Social Media as a Space for Peace Education

The Pedagogic Potential of Online Networks

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Palgrave Studies in Educational Media

There is no education without some form of media. Much contemporary writing on media and education examines best practices or individual learning processes, is fired by techno-optimism or techno-pessimism about young people's use of technology, or focuses exclusively on digital media. Relatively few studies attend – empirically or conceptually – to the embeddedness of educational media in contemporary cultural, social and political processes. The **Palgrave Studies in Educational Media** series aims to explore textbooks and other educational media as sites of cultural contestation and socio-political forces. Drawing on local and global perspectives, and attending to the digital, non-digital and post-digital, the series explores how these media are entangled with broader continuities and changes in today's society, with how media and media practices play a role in shaping identifications, subjectivations, inclusions and exclusions, economies and global political projects. Including single authored and edited volumes, it offers a dedicated space which brings together research from across the academic disciplines. The series provides a valuable and accessible resource for researchers, students, teachers, teacher trainers, textbook authors and educational media designers interested in critical and contextualising approaches to the media used in education.

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Series Editors' Foreword

There is no education without some form of media. The field of educational media is a growing area of interest, as policy papers on the 'digital agenda', the rapid expansion of conferences and events on educational technology, and the range of recent books and articles on education and media show. Educational media are crucial to producing knowledge and shaping educational practices. Much interest in recent years has, however, focused on which digital technology should be used, on the benefits and risks of using 'new' technologies, on good practices for teaching and learning with media, or on how media supports individual learning processes.

While these are important issues, there has been too little attention to the socio-political contexts in which educational media are developed and used, to the societal discourse in these media, and the relations enacted when we use educational media. Conflicts over the contents of textbooks and curricula, flaring up regularly in the daily news across the world, illustrate how many stakeholders are invested in sharing their particular understandings of our (shared) past, the current society and potential imagined futures with the younger generation. Policymakers, politicians and activists regard educational media as important tools which not only foster young people's media skills and world knowledge, but also shape which ways of living are considered desirable or even legible.

Today, an increasing number of studies see educational media as a highly contested and thus crucially important cultural site. This research considers media in their contexts and takes a carefully critical or generative approach to societal concerns. The *Palgrave Studies in Educational Media* series brings together current research on educational media by focusing on three issues:

First, it foregrounds studies which attend—empirically or conceptually—to how deeply embedded textbooks and other educational media are in contemporary cultural, social and political processes, and to the historicity of the media used in education.

Second, it brings together vibrant and dynamic scholarship drawing on a range of disciplines—including sociology, history, cultural studies, computer science, memory studies, information science, media studies, education and cognitive science—to build and develop insights generated and exchanged across disciplinary boundaries.

Third, although the field of educational media studies has turned its attention to digital technologies, taking a closer look at today's educational practices, it is clear that (1) they are by no means predominantly digital, and simultaneously (2) 'postdigital' practices abound in which the digital is no longer seen as new or innovative, but is integrated with other materials in daily teaching and learning. Empirical observations of education around the globe demonstrate the reach and visibility of a broad range of media (textbooks, blackboards, LEGO™, etc.), as well as the postdigital blending of digital and non-digital media in contemporary educational settings.

Palgrave Studies in Educational Media aims to address these three issues in an integrated manner. The series offers a dedicated space which encourages dialogue across disciplines. It showcases both empirical and theoretical work on educational media which understands these media as a site of cultural contestation and socio-political force. The focus lies primarily on schools. The series is interested in both local and global perspectives, in order to explore how educational media are entangled with broader debates about continuity and change in today's society, about classroom practices, inclusions and exclusions, identifications, subjectivations, economies and global political projects.

This volume, on the complexities operating at the cross-section of education, social media and cultural politics, began its life at a symposium held at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Brunswick, Germany, with the title *Peace 2.0: Social Media as a Space for Peace Education*. It was the first symposium of the Georg Arnhold Program on Education for Sustainable Peace, which had recently been established at the Georg Eckert Institute by American benefactor Henry H. Arnhold (1921–2018) to honour the legacy of his grandfather, Georg Arnhold (1859–1926): banker, patron of the arts and committed pacifist. The programme seeks to promote research on the role education can play in fostering and establishing long-term peace. With its fellowship award, annual summer conference and fieldwork scholarships, the latter in cooperation with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as of 2020, the Georg Arnhold Program builds bridges between research and practice, between professors and activists, and between the ivory tower and the classroom. The topics addressed by the programme's events over the years have ranged from reconciliation via education in post-conflict societies, transitional justice and human rights education to education in emergencies and preventing extremism, to name but a few. Publications such as this book seek to render the findings of the programme's events accessible to a wider audience in the field of peace education. M. Ayaz Naseem of Concordia University, Canada, was the first Georg Arnhold Visiting Professor and convener of the symposium. Our thanks go not only to him and to Adeela Arshad-Ayaz, co-editor of this book and also a participant in the event, but also to Martina Schulze, the programme coordinator at the time, for her organisational talent, enthusiasm and support. Finally, we are grateful to Simone Lässig, director of the Georg Eckert Institute at the time of the programme's establishment and the symposium, for her visionary ideas, steadfast commitment and continued support of the programme to date.

Brunswick, Germany   Eckhardt Fuchs
May 2020   Felicitas Macgilchrist

Preface: Social Media, Cooperation and Civic Engagement

In this volume we seek new perspectives on the types of human cooperation and collective action that are currently emerging, in particular the role of social media in promoting new ways in which people can interact and collaborate. How might social media be applied to civic education among young people? One of these new perspectives I would like to propose here is a new way of viewing how humans get things done together. The traditionally perpetuated story is one in which biology is a war in which only the fiercest competitors survive. Businesses and nations succeed only by defeating or destroying their competition, and politics is about winning at all costs. A new narrative has emerged, however, over the last fifteen years: a new story in which competition is still important and still central, but in which the role of competition shrinks dramatically in order to make room for new understandings that have emerged in a number of different sciences.

Around the turn of the millennium, young people were texting and also using SMS to coordinate their social activities. This appeared relatively nondramatic until, in the Philippines, for example, demonstrations that had been organized entirely through text messages deposed Joseph Estrada, the head of state. Something new was happening in terms of collective action. The combination of the mobile phone, the Internet, and the personal computer were lowering barriers to collective action, almost ten years before the Arab Spring.[1] We now see this type of activity all over

the world; in the course of the decade between, not only were devices disseminated, but people learned that they could use mobile devices to organize in ways that had not been possible previously. So, "smart mobs" have emerged because social media have amplified our ability to coordinate and cooperate; these media—and the collective action that they facilitate—have both beneficial and destructive impacts. Just as humans display both positive and negative behaviors, so do populations.

We are seeing more and more mediated self-organization, real-time coordination, and collective action around such street demonstrations, which are the most visible manifestation of this phenomenon. In Korea, the balance of votes in the 2003 presidential election was tipped by people online from the citizen journalist site *OhMyNews*, which during the election put out a call for its supporters to vote for the underdog, who surprised all of the political pundits in Korea by winning. And when the Congress tried to impeach President Roh those same citizen journalists called for peaceful demonstrations. Following the Madrid train bombings in 2004, ultimately attributed to Al-Qaida, the government had initially blamed the attack on Basque separatists. Because it was only a few days before the general election and Spanish election laws forbade political gatherings immediately before an election, people sent out text messages, gathered outside the headquarters of the ruling party, and again changed the result of an election. The power of social media has also decided political careers in other ways. U.S. politician George Allen was favored to win a seat in the U.S. Senate until he pointed at someone in the crowd and made a racist remark; a video of the incident was posted on YouTube, and he lost the seat. Mitt Romney might have been elected president of the U.S. if he had not been captured making a gaffe on a mobile phone camera, which was broadcast on YouTube. Similarly, the civic activism inherent in the "Color Revolutions" of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans during the early 2000s focused on nonviolent resistance and remained for the most part peaceful.

In Los Angeles in 2006, in response to an immigration law, students who were concerned that their parents might be deported walked out of their classrooms and joined demonstrations organized entirely on the social media platform *MySpace*. And in Chile in the same year, students not only walked out of their classrooms in protest but they also chained

the schools shut and induced 700,000 other Chileans to join them in the streets to protest the lack of government funding for education. Because the students wore black and white uniforms, this event became known as the "Penguin Revolution". This debate about state control in matters of education continues in Chile. Many of these young people, aged between 15 and 17, used *YouTube*, the social network service *Fotolog*, and instant messenger to organize the protests. Several of them now work in politics and are standing for election to the National Congress. And the Moldova "Twitter Revolution" played a significant role in organizing nonviolent street demonstrations to protest against election fraud. Last but not least, the Arab Spring from 2010 also made extensive use of social media. Since the Arab Spring, there have been numerous examples of the use of social media for electoral politics (most recent being the Obama and Trump election campaigns) and social movements (Occupy movement, Idle No More, Me Too, etc.). "Smart mobs", as I have called them, are not always peaceful, however; violent demonstrations have also been organized using SMS.

This development is not just about political demonstrations. We are seeing all sorts of forms of collective action emerging as a part of a systemic transformation that has been catalyzed by the widespread availability of new technologies: 4.5 billion people are on the Internet; there are 6 billion mobile phones in the world, and almost a quarter of a billion of those are smartphones. In other words, many different ways of organizing are emerging. I will touch here on just a few of them.

We are currently seeing some places experimenting with using social media for governance. In New Zealand, legislation around police powers was opened up on a wiki to citizen participation. We are also seeing people sharing their computing power. The first incidence of this was related to the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (SETI); a very large amount of data from outer space was being searched for intelligent signals, a highly intractable task in computing terms, which was partly resolved by people being enabled to download a screen saver which, when their computer went to sleep, would wake up, perform computations to see if there were patterns and then send the results back to SETI. I mention this not because they found any messages from 'little purple people'—as far as we know, nothing has been detected as yet—but because at one point several

million volunteers had created the largest supercomputer in the world, at 20 trillion operations per second. Now, if you go to *folding.stanford.edu*, you can help bio-chemists try to make new medications for cancer or AIDS by aiding their understanding of how protein molecules unfold. Indeed, a game called "Fold-it" is available on the X-box platform that enables teams of players to compete by finding new ways that protein molecules might configure themselves. About a year ago, a group using Fold-it found a medically important configuration of the protease molecule, which is of great importance in anti-AIDS medications.

Biomedical science is not the only discipline to be getting in on this particular act: We are already using distributed computation for weather forecasting, and we as yet have no idea what kinds of computation people are going to be able to do by just putting their smartphones and their laptops together in ways that even the largest mainframes cannot do today. In astronomy, over 200,000 people have helped classify over 200 million galaxies. More astronomical data is collected in a few days now than in all of the history of astronomy up until this point. We are beginning to see citizen-science emerging in every field. In Japan, after the Fukushima disaster, with an unmet need for access to good information about where there were high radiation levels, a group of citizens used inexpensive electronics to create a sensor and drove around and mapped the region. In this way, they created the most detailed map in the world of radiation in a particular area, including the mapping of Chernobyl that's called "Safecast", it was completely organized by citizens. Within hours of the Asian tsunami of 2004, we saw the Asian tsunami blog connecting people with their relatives and enabling people to build shelters. After Hurricane Katrina in the U.S., people used the "Katrina PeopleFinder" wiki to find one another. As such events are increasing in frequency, there is now a website, CrisisCommons.org, whose purpose is to help people organize *ad hoc* responses to natural disasters and other emergencies.

We are seeing new forms of economic production that involve very large companies sharing some of their assets. We know that programmers who are not incentivized by financial compensation or organized the way corporations are organized have challenged the market leader, Microsoft, in both the operating system and browser markets with open-source

software. We know that Google enables people to use their automatic advertisement placements to make money from advertising on their blogs, and that Amazon has enabled millions of people to open small shops. None of these companies are doing this out of a sense of altruism; they are doing it because technology enables them to share their engine for making profit and to make more profit for themselves by enabling others to profit as well. We can, further, observe a phenomenon which has now been termed "collaborative consumption", with Airbnb, Lyft, UBER and a number of other services that enable people to share and loan and rent things that they were not able to share, loan or rent before.

The research I did with Institute for the Future on why Wikipedia works indicates that part of its success lies in the structure it has for monitoring. People subscribe to pages, and when those pages are changed, they can see whether those changes were destructive and with one click they can reverse them. Users have thus discovered that if enough people are paying attention it is much more difficult to damage other users' efforts than to repair that damage. Further, Wikipedia runs on a series of norms revolving around the principle of the "neutral point of view", which enables it to create millions of pages in hundreds of languages for free.

Jim Gray was a computer scientist who went missing in a sailboat. Overnight, his friends organized a search by downloading photographs of the area of the Pacific in which he had gone missing in from satellites. The engineers at Microsoft used images from Google and NASA and divided them into half a million images. Amazon used its Mechanical Turk Platform to enable thousands of volunteers to search. They did not find Jim Gray but I think it is worth noting that they were able to put this effort together with services that are available to anybody online literally overnight.

I have touched on a lot of very different things up until now in the hope that you will be able to see the connections between these things. We now have crowdfunding, Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and a number of different sites that are enabling people to create and build things, make artistic efforts, and engage in humanitarian activities, funded not by governments or wealthy individuals or foundations, but by other citizens. I believe that the reason we are seeing all of these innovations is that the technology is available, whether it be commercial platforms like Google

or Ebay or noncommercial efforts such as Creative Commons or Wikipedia, the Omidyar Network, which is attempting to do networked philanthropy, or ThinkCycle, which brings design students at universities together with people in the developing world who have problems design may be able to solve. All these platforms are successful because they use technology to enable people to participate in ways that had not been available to them before.

In fact, we are beginning to be able to study collective action, how the ways in which people do things together have been turned on their head. In the 1960s, *The Logic of Collective Action*, by Mancur Olson, established the dogma that a large group of people who are not related and who do not have financial incentives are unlikely to create public goods. We now know, with the Internet, with Wikipedia, Open Source, Creative Commons, and many other public goods, that this is not the case. In fact, what we are seeing is that if it is easy and inexpensive enough, people will participate without financial compensation, together with people whom they may not otherwise know, in the creation of public goods. And I think we are only now beginning to see what this means and to understand how to apply this phenomenal force for change.

It is, in my view, no accident that these communication technologies are making new forms of cooperation possible. Every time there is a new way for humans to communicate, we think of new ways to do things together. This really began with speech, with writing. Writing came along with agriculture and a number of other changes that gave rise to what we now call civilization. The invention of the printing press enabled more than just a tiny elite to participate in literacy to transmit knowledge across time and space. The Gutenberg Revolution brought in its wake the emergence of self-governing populations in democracies and the emergence of modern science.

I think that at this juncture we can begin to see what are the characteristics, what specialists call affordances, of these technologies, that are enabling the kind of activities that I have been describing here. They are easy to use, they enable people to connect with one another, and they are open. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of HTML, did not have to get permission to turn the Internet into the web; the young people who created Google did not have to ask the web to re-wire itself to create a search

engine in their dormitory room. These technologies enable people to form groups, whether they revolve around buying and selling things, creating knowledge or socializing. These groups are largely self-instructing and—this is a point I would like to emphasize—they involve leveraged self-interest. Leveraging self-interest for whatever your particular cause is like leveraging gravity. People do things for altruistic reasons, but for the most part they do things in their own interests. If you can find a way for people, acting in their own interest, to aggregate their activities in a way that creates a public good, then you are creating a great deal of value. Google does this with its search function. It regards every link on any webpage as a vote for that webpage. I am certain that nobody is thinking 'I am going to increase the value of Google today' when they put a link on their webpage. They are thinking that the people who pay attention to their webpage are going to find this link valuable. What Google does with its page-rank algorithm is aggregate of all those decisions. Further, it creates free-search—which of course is not entirely free, as essentially Google sells our attention for advertising—but I think online searching has become such a big part of our world that people take it for granted that you can ask any number of questions, about anything, at anytime, anywhere, and receive answers back within a second or two.

It is now up to the person who asks the question to try and determine which of these answers are accurate and which of those are misinformation or dis-information. To dwell on this would take us into an entirely different discussion, so I will not go further down this route at this point. Drawing together what I have just said, though, I would point out that social media can enable people to use what Tim O'Reilly calls "architectures of participation", that is, people acting in their self-interest in a public way that adds up to the creation of very important public goods. The web was not created by a government, it was not created by a corporation, it was created by millions of people who put up webpages and linked them to one another.

Now I would like to elucidate how we might begin to think of focusing this use of social media, its ability to connect people according to their interests and enable them to engage in all kinds of collective action, including learning. Schools no longer have the sole monopoly on learning most things. If you want to learn how to configure a web server, or

build a guitar, or grow a potato, or any number of things, you go to YouTube. The young people of today have never known a world in which there was no web, no online search, no Internet in their pockets. Polls have shown that a majority of young people in the U.S. and in Europe not only consume social media but also create it, even if it is just a profile page. This represents an opportunity to enlist young people's natural enthusiasm for communicating with one another, using media that have never been available to anybody at previous points in history, in acts of civic engagement. It does not always make headlines, but we are seeing this happening over and over again all over the world. These technologies help students exercise a public voice on issues they care about.

When I teach my college students to blog, I talk about private voice and public voice. A private voice is something that they use when they are talking to their friends, when they are promoting themselves. When somebody is trying to sell something, whether it be a product or a political idea that is a private voice. But when you are talking as a citizen, as citizens in democracies must do, about issues that you care about, that then is a public voice. The opportunity to learn to use media such as blogging to exercise public voice is one that young people have not had before. Young people, broadly speaking, have not been listened to historically. They have not had a platform. And they have issues that they care about. It may seem trivial, but the lack, for instance, of a place to skateboard in a local community is something that is going to interest a student immediately, a lot more than something vague like world peace. Such an issue represents a way for them to enter into the public sphere with their public voice.

According to Habermas' theory, the public sphere is the foundation of democracy, in the sense that in a democratic nation in which citizens govern themselves, the key to public participation is not simply voting for their political representation, it is the public possessing the freedom and the information to have conversations about the issues that concern them and for these conversations to influence public opinion. One example from the U.S. and elsewhere is women gaining the right to vote. They were not given the right to vote, they took the right to vote. They did this by exercising public voice and by collective action that influenced public opinion, and it was a process that took decades. The civil rights

movement is another example. We do not have perfect racial equality in the U.S. Racism still exists, but institutionalized racism has for the most part been eliminated because people, particularly young people, have been willing to exercise public voice and indeed put their bodies on the line. If you visit the civil rights museum in Memphis, Tennessee, you will see very inspiring images of the people who faced a formidable police presence during the civil rights movement; they were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. Today's young people are bloggers, they are YouTubers; YouTube posts more video in a week than all of the broadcast networks in the U.S. have broadcast in the period from their inception to the launch of YouTube. Something like a hundred hours are uploaded every minute. Eighty percent of this content is produced by the people who upload it, and increasingly these are young people. There is, admittedly, a lot of rather disheartening commentary to be seen in the comments left by YouTube viewers, but there are also innumerable communities in which young people are organizing around their interests, around sports and entertainment, and yes, politics. They create videos, they blog, they text one another, they Instagram. Whatever new social medium comes up tomorrow, young people are going to explore it and see whether it fits for them.

The reason they do this is because young people are engaged in experimenting with who they are and with trying out these experiments with their peers. Increasingly, young people, particularly in the industrialized world, have more and more controlled lives and more and more of the public spaces in which they could previously have gathered are disappearing or becoming restricted. They are moving onto social media in part because their lives are so busy, because their lives are so constrained, because the places in which they are allowed to gather in public have been reduced in size, scope, and number. They now find that they can communicate with one another in this virtual way, for the most part without their parents or their teachers spying on them while they do so. They are active media consumers, which, admittedly, does not necessarily mean that they are skilled in using these media as part of the public sphere.

According to a study report entitled, *New Media and Youth Political Action*, 41% of the young people polled have engaged in at least one act of participatory politics, and 68% are already supporting a cause on a

monthly basis. This seems to me to be a rather significant proportion of young people. There is, however, an activation gap within which we find substantial room for growth. It appears between those who have the Internet in their pocket, who communicate regularly with others through multiple media, who create and mobilize their own networks, and who know how to do that to gain a public voice to influence a public opinion and to influence the political process. This is where the opportunity for growth lies. There is a very strong connection between this new view of cooperation, fueled as it is by the Internet revolution, the availability of social media and the opportunity to take advantage of this activation gap and teach young people to get involved in the discourse and show them how they can be not only active but effective.

Civic skills are communication skills. In order to be a citizen who can get what he or she wants and who can join with others to gain what this group requires, you need to know how to communicate. You need to know how to talk, you need to know how to write, and increasingly you need to know how to get your point across on YouTube and Twitter and in the blogosphere. Civic skills are the same as the social skills that young people fervently desire to learn in order to make friends. For the most part, courses in civics as taught in schools essentially resemble boring history lessons. They do not concentrate on how we can use the media that are available to us to engage in the kind of public sphere that undergirds democracy.

In this light, I now make a few points about how exactly educators might go about encouraging young people in these endeavors. I have discussed this at length in an earlier piece, entitled "Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement (2008)", which appeared in a free publication from MIT Press that was sponsored by the McArthur Foundation. Here, I wrote about and documented the ways in which young people are connecting with political and civic engagement through social media. I would consider that the first and crucial step—important in education of all kinds, particularly these days, but especially so with reference to civic education for peace—is focusing on what young people are interested in. We need to start with things that they feel are important. A teacher in Chicago gave cameras and made video editing facilities available to young people in a very tough neighborhood and

asked them to go and speak to their families and neighbors about the issues in their neighborhood that they did not see reflected on television. The participants in the project edited their films and posted them on YouTube, then spread the word through social media. They brought a great deal more attention to issues that the mainstream media—newspapers, television stations—were not paying attention to. The project closed that activation gap for these young people, who are now continuing to explore what power they can mobilize by knowing how to communicate.

Education of this kind starts, then, by paying attention to young people's interests, and it starts by really listening to young people. Listening means not just shutting up and asking them to talk; it means actually doing something about what one hears them saying. This is often difficult for teachers who have a set curriculum that they are expected to teach to. They do not have a lot of time to listen to students. But in my experience as an educator and in my experience of those I have interviewed, every minute spent, particularly at the beginning of an endeavor, showing that you are listening, showing that you hear what young people are saying, trying in some way to include their concerns in what you are talking about, pays off in manifold ways.

Teachers need to be active users of social media themselves in order to engage young people in learning how to exercise a public voice to become activists and to learn civic communication skills. It is partly with this in mind that I do a lot of work with digital media and learning communities. I have conducted more than a hundred video interviews with innovative educators, which can be found online at clalliance.org. Teachers are frequently overworked and underpaid. They are not given extra time or money to use social media. Those, however, who do have time and resources found that they can connect with personal learning networks of other educators who can help them climb the learning curve of the technology and assist them with techniques for reaching students. Teachers who are active in this field can understand the world in which their students are immersed in a much better way and can teach them some of the things that are very important in this world. It was once the case that students went into a classroom, kept quiet, took notes while the teacher talked; they had textbooks, took tests, solved problems, all in what was

essentially an enclosed world unto itself. These days, students can search, they have Wikipedia, they can access networks of experts and other students available to them through one simple click. Networked students require networked teachers. And I have been finding myself increasingly engaged in trying to help teachers learn how to become networked. I will soon be joining with others in teaching an open, free connected course on how to create and run connected courses: "Connected Courses.net", a collaborative community of faculty in higher education developing networked, open courses (http://connectedcourses.net/). Social media literacy is also vital. I have been writing about digital media for nearly thirty years. In the 1980s, I wrote about the future of personal computers. In the 1990s, I wrote about using online networks for social communication. And in the early 2000s, I wrote about mobile communications. At each step of the way, I have been asked by critics, by scholars, and by myself: Are these tools—personal computers, networks, mobile devices—any good for us? As individuals, for our relationships, for our communities, for our societies? I became convinced a few years ago that the answer has to be "it depends on what people know". The technological status of the devices and the services that enable people to connect to this world wide web of knowledge have grown at an astonishing rate. As I have mentioned, over 4.5 billion people have Internet access by 2020. There is a hugely growing number of mobile phones, with the largest expanding markets being China, India, Africa. Know-how is the key now. The digital divide is no longer just between those who can afford to have access and those who cannot; that divide is narrowing. The real digital divide is between those who know how to use the media in their pockets to their advantage, and how to join together with others for collective action, and those who do not have access to this knowledge. With this in mind, I wrote a book *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (2012), and I teach a course at Stanford around this book about social media literacy. My teaching focuses on what I feel to be the five most important types of literacy. First and foremost among them is attention. These devices that fascinate us so much, which one can observe people looking at all the time, are attention magnets. And it is not that humans are irrevocably tempted by distraction; it is that nobody has really taught us how to pay attention when social

media all around us are vying for that attention. It turns out, however, that we can learn and teach attention. After attention, which is, after all, the foundation of all thought and communication, what I call "crap detection" is most important. As I have said before, you can ask any question, but it is up to you to determine the veracity of the answer that you get. We used to have editors and publishers and librarians who acted as gatekeepers and trusted authorities. The authority of the text is no longer vested in those authorities. For better and for worse, we are not going to get it back. We need to teach people how to tell truth from falsehood, which is becoming increasingly difficult in a world in which ever bigger sums of money are being concentrated on manufacturing falsehoods that look very real. I have developed a resource in English of tools to use for "crap detection" when on the web, *bit.ly/crapdetect*. There is no way, even if it could possibly be enforced, to put some kind of veracity filter on the Internet that tests what people publish online for its truthfulness. If we are not going to be inundated by a wave of crap and falsehood, our only solution is to teach more people to tell the difference.

The third of the five literacies I advocate is participation. Whether it is a blog or wiki, or Twitter or YouTube, or Facebook, or a medium that is yet to be invented, we have both the opportunity and, I believe, the obligation to actively participate. The media are important to people and not just corporations because people and not just corporations have created so much of it. Now that we are seeing Facebook trying to enclose the web, trying to make its own version of the web, I am of the view that it is crucial to teach young people to create and not just be consumers of media. The fourth literacy is the literacy of collaboration. Above, I have talked about smart mobs, virtual communities, how Open Source and Wikipedia use what has been called social production; we are seeing collective action in disaster response. There are many, many different ways in which people can do things together using online media. But they need to learn how to do it.

Finally, as the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (2000) has said, we don't live in an information society, we live in a networked society. People need to understand how networks work; this is an essential form of literacy for the twenty-first century. Participatory media are the first many-to-many media we have seen in our history. They provide platforms for

those who know how to use them and networks for the diffusion of public voice. Social media derive their value from participation by the many. If the number of people and the number of organizations that participate diminish, then the democratic value of these media diminishes. Social networks *per se* go back to the dawn of humankind; long before Facebook, people were interacting in social networks. These days, however, such networks are amplified by information technology. Our social networks can now include people on the other side of the world that we have never met and did not know previously, but who share a particular interest with us. The broader, faster and lower-cost coordination engendered by these possibilities is, we might say, a big deal.

I believe that we need to encourage young people to turn the media production skills that they are naturally attracted to, because they are experimenting with their identity and seek to communicate with their peers, on issues that affect their lives and their communities, whatever they are. Do not tell them what to do, let them figure it out. Teach them about publics and public voice. Show them how young people in other places have exercised public voice and influenced public opinion.

I know I have covered a lot of territory very quickly in this chapter, but I hope I have planted seeds in your thinking of a new way of conceiving of how people cooperate and engage in collective action and of the connection between young people, social media and civic engagement. I know that the primary concern of this volume is peace education, but I believe that peace education is a form of civic engagement and that knowing how to use media makes the peace activist far more powerful than they would otherwise have been. And it is this power that activists will need to harness if they are to progress toward lasting peace. Let's go forth and communicate.

Mill Valley, CA   Howard Rheingold

Note

1. For more details, see Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

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Notes on Contributors

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Ann-Louise Davidson is Associate Professor of Education and Concordia University Research Chair in Maker Culture. She is Associate Director of the Milieux Institute for Arts, Culture and Technology and she directs #MilieuxMake, the Milieux makerspace initiative. Her work focuses on maker culture, social innovation, inclusion, disruptive pedagogy, and digital technologies. She has given keynotes in Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East on these topics. She has expertise in action research methodologies that engage participants in collaborative data collection and meaning-making and hands-on studies in technology and innovation. She created Education Makers, a community of educators who strive to develop the profile of maker education. She is developing innovative workshop concepts that draw on crucial themes, such as global issues, health, sustainability, and youth motivation, through concrete maker activities such as building arcade tables, wearable computing, robotics, computational thinking, and 3D printing, while engaging marginalized communities.

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Nadia Naffi is Assistant Professor of Education and holder of the Chair in Educational Leadership (CLE) on the Sustainable Transformation of Pedagogical Practices in Digital Contexts at University of Laval. Her doctoral research focused on learning about oneself as an essential process to confront social media propaganda. With the takeover of social media by hate speech proponents, namely the social media propaganda against the resettlement of Syrian refugees, her work presented a model with concrete tools to help youth withstand manipulation and fight racism, hate speech, and radicalization. She is the recipient of the Governor General Gold Medal—Person and Society—2018 for the excellence of her thesis and the 2019 SALTISE Best Practices & Pedagogical Innovators Award. Naffi delivered presentations and keynotes in national and international conferences on topics including human performance technology, performance improvement, learning and development with disruptive technologies, teaching and learning with and through social media, cyberbullying, and social media propaganda. Naffi's work focuses on the ethical, critical, responsible and sustainable application of artificial intelligence, big data and emergent digital technologies in education, and in the human/machine collaboration.

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Studies. Rahimi has been an expert guest on various media programs like The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, BBC and CNN, in addition to NPR and On the Media. Also, he has been a visiting scholar at the Internet Institute, University of Oxford, Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Freie Universität Berlin, and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Howard Rheingold is an author and Internet pioneer. "I fell into the computer realm from the typewriter dimension in 1981, then plugged my computer into my telephone in 1983 and got sucked into the net." Howard Rheingold wrote the bestselling books *Virtual Reality*, *The Virtual Community*, *Smart Mobs*, and *Net Smart*. TED calls him "one of the driving minds behind our net-enabled, open, collaborative life." Rheingold has taught as appointed lecturer at UC Berkeley and Stanford University.

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Introduction: Peace 2.0: Social Media as an Interactive and Participatory Space for Sustainable Peace Education

M. Ayaz Naseem and Adeela Arshad-Ayaz

The world that we live in is both dangerous and a hopeful place. The sheer scale of ongoing violent conflict is unprecedented. According to the global conflict tracker of the Council for Foreign Relations, there is conflict present in almost all inhabited parts of the world with the possible exception of Australia and New Zealand. The list of types of conflict on the Council for Foreign Relations global conflict tracker is long. It includes civil wars, interstate conflict, political instability, sectarian violence, territorial disputes, transnational terrorism, and unconventional conflicts (www.cfr.com). Most if not all of these conflicts are violent in nature; most if not all have been unchanging or getting worse over the past few years. The magnitude of violence in these conflicts can be gauged from the fact that four

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1

of these conflicts are categorized as ones with 10,000 deaths or more in the recent years. These include the war in Afghanistan, the Iraqi civil war, and the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, there are at least ten conflict regions where the death toll ranges between 1000 to 9999 deaths and 22 conflicts with around 1000 deaths in the current or past years.

Despite the sheer magnitude of destruction and violence, the desire for peace is also unprecedented. There are peace initiatives at almost every level; from United Nations' initiatives to state level and from civil society to grass-roots, interpersonal, and inter group levels. Actors and agents situated in and at the intersections of these initiatives realize that no one initiative on its own can bring about lasting and sustainable peace. They also understand that they must employ any and all means to combat the growing violence in the world. These actors and agents occupy (and use) all available spaces that can lead them to the goal of sustainable peace. One such space is the relatively new space provided by social media and interactive technology widely known as Web 2.0. Various social media, each with their own affordances and an essentially interactive nature, provide a space where people who were hitherto separated by physical distances, state controls, and other impediments can come together and interact reflectively and reflexively outside the space and structures provided to them by the nation-state discourses (among other discourses) in their respective countries (Naseem, this volume).

The dominant discourses including those of the state, education, media, defense, and foreign policies construct binaries between the self (national, religious, ethnic, etc.) and the national, religious, ethnic 'other'. These discourses also create a binary between states (India-Pakistan; North and South Korea, etc.). Inherent in this binary construction is the inevitability of conflict. Unlike the statist discourses, social media potentially provides counter-hegemonic opportunities for resisting the dominant discourse. It also provides a space for interpersonal and intergroup interactions, and for contact outside of the dominant discursive institutions (Naseem, 2008; Naseem, 2015; Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz, & Doyle, 2017). The unmediated space provided by the social media also helps those who interact in this space in avoiding the experts' gaze (Naseem, this volume). Hence, social media can be explored as a new space where subjects of states can converse without the mediation of state structures and the 'gaze' of the politicians, academics, clergy, and media. In this sense, social media can be seen as a space for sustainable peace education.

We understand peace education not (only) as study of conditions that promote negative peace, that is, absence of conflict and violence, but as education that enables conditions for consciousness raising, collaboration, border-crossing, social and cognitive justice, and recognition of an ecology of knowledges.

Access to the Internet is a globally ubiquitous phenomenon. Whether the online environment is a new reality or merely the next step in human and social development is still undecided. However, there is no doubt that the online environments have spurned new forms of social, political, and economic networks and relationships. It will not be too far-fetched to say that the online world has a unique constitution and its own social and cultural capital. Social media users are not mere consumers/recipients of the discourses but also active producers of the discourses. Unlike the earlier understanding that the offline realities of the participants/subjects condition their online behavior and identity in the online environments, there is now a growing realization that the online realities and discourses condition the offline behaviors and identities of the subjects.

The omnipresence of the Internet and its offspring, social media, can be gauged from its wildfire popularity. According to some estimates, as of 2019, there are 3.84 billion social media users worldwide— approximately one-third of the global population (hootsuite.com). Out of these, a whopping 1.55 billion people have accounts and/or use Facebook for social networking. About 800 million people use Facebook Messenger to communicate with each other. Similarly, 320 million people use Twitter every month to communicate and/or to get their daily information, and 900 million users worldwide use WhatsApp.

Beyond the force of sheer numbers, social media have brought about changes in the social and political organization in societies, which has prompted some to think of it as a new reality that must be explored and researched in order to understand its full potential. For example, the use of social media in political and electoral campaigns has introduced a new scale of interactivity between the politicians (and their campaigns) and the voters/citizens (Poell & van Dijck, 2018; Tufecki, 2017; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). While Barak Obama was called the 'first social media president' for his effective use of social media during his two presidential campaigns, Donald Trump's use of social media to contact, mobilize,

fundraise, and maintain contact with his electorate has been hailed as tremendous (Pain & Chen, 2019). President Trump's use of Twitter to communicate policy decisions A.K.A. policy-by-tweet, and even for diplomacy has been unique even if controversial. Social media have also been implicated in meddling in national politics. A prominent (though contested) example is of the use of social media by Russia to allegedly manipulate the US election in 2016. A couple of reports commissioned by the US Senate note that Russia used social media (especially troll factories) in order to meddle in the US election by suppressing the African-American vote, promoting and/or vilifying particular candidates, and sowing disharmony in American public at large.

Furthermore, uni-directional traditional media such as newspapers and television channels have been forced to integrate interactive social media into their structures, thus creating a two-way exchange of ideas and feedback between the media and their readers/viewers. In this changed environment people are not merely consumers of news and ideas but also producers of ideas, thus prompting some to label them as 'prosumers' (Arshad-Ayaz, this volume). Last but not least, those involved in social movements have made effective use of the Internet and the social media to launch social and political action, to air grievances, to hold governments and authorities responsible, and to organize protests and rallies against and in support of social and political causes. Since the early 2010s a number of social movements have made significant use of social media to further their respective causes, to organize protest movements, and facilitate logistical and communicative networking. Some of the recent examples include (but are not limited to), the Arab Spring (2010s), the Occupy Movement (2011), printemps erable (the students' movement in Quebec in 2012), Black Lives Matter (2012), and Idle No More (a Canadian First Nations' Movement 2012). More recently, social movements such as the Me Too movement (2017), Times Up movement (2018), and the ongoing movement against citizenship legislation in India (2020) have relied heavily on different social media for logistical, communicative, and organizational purposes. While there is enough evidence to argue that social media was not the sole causal factor behind the emergence of these movements, it is also evident that the participants in

these social movements made effective use of social media to mobilize and communicate.

At the micro level, individuals have used various social media to form new transnational communities that are based on common interests and issues. Due to their interactive nature, social media offer the users the space to transcend geographical boundaries and structures and be members of global publics (Bennett, Segerberg, & Yang, 2018; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). As global publics, social media users actively engage in making political, social, and cultural meaning, both as producers and consumers (Arshad-Ayaz, this volume, Rheingold, this volume). Social media allow their users to participate in social, cultural, and political interactions through multiple genres and modes of participation (Ito et al., 2009; Nagle, 2017). The new media are also seen as spaces that help the marginalized by airing and discussing their particular grievances.

Notwithstanding the ubiquitous presence of social media in everyday life, they are not without their detractors and critics. Social media are seen by some as agents of new forms of cultural and knowledge imperialism, catering primarily to the interests of the developed world (Arshad-Ayaz, this volume, Fuchs, 2018). They are also seen as tools of a neo-liberal economic regime used to create a consumer culture that benefits the developed world (Fuchs, 2018). Social media are also seen as an arena where the forces of violence and peace are competing to gain the attention of the young (and older) social media users (Nagle, 2017). Extremists adhering to a variety of ideological creeds have used social media to propagate hateful messages while also using the media as recruiting grounds for the violent and nefarious ideologies (Cohen-Almagor, 2015; Guiora & Park, 2017; Ozeren, Hekim, Salih Elmas, & Ibrahim Canbegi, 2018; Weimann, 2016). While initially it were Al-Qaida and ISIS that used various social media for recruitment and dissemination of ideological content, lately white supremacist groups have overtaken the jihadist organizations in the use of social media to spread ideological hate content. According to John Berger of George Washington University's program on Extremism, 'on Twitter, ISIS's preferred social platform, American white nationalist movements have seen their followers grow by more than 600% since 2012. Today, they outperform ISIS in nearly every social metric, from follower counts to tweets per day' (Berger, 2016, p. 3).

Similarly, Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch Mosque shooter, livestreamed the Christchurch mosque attack on Facebook.

Similarly, there has been a considerable increase in hate speech on social media. According to a Council on Foreign Relations report (2019), hate speech-related incidents involving social media have been reported on almost all continents of the world and the 'social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts' (2019). Social media is named as the space for the widespread use of the 'great replacement' trope (the Jews/Muslims will lot replace us) from Charlottesville, Virginia, to the Pittsburgh synagogue and the Christchurch mosque in New Zealand. The same platforms that galvanize the peace and pro-democracy advocates also allow the hate groups to use them for spreading hate and violence. The algorithms designed to target particular users with pinpoint precision in order to maximize their 'viewing times' and 'capture rates' also make it easier for groups to spread their ideological messages. The use of big data (boyd, 2019) and data voids (Poell & van Dijck, 2018) to wage culture wars (Nagle, 2017) contribute to additional conflict in the society. It also drives home the understanding that without a critical social media education, the instruments and space of social media are being and will continue to be used for non-peaceful activities.

On the other hand, social media are credited with removing a substantial number of state, governmental and other structural barriers between people within and across societies (Naseem, 2008; Naseem et al., 2017). As space for conversations about sustainable peace and sustainable peace education, social media are akin to what Barraclough (1965/1982) calls the new 'town'. Just as the towns in the colonial period provided an important space where sentiments against the colonizers and colonization could be instrumentalized by the nationalist anti-colonial leadership, (Barraclough, 1965) social media can provide spaces for communities to rally and engage in new forms of peace conversations. In fact, the new media surpasses Barraclough's notion of 'towns' in their dynamic and expansive accessibility. While 'towns' are geographically static, the new media invites people from different geographic places to engage with one another. Moreover, the new media as the new 'town' is more participatory and less discriminatory. The 'town' offered nationalist leaders the opportunity to confront and mobilize communities, whereas the new media

gives the community the opportunity to confront each other and mobilize themselves. The once requisite leader (political, religious, academic, and media) is now obsolete: ideas, not people, are guiding movements. Participants on social media are not leaders or followers, but peers.

Contributors to this volume explore the potential of social media as spaces for sustainable peace action and education. Together they explore if, how, and under what conditions social media can be used for cultivating conversations and dissenting voices related to issues important in (re)starting stalled peace processes and initiating newer ones. The underlying consensus in these contributions is that social media, relatively unconstrained and unmediated by political, academic, and religious 'experts', can be used to initiate and promote democratic multilogues among participants of a national and global civil society. In this sense, social media provides particularly advantageous spaces in which issues related to peace and violence can be discussed. The volume encapsulates conversations at the first Georg Arnhold Symposium on Education for Sustainable Peace, which focused on social media as space for peace education.

The volume opens with a preface by Howard Rheingold, a world-renowned authority on social media, innovation, and educational uses of social media. In particular, through examples from public organizations that he terms 'smart mobs', Rheingold focuses on new forms of human associations and socio-political organization that have come about in the wake of advances in 'new technologies'. He concludes with a discussion of how social media might be applied to civic education among young people. On the other hand, Adeela Arshad-Ayaz cautions against an uncritical acceptance of social media as an educational tool.

The next two chapters by Nadia Naffi and Ann-Louise Davidson and Nicole Fournier-Sylvester discuss the potential of social media to create praxis between the conceptual and empirical arguments regarding social media's role as space for sustainable peace education. Naffi and Davidson attempt to understand how Canadian youth construed their role in the integration and the inclusion of Syrian refugees in Canada while their image was tainted by social media propaganda in what they term as 'an era of alternative facts, fake news, and hate speech against refugees'. Analyzing a large qualitative data set, Naffi and Davidson discuss how Canadian youth learned to take positions to lead disruptions through

online discourses against cyberbullying, hate speech, Islamophobia, and racism.

Nicole Fournier-Sylvester explores how the use of social media may help create pedagogical opportunities for critical dialogue in educational contexts. In addition to its capacity for mobilization, using social media to discuss social issues facilitates understanding through digital imagery, storytelling, as well as wikis that can be used to visualize conflicting narratives and understandings of history. She concludes that without a solid critical pedagogy strengthened by critical digital literacy training, however, the integration of social media in peace education programs may only serve to exacerbate the inequalities such a curriculum would aspire to combat.

In their contribution, Edward J. Brantmeier, Jayson W. Richardson, Behar Xharra, and Noorie K. Brantmeier articulate social media as a 'liminal space' between the mind and embodied action. They address questions about social media's pedagogical potential for consciousness-raising and political mobilization (both online and offline) in collective community efforts at change, reconciliation, and renewal. The authors point to state digital diplomacy initiatives in Kosovo that aim to promote a positive national identity in the aftermath of traumatic violence. They do this to demonstrate how social media can be used to erode tensions and build interfaith harmony in post-conflict environments by illuminating ideas to diverse audiences, thereby mobilizing communities to challenge historical power dynamics and hierarchies. Brantmeir et al. conclude that in post-conflict zones, where community voices have been systemically undermined, the accessibility and democracy of knowledge production and consumption on social media is critical to civic engagement and collaborative peace building. Her chapter in this volume investigates the capacity of traditional and social media educational spaces, materials, and pedagogy to promote civic engagement and peace. She identifies that the 'market based orientation of education' narrows possibilities for civic engagement and peace building, instead promoting different types of violence. She first explores the ways in which social media illuminate the failures of traditional educational models to promote civic engagement

and peace. However, she also casts doubt on the dominant romantic understandings of the educational and emancipatory potential of Web 2.0 tools based on her research with on pre-service teachers' use of social media to promote civic engagement. The chapter points to significant gaps in current research on social media, particularly the dearth of analysis of political agenda and mediated nature of social media, a gap in the literature obfuscated by current visions of social media/Web 2.0.

Craig Zelizer's chapter in the volume conceptualizes social media in relation to civic engagement and peace. Zelizer makes a forceful case that social media is misconstrued as merely contributing to slacktivism and hashtagavism. He argues that social media contributes to peace-building among young users. Using practical examples from leading platforms, Zelizer unpacks various ways social media educates and engages users in peace building, including its capacity as an educational space to learn skills and knowledge, a site of mobilization for collective action and a communicative current for parties in conflict-affected zones. Web 2.0 tools have drastically transformed online spaces from technologies that simply gather information to instruments for active engagement and learning, functions of which are increasingly used for peace building projects at both local and global scales. Zelizer takes a keen interest in possibilities of measuring or otherwise assessing the impact of social media for peace building and how the implications translate to concrete behavioural and societal change.

In their contribution to the volume, Jana Fedtke, Zaid Bouziane, and Mohammed Ibahrine looks at implications of the rapid diffusion and adoption of social media platforms in the Arab world on religiosity and practices of piety. Social media has proved a popular arena in which Muslims from both Muslim majority countries and the Diaspora express, contest and discuss religion and religious issues. Social media websites, microblogging, and mobile social apps have fractured orthodoxies by inviting commentary on interpretations of the Qur'an from individuals from all levels of the religious hierarchy of Islamic religious sciences, thereby disrupting the authority of official religious scholars and authorities. Ibrahine considers impacts on social life including religious practices, religiosity, preaching, issuing *fatwas*, and building virtual

communities and how these might impact violence and peace in respective Muslim societies.

M. Ayaz Naseem, the first Georg Arnhold Visiting Research Professor on Education for Sustainable Peace and the convenor of the first Georg Arnhold Symposium, examines the potential of blogosphere for peace education. Naseem articulates social media such as blogosphere (among others) as the new 'town', a gathering space where ideas with the potential for change are aggregated and then transported to individual, local, national, and communal contexts where their application can initiate change. Using a case study of the Pakistani blogosphere he argues that in in-crisis societies Pakistan the blogosphere is a space where conversations and multilogues on issues that are crucial to societal regeneration are taking place. He demonstrates that these conversations and multilogues in the blogosphere are democratic and inclusive in that they are not confined by the traditional articulations of 'expertise', privilege, and subject positioning, nor are they are privileged by credentials or their positioning in the 'knowledge' hierarchy.

Babak Rahimi offers an account of the history and socio-political dynamics of the Iranian Internet in order to understand the emergence of new spaces of civic engagement. For Rahimi, this digital sphere is less about creating an educational paradigm than it is about the potential for 'living' in a new kind of politics based on civic engagement, which is paramount to civic activism. Rahimi points to Tavaana, an e-collaborative civic educational online project based out of the United States, as a chief example of Iranian civil society advocates amassing and sharing learning and informational resources online. He argues against state involvement with civic educational projects, contending it reconfigures the spaces into policy domains with precise political agendas, undermining the dynamism of civic activism as an independent political practice.

In the last chapter of the volume, Samuel Woolley and Mark Kumleben investigate the relationship between social media and revolution, unraveling the major debates over the use of social media in revolution, protest, elections, and security crises. Online, activists find the tools to mobilize, organize, and publicize material easily, efficiently, and safely. Howard and Woolley also point out one of the newest additions to the social media toolkit: the social media bot, programmed to produce and mimic content

on sites just as human users do. The authors challenge assumptions that these bots are purely tools of coercion and control activated by powerful political actors who hide agendas of propaganda in the recessions of code. The authors conclude by proposing exciting possibilities for these bots to be incorporated into democratic outreach, education, and collaboration.

This volume makes several innovative contributions to the fields of social media and peace education. First, the volume brings together conceptual and practitioner perspectives with a twin view to aid conversations on bringing about a praxis and provoking thinking about further theorization on critical social media education, especially in educational and pedagogical realms. Second, realizing the ubiquitous nature of social media the volume contributes to the field by bringing in voices, scholarship, and expertise from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Contributors to the volume approach the intersections of social media and peace education from disciplinary perspectives as diverse as education, communication, journalism, media studies, social advocacy, cultural studies, peace education, and pedagogy. Third, contributions to the volume move beyond focusing on particular social media such as Twitter and Facebook and examine a range of social media in order to have a wholesome view of the social media ecology with an aim to understand how differing affordances of social media can be instrumental in creating enabling conditions for sustainable peace. Finally while lately there has been some scholarly effort that examines the role played by social media in peace-related phenomena such as civil society networking, consciousness raising, and so on, this volume is a pioneer effort that explicitly elucidates multiple dimensions in which social media can provide a space for peace and peace education.

The inaugural Georg Arnhold Symposium and this volume were conceived in a spirit of collaborative exploration to identify newer spaces and arenas from where peace education and initiatives could be conceptualized and launched. Contributions in this volume reflect this exploratory spirit. Participants of the first Georg Arnhold Symposium and their contributions to this volume set aside any and all pretensions of finality, of academic privilege, and disciplinary authority at the outset. These are humble contributions to honour the desire of Mr. Georg Arnhold for

lasting peace through sustainable peace education. We dedicate this volume to him.

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2

A Group of Youth Learn Why and How to Disrupt Online Discourses and Social Media Propaganda Around Syrian Refugees

Nadia Naffi and Ann-Louise Davidson

Introduction

As 2016 was nearing its end and 2017 was approaching, Canadians were expected to embrace the *Canadian Exceptionalism* (Bloemraad, 2012) and welcome Syrian refugees in an era of alternative facts, fake news, and hate speech. This was challenging for many Canadians who were led to believe that they had an either-or choice to make between being exceptional or being safe. Since the online discourse around Syrian refugees during this period was mainly orchestrated to spread fear amongst potential and existing welcoming communities, a counterpropaganda led

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by agents of change was of outmost importance to counterbalance the negative influence and allow host societies to make informed choices. Since nearly 100% of the Canadian youth beween18 and 24 years old uses the Internet on a daily basis and most of them follow news and current affairs through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Mitchell, Simmons, Matsa, & Silver, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2018), we considered them potential candidates to lead this change.

Youth Versus News on Social Media

A majority of Canadians was following the development of the Syrian refugee crisis and the dreadful 2017 terrorist events through social media and was exposed to the propaganda campaign spread against the resettlement of Syrian refugees (Angus Reid Institute, 2017). This propaganda fed and was partially being fed by far-right extremists and was used to vindicate behaviours against Muslim immigrants and refugees. On January 29, 2017, the 27-year-old Quebecois Alexandre Bissonnette shot and killed six Muslim men in a mosque in the Sainte-Foy neighbourhood of Quebec City. Reports claimed that Bissonnette was a fan of Marine Le Pen (Gagné, 2017), a French anti-Muslim anti-refugee politician whom he never met but followed on social media. Following the events, far-right activist groups, namely Pediga, La Meute, Storm Alliance and the Three Percent, came out and openly expressed their anti-Muslim position. According to an article posted on Vice, the Three Percent group was "armed, ready for war on Canadian soil, and experts say they are dangerous" (Lamoureux, 2017).

Contrarily to previous discourses that position millennials as passive consumers of news with little and accidental exposure to world events, a thorough study conducted by the Media Insight Project (2015) affirmed that youth between the age of 18 and 24 were "anything but "newsless", passive, or civically uninterested (…). [They] consume news and information in strikingly different ways than previous generations, (…) their paths to discovery are more nuanced and varied than some may have imagined," and social media plays a large role in their news consumption. Their main social media platforms to access news are Facebook, YouTube,

Instagram and Reddit, and most of the youth make sure to stay up to date with what is going on in the world (The Media Insight Project, 2015).

In fact, youth's digital devices are flooded with information. Whether they get their news from actively seeking out information or from simply bumping into it when socially interacting online with friends and family, youth need to filter this information and judge its credibility (Thoms, 2016), especially in this fake news alternative facts era. Thoms (2016) explains that, before they are read by Canadian youth, this news undergoes two filtering. First, social media platform algorithms as well as youth's network of friends and family aggregate perceived important and interesting breaking news. Second, Canadian youth filter news to read from the aggregated content and decide whether to undertake a superficial glance at the headlines or to investigate the stories more thoroughly. Their decisions are based on a number of criteria such as the source of the news and the quality and the corroboration of the story. Youth's interest in the topic, their past experience, their personal logic, their energy and motivation levels and time are also influential factors.

Many youth admit that judging the credibility of the information they encounter on social media is challenging (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012). Thoms (2016) shares similar results, notably that Canadian youth are inclined to believe stories shared on social media. However, she also notices that these youth are sceptical when the information sounds unbelievable, of poor quality or when they cannot cross verify it from multiple resources.

Thoms' (2016) explanation of youth news filtering is quite refined because they appear to follow a pattern when exploring news. First, they glimpse at trending topics or articles posted or shared by their network of friends or family and then seek more information about the topics through a Google search. They rely on what they perceive as trusted mainstream news sites—a strategy stemming from the literacy skills they develop through their public-school curriculums. Who shares the news and the identity of the sharer also plays an influential role in deciding what to trust and thus to read (The Media Insight Project, 2016)? Further, Canadian youth who are exposed to racial and ethnic diversity distinguish between types of online speech they consider offensive and are less tolerant of racist speech (Harell, 2010).

Youth oftentimes see or experience direct or indirect racial discrimination online (Steeves, 2014), or witness unproductive, uncivil or disturbing Facebook discussions amongst people holding divergent views (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016). When this happens, many youth become reluctant to share their perspective online by fear of backlash or negative consequences (Kahne et al., 2016). They remain "*power users* (frequent users)", instead of "*powerful users* (influential users)" (Kahne et al., 2016, p. 24).

Gap in the Civic Education Curriculum

In order for Canadian youth to *powerful users* in this era of social media and fake news, educators, especially civic educators, should help "prepare youth for important forms of engagement in civic and political life in the digital age, including investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization" (Kahne et al., 2016, p. 14). The best way is to empower youth to stand up to propaganda, identify ways to leverage the power of social media and have "greater control, voice and influence over issues that matter most in their lives" (Kahne et al., 2016, p. 38).

To withstand all forms of propaganda, research suggests that awareness is the best prevention (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012). Awareness starts by acknowledging the existence of propaganda then analysing the propaganda campaign to predict how it could shape beliefs (Manzaria & Bruck, 1998). Kahne et al. (2016) suggest that civic educators should develop competencies to help their students to (1) effectively search for information and analyse its credibility, (2) use multiple digital tools and platforms to ensure high-quality investigations and (3) exploit social networks in their quest for information. Further, youth should be able to participate in shaping online discourses (Kahne et al., 2016). They need to be able to (1) frame the information and create stories, (2) express their perspective with respect and civility in a digital format while using persuasive strategies, (3) engage in conversations with people with diverse standpoints while being aware of the risks of backlash and cyberbullying, (4) circulate multimedia using digital tools, platforms, and social networks, (5) go public and invest in expending their online audience that

can serve as a vehicle to spread their viewpoints and (6) anticipate and thus design the footprint and the digital afterlife that will generate from their civic and political activities (Kahne et al., 2016).

Moreover, civic educators should equip youth to be able to (1) organize and mobilize others for a cause, (2) build support and (3) anticipate possible or unexpected outcomes and plan adequate responses (Kahne et al., 2016). While youth are active on social media, many are ill-informed about how to strategically select the digital media tools and platforms to serve their goal, or "to craft persuasive messages that will reach a targeted audience" (Kahne et al., 2016, p. 11). These competencies should also be addressed in the curriculum. Despite the importance of the topic, Canadian school curriculum initiatives remain conservative.

As Kahne et al. (2016) point out, "In the digital age, as before, youth must learn to carefully analyze issues, understand the social context, and reflect on their own positionality" (p. 27) in order for them "to work collectively to identify, learn about, discuss with others, and address public issues" (p. 4). Civic educators need to move beyond asking youth to deconstruct social media news and propagandist messages and start encouraging them to uncover the logic of their deconstruction so they understand the genesis of their reasoning. Educators should avoid asking students to go on missions on social media platforms and simulate online interactions which oftentimes lead students to feel "like a regular assignment written for the teacher" (Kahne et al., 2016, p. 19).

For youth to withstand propaganda, whether coming from governmental parties with agendas or from radical extremists, and to engage in civic and political life in the digital age, they need to understand where their political tolerance and intolerance are coming from. Further, in order for any Canadian to play an active role in the inclusion of refugees, they need to understand the concerns, the emotions and the values that generate the public attitudes towards refugees (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017).

Thus, in a context where schools are yet to establish a curriculum that transforms students from debriefed bystanders, at risk of being manipulated by the media, to critical citizens, agents of change, our study focused on engaging youth in in-depth discussions about how they construed (1) the online discourse surrounding the settlement of Syrian refugees and (2) their role as Canadian citizens, active users of social media, in the resettlement of refugees.

Methodology

To conduct our study, we recruited twenty-two Canadians between 18 and 24 years old through a snowball purposeful sampling using Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. Twelve participants came from a diverse environment. Ten came from small exclusively white Canadian towns but got immersed in a diverse environment when they left their hometown and joined a university in one of Canada's big cities. The participants were active on social media, supportive of the Syrian refugee resettlement in Canada, but deliberately acting as bystanders whenever they encountered online posts and interactions about the Syrian refugee crisis.

We engaged participants in four in-depth interviews to explore (1) how they construed online interactions about the Syrian refugee crisis and (2) how they construed their own role in the integration and inclusion of Syrian refugees in Canada. We focused on interactions that occurred on social media right after the dreadful terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015), Brussels (March 2016), Nice (July 2016), Berlin (December 2016) and Quebec (January 2017) and the sexual assaults in Cologne (New Year's Eve 2016).

We designed the interview protocols (Naffi & Davidson, 2017) through adapting four techniques that stemmed from George Kelly's Personal Construct Psychology (1991 [1955]). These techniques were Kelly's self-characterization technique, Procter's Perceiver Element Grid (Procter, 2014), Kelly's Repertory Grid Test (Kelly, 1991 [1955]) and Hinkle's laddering technique (Hinkle, 1965).

We adopted Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), a "theory of human personality, a therapeutic approach and a research methodology" (Brown & Chiesa, 1990, p. 411), as a theoretical framework for our study. Through PCP, we helped young participants to develop an understanding of their own understanding of online interactions surrounding the topic of the Syrian refugee resettlement and to construe their own online participation in this topic. During the interviews, participants delved into their own construct system and reflected on the genesis of their constructs.

According to Bannister and Fransella (1971), a personal construct system is "the person's guide to living. It is the repository of what he[she] has

learned, a statement of his[her] intents, the values whereby he[she] lives and the banner under which he[she] fights" (p. 27). The process of discovering and acknowledging their own construct systems let alone construing others' construing was very exigent. However, experiencing this process was an eye opening for all participants and triggered their agency.

The interview data were transcribed and validated by participants then analysed following the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). We began by getting immersed in the data before we were engaged in an open coding exercise, the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data as per Corbin and Strauss (2015). We identified similar phrases, patterns, relationships between concepts or themes and we grouped those with similar properties. We isolated the patterns and processes as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and we ordered and reordered the categories until saturation, as suggested by Creswell (2008). We then proceeded to layering the themes by identifying levels in which they fit. In the following section, we summarize the results based on the determined themes and we interpret the findings while recurring to the existing body of literature. Since we conducted the interviews in three languages, when expressions are not easily translated, we paraphrased to remain true to the statement.

Discussion and Findings

Kelly (1991 [1955]) posits that one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours operate in a structured manner and are determined by one's predictions of the future. These predications generate from tailor-made construct systems that one develops through one's own experiences of events. Research on youth and on social media depict youth as victims, easily manipulated by the media. Through the lens of Personal Construct Psychology, we posit that youth are not victims. They can control how social media influence their thoughts, feelings and behaviours once they identify their construct systems and thus understand themselves. As Bannister and Fransella (1971) explain, "The aim of personal constructs, put at its most pious, is liberation through understanding" (p. 201). In the sections that follow

we present what participants learned about themselves during the interviews, the skills they developed and the factors they identified that could trigger their active participation.

Knowledge of Oneself

As participants went through the interviews, they experienced several discoveries about themselves. First, they realized that their choice of the information and the news to read was not random. Second, they recognized how social media depicted Syrian refugees. Third, they recognized the image they unconsciously construed of the anti-refugee anti-Muslim groups who posted on social media. Fourth, participants identified potential factors that led to the anti-refugee anti-Muslim sentiments. Fifth, they uncovered the reasons why they opted for the bystander stance when they encountered posts and arguments about the Syrian refugee crisis.

First, participants filter online posts about the Syrian refugee crisis before reading them

In line with Thoms' (2016) results, participants admitted adopting a set of criteria to select the content they read on social media. Some of these criteria were similar to Thoms' (2016) criteria, such as the source of the news, the quality and the corroboration of the story, the participants' interest in the topic, their past experience, their personal logic, their energy and motivation levels and time. Our study revealed an additional number of criteria. These criteria were the length of the post, the stance expressed in the post, the arguments used to justify the stance, the tone of the post, and the personal reactions the post triggers. In the section that follows, we present the overall filtering criteria described by the participants.

When participants were asked to describe the online posts and comments that caught their attention on the Syrian refugee crisis, they shared a variety of criteria ranging from the length of the posts to the power of the content to consolidate participants' position. These criteria are the identity and posting behaviours of authors, the content being shared, the arguments leading the statement, the familiarity of the participants with the arguments, the tone projected by the post, the quality of the resources

used to back up the arguments, the media used, the concerns shared through the post, and the personal reaction triggered by the post influenced the participants' reading selection.

Most participants avoided long posts. For them shorter posts where authors conveyed a strong message with only a few meaningful words had more merit and effect than longer ones. The identity of the authors, whether they were friends or not, their posting behaviours and the media used were also selection filters.

Participants not only stopped to read statements they resonated with, but also posts that made no sense to them. They were intrigued by posts that shared views they disagreed with, incorrect and shocking information, arguments promoting fear, controversial or upsetting titles, or unfounded calls for action. They also stopped when posts or comments shared an explanation they agreed with or evoked points they often heard from people in their network.

Most participants felt drawn to positive posts. However, what really interested them were posts supported by reliable sources and lived experiences. They looked for posts that shared supportive initiatives or presented arguments and sound concerns. They expressed hope when young adults actively engaged in demonstrating unity in an attempt to change public perceptions.

Despite the efforts of many to read positive posts, being exposed to negative posts was inevitable. Participants believed that in general media opted to report negative events, thus their exposure to more negative news and comments than positive ones. In some cases, this unsupportive content triggered personal reactions in participants. One Muslim participant felt personally attacked by the online accusations:

> I feel like this is an attack on my own, I am not a refugee, I am not in the same boat, but I feel that they are attacking my identity as a Canadian. It makes me angry because it feels directed at me. I existed successfully seamlessly in the Canadian culture and the Canadian society for 24 years now, and I am not one and alone, I have many friends, so why all of a sudden when few things happen in the name of Islam all the good that has happened is just negated. It feels unfair, especially knowing how hard my parents worked, knowing how much they put in making us part of the Canadian society, it feels like you are negating all the hard work of so many families.

When participants reflected on the reasons why they were attracted to certain posts and not to others, they realized that despite the fact that they had never deliberately chosen to click on a post, or to skip it, they did have instinctive filtering processes that they adopted online. By identifying these criteria, participants also recognized the kind of information they allowed themselves to have access to. They recognized the fact that a first filtering was happening through algorithms used by social media. However, these algorithms, in many cases, were based on the participants' own patterns of behaviours and preferences. In other words, participants were not passive receivers of information. They had some sort of control even if this control was unconscious.

By identifying the criteria that they used to select the content to read, they also identified the content they were dismissing, why they were dismissing it and what to do to reach it. Further, participants identified their biases, the content that triggered their emotional reactions, how they dealt with it and how it was affecting their construal of the refugees and other Canadians.

Second, participants recognize the image of Syrian refugees the public is led to believe by the media

Participants' observation on the online discourses about the Syrian refugee crisis was consistent with media critics and researchers' findings. The media in general (Perry & Scrivens, 2016) and the Canadian media in particular (Tyyskä et al., 2017) propagated a negative image of the Syrian refugees. According to the participants, refugees were dehumanized on social media, they were considered as problems to deal with instead of human beings fleeing life-threatening events. They were viewed as uneducated, coming with large families, and most probably future burden on host society taxpayers. They were accused of "having ruined their own country and now coming to ruin ours."

One participant responded emotionally: "Some are overly negative and paint everyone with one brush. Some describe Islam as a nationality on its own and somehow that "Islam" and "Canadian" don't coexist. The religion and the nationality are very interchangeable for them."

Through identifying the image depicted by the media of the refugees and of Islam, and the very specific characteristics that were highlighted, exaggerated or even faked, participants pinpointed the elements and the arguments that needed to be featured to counterbalance the negative image. They also reflected on the effect of this image on Syrian refugees' motivation to integrate and the level of confidence and trust these newcomers would have in the Canadian society to include them.

One participant shared an observation about the difference between how hate and love comments affected refugees. He said that hate was much easier to remember than love and affected us more since "it was harder to deal with". Another participant said, "One negative post will stick with refugees longer than a hundred positive posts just because you will immediately feel attacked and defenceless."

In fact, participants considered the negative image shared online a fundamental barrier to the integration of Syrian refugees. They explained that Syrian refugees who meet a Canadian for the first time would worry whether this person wants to help them or wishes they would stay in the war zone, even if this led to their death.

Third, participants construct an image of the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians (ASRC) based on social media content and behaviours

While most research focus on assessing the impact of the media on how Syrian refugees are perceived by the public (Bleiker et al., 2013; Nail, 2016; Perry & Scrivens 2016; Tyyskä et al., 2017), in our study we examined the impact of this same propaganda on how our participants perceived the anti-Syrian refugee anti-Muslim public. In fact, the media and the propagandists who invested many efforts to disfigure the Syrian refugees were being construed as well.

Most participants construed negative posts as coming from people who were self-centred, only concerned with their own safety, uncaring about refugees or their problems, "Going out of their way to make [refugees] feel unwelcome" while expecting them to show gratitude for being received in Canada. They viewed the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians (ASRC) who shared unsupportive posts to be closed-minded, "who

[thought] that their opinion [was] the only right opinion," "unwilling to hear any opinion other than theirs," with "certain internal biases" difficult to unlearn, and an "us versus them mentality." They also viewed the ASRC as "comfortable with their lifestyle and uncomfortable with the idea of change."

ASRC were also considered as privileged Canadians, ignorant of the complexity of fleeing a war zone. They were described as Islamophobic, "bluntly racist, painting everybody with one brush," easily influenced by propaganda and willingly attentive to negative posts. One participant said: "They are listening to everything that is going on in the media that is negative and I think that you can choose to listen to negative or positive and I think these people chose to listen to the negative media (…) They believe the propaganda that spreads a generalized hate towards Muslims and looks at them as if they all bring some sort of problems."

Some participants construed the ASRC as white men from an older age. One participant said, "I do think of these people as just like small town old white men, that is my first image of these people, who had a lot of time to go on the Internet and spread hate. Their ideas are engraved in them for so long." They also viewed them as acting with superiority, using comments that implied that Canadians were superior to Middle Eastern people.

Participants construed ASRC's behaviours online as judgmental, as one participant described, "Some are not against refugees as much as they are against Islam itself as they judge Muslim people, they think Muslims are the source of the problem." They also found them exaggerating, "pushing towards more a very exaggerated view of the problem," and generalizing, as the behaviours reflected, "a generalized hate towards Muslims".

As participants were reflecting on the labels, they gave the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians, they started developing empathy towards ASRC. They realized that the ASRC might have potential legitimate concerns that needed to be acknowledged and specific factors that forged their beliefs, regardless whether participants agreed with these concerns and believes or not.

The participants suddenly realized that their labelling or categorizing behaviour was in some way very similar to the anti-Syrian refugee

Canadians' behaviour that stereotyped Syrian refugees and the supporters of the resettlement. They shared that they were self-centred, concerned of being the exceptional Canadian, respecting the Canadian humanitarian reputation and identity, and worrying about how guilty they would feel if they did not help people in need. They also noticed that they were closed-minded when it came to understand the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians' perspectives. They automatically labelled them with racism, intolerance and ignorance without trying to be in their shoes. Participants also admitted that they had certain internal biases as they preferred to read positive media and had an "us versus them" mentality towards both refugees and the ASRC.

Fourth, participants identify factors that potentially influence attitudes towards refugees

Around the middle of the interviewing process, participants started developing empathy towards the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians and tried to understand the roots of their anti-refugee position and behaviours. They presented them under four factors that they considered central to explain and understand anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, excluding behaviours. These factors were the *small-town effect*, *social media influence*, *education*, and *family and peer pressure*.

Small town effect. While some participants portrayed ASRC as conservative Christians, uneducated politically, many argued that those coming from small towns lacked contact with thus knowledge about immigrants, Muslims or refugees. They argued that the *small-town effect* could explain excluding posts and behaviours. Some comments from participants were:

> I think some people are afraid of what Islam means. Some things are not totally untrue. Religious people often do believe that their ways are God's ways. Religious people share this same belief but if this person is a Christian person, people don't have this anger towards what this person is saying. They won't have that anger because they are exposed to Christianity more often.

Social media influence. While Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) state that the influence of fake news on people's perceptions is still to be determined, participants believed that social media affected attitudes towards refugees, notably Muslims. This is in accordance with McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (2017) and Harell's (2017) findings.

Participants observed that people who had little to no contact with refugees and Muslims were even more apt to be influenced by social media, especially that social media, according to them, was a main source of information about the Syrian refugee crisis. They added that being exposed to news about the Syrian refugee crisis was almost unavoidable as most of the time this news happened to pop up on their news feed.

Participants were not as oblivious to social media propaganda as we could have expected based on previous research. When it came to examining propagandists' usage of social media as a main propaganda strategy, some participants discussed the power of hashtags and their omnipresence in every aspect of their lives, which, according to them, were very tied to social media.

Participants remarked that the strategy to use social media as a vehicle to propagandist messages was exploited in particular by far-right extremists to spread fear and by politicians to advocate for their ideas and to gain votes. They added that social media had such a strong effect on people because many took the information shared online at face value, believing it was credible, and then carrying it on in their day-to-day life when they were not even on social media.

Educational gap. Interestingly, participants valued the role of education in defying the fear escalated on social media. One participant observed: "They are simply scared. People are so afraid of terrorism. The opposite I almost want to say education. Because if you knew anything about Islam, I don't think you will have that fear."

Participants identified the discussions that were missing from their classrooms. For them, it was essential that schools addressed questions such as

- How to analyse and become critical of social media?
- How to have an informed opinion?
- How to select reliable and trustworthy sources of information?
- How to read online posts and comments?

- What is happening in the world?
- What is Islam?
- How to deal with racism?
- How to deal with one's own racism?
- How to identify different perspectives?
- How to present arguments related to a sensitive topic such as the resettlement of Syrian refugees, while acknowledging that others' arguments are legitimate too?
- How to develop one's voice? How to create spaces where one can be heard?
- How to stop judging and start developing empathy?
- How to stand up for one's beliefs even if they are not compatible with own family's or friends'?
- How to make others consider one's viewpoints?
- How to make one's voice matter? How to become an influencer?

Many of these questions are in line with competencies and practices identified by Kahne et al. (2016) and need to be part of the civic education curriculum to foster participatory politics. Examples of these practices are investigation, dialogue, circulation and mobilization.

Participants felt that many of the ASRC comments demonstrated a lack of skills for checking for the reliability of sources before posting. They believed that most ASRC were too quick to repost without carefully examining the source of the content, uncaring about the impact of these posts on how refugees were viewed and looking to trigger reactions and likes.

Many of the participants shared that one of their main concerns was to ensure they only read news from reliable sources and shared valid information. They considered social media to be "filled with misinformation" that easily circulates between users. To remedy this situation, they often "check multiple people's posts and comments", "try to look for some reliable sources more than Facebook posts" and "make [their] own research before [they] form an opinion about something". One participant explained, "Now it is so normal and so easy to add information online and people are not always aware of what is real and what isn't". Another said, "I want to avoid looking like an idiot, looking uneducated on the topic because then people are going to question my legibility".

Participants' practices were in line with Thoms' (2016) findings. However, the author stated that her study could not be generalized given the qualitative approach she adopted and the small sample she had. This explains why while the participants in our study demonstrated some civic online reasoning, they noticed that other Canadians still needed to be taught how to access the information they accessed online.

Another observation made by most of the participants was that it appeared as if many ASRC did not research the topic of the Syrian refugee crisis before posting or reposting on social media. According to them, one should not only be critical of media content but also be open-minded, with a positive mindset, "trying to understand what is going on in the world" and "putting some research in [the topic] before making a post," which the ASRC did not do. Some participants explained, "If you do not experience certain things you do not have the understanding, so you need to challenge yourself and you need to educate yourself."

Participants also noticed that many social media users could be lost in interpreting the mixed messages shared online and proposed that "someone should teach everyone how to read these posts." Further, they expressed their need to identify their biases and racist thoughts, to develop empathy towards people whom they perceived as racist and to find ways to help them explore other perspectives.

Going through the interviews did not quite help the participants to answer the questions that emerged. However, it gave both the participants and the researchers directions to follow. Gaps were identified and discussed. This process confirmed the everlasting need to address these gaps and to modify our curriculum in order to bridge them. This is of outmost urgency, especially in the context of the inclusion and the integration of refugees.

Family and peer pressure. Participants considered that, in addition to the *small-town effect*, *social media influence* and the *educational gap* in our curriculum, *family upbringing* and *peer pressure* were two influential factors and affected youth's stance on the refugee resettlement.

On the one hand, some participants noted that anti-Syrian refugee Canadians' behaviours could result from concerns to please others from their network, such as parents or peers. Worrying of losing the financial or emotional support of ones' family or of being excluded from one's peer group would force some youth to conceal their stance and adopt their

family's or their peers' in public contexts. Some participants explained: "I talked to some people and to them it is more their family, because of the family believes, so they don't have the choice, if their family has really negative opinion about it they would be afraid to go against their family in it," "people repeat what their family or friends say," "I think a lot of people are going to jump on the bandwagon of whatever people around them are supporting", and "maybe because they think that something happening across the world is not worth losing their friends."

On the other hand, participants valued the influence of their own family and network on their decision to support the Syrian refugee resettlement in Canada. One participant commented, "I often have to remind myself that I am very privileged that I have parents who, in my opinion, are very progressive and open-minded and taught me about racism and all of this stuff." One Muslim participant even noted that her presence within her group of friends shaped how they viewed Muslims and accepted them:

I do have a supportive community; I think having me in their lives meant having different perspectives sometimes on these things. I am very thankful for it now. I did not expect this growing up, but I feel that maybe it has some effect on them, knowing that somebody was Muslim and was different, they don't buy into the propaganda that is shared on social media so quickly.

Participants noted that one could move from a small town, become aware of the social media influence and do own research on the topic, however contradicting one's family or friends was the real challenge. It required serious courage and a strong belief in the case one was advocating for.

Fifth, participants' online passiveness results from perceived barriers online

Kahne et al. ([2016](#)) claimed that many youth avoided sharing their perspective online for fear of backlash or negative consequences. Witnessing or being a victim to direct or indirect racial discrimination online (Steeves, [2014](#)), or being frequently exposed to unproductive, uncivil or

disturbing Facebook discussions amongst people holding divergent views (Kahne et al., 2016) hold back youth from having a voice on social media. The results of our study are in line with the findings of previous research. Because of the specificity of the topic, we were able to pinpoint additional reasons why participants opted a bystander role in the online discussions about the Syrian refugee crisis.

The majority of the participants were reluctant to respond to posts or comments they disagreed with or even to share content about the refugee crisis for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons were their belief that users had the right to express their opinions, their discomfort to publicly argue with family, friends or members from their close network, or their lack of knowledge about the Syrian refugee crisis, as they explained, "Sometimes I don't have enough information or knowledge to back up my arguments, to make a strong enough point."

In addition to the mentioned reasons, three main barriers were shared by most participants and prevented them from having a voice, let alone an influence online. First, they felt hopeless online, faced with individuals whom they described as inflexible, uneducated, ignorant and close-minded. Some of the participants' comments were: "I truly tried… it just feels like it is hopeless so I just block them out," "some language that is used makes you feel that no matter what you say you won't be able to change this person's opinion," "a long comment battle with somebody… you would just end up being more frustrated," "I feel so helpless. I feel as if I am hitting a wall after a certain point. The people are not willing to having their opinions changed or even have a discussion with you to help you change your opinion," and:

> I don't personally like to get into online arguments and debates, I find them useless. Often times the people you are debating with are not educated enough to want to change their mind or be willing to be open enough to hear someone else's opinion. So, it won't end positively. This is why I won't lose my time to do that, but I do realize that not doing it could sometimes feel as if you're just kind of being weak not defending the things that you believe in, I don't know. It has mixed feelings about it.

Second, participants were concerned with confrontations. The participants remarked that those who supported the arrival of the Syrian

refugees were attacked on social media, which made many, including themselves, unenthusiastic to voice their opinion. This is how they explained it:

> People say comments all the time that are actually racist, even if they are said in very subtle ways. You feel so guilty when you just let it slide, later on in the day. At least I do. I always feel guilty about it but then if you are very upfront about it and you say you can't say that, that's racist, they will automatically get very defensive and won't listen to you. And, if it is with a friend, then it's really awkward and there is a lot of tension. Most people want to avoid that.
>
> When I encounter a post that I feel is misguided or mean, I spend days mulling over how to respond only to decide I do not want to be confrontational online. In that sense I am rather passive, and instead compensate by being more vocal in person.

Third, participants felt that their voice was lost amongst the voices that campaigned against the resettlement of refugees in Canada, as one participant pointed out:

> It is social media; your voice is lost amongst so many. Your voice isn't heard, the bigger voice just attacks and it's like I want to do something about your opinion, but I can't because I can't talk to you about it.

Developed skills: Critical thinking and empathy

As participants went through each of the four interviews, they gradually moved from providing predictable surface answers to actively seeking to understand their own understanding of the phenomenon. They started questioning their own answers, reflecting on their own behaviours online, trying to make sense of their decisions and of what made them think that they were different than other Canadians. They were critical of others' behaviours online and curious to figure out the rationale behind the behaviours they disagreed with and the reasons why these behaviours bothered them.

They were critical of social media. They realized that when people adopted this medium as their main source of information, they were exposed to only one side of the stories, most of the time. They figured out that most of what popped up on their News feed was controlled by algorithms with a sole purpose to affirm their beliefs, regardless of what these beliefs were.

Participants were also critical of their own knowledge about the Syrian refugee crisis and admitted that what they knew was not sufficient to be used as a counterargument. They criticized the lack of discussions about topics such as the resettlement of refugees, racism or Islamophobia in schools. They believed that addressing these topics in schools would allow students to become exposed to different perspectives and help them construct an informed opinion. According to them, students would be less scared to express their views, prepared to deal with racism, and confident to argue their position while acknowledging and respecting others'.

While reflecting to answer the interview questions, the participants not only started to gradually engage in the development of thinking critically about the topic, they also started expressing empathy first towards the Syrian refugees and second towards the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians.

When they were asked about what refugees thought, felt or would behave, many participants realized that they did not have a sure answer since they never experienced what refugees went through. Then they tried to answer the questions while admitting that their answers were personal assumptions, that one could only try to put himself or herself in the shoes of refugees, that one could only assume. Some of the comments were: "I never really understand racism because I never experienced it myself", "if I put myself in their shoes, and this is not easy, I would be really just nervous because there is such a variety of responses like you really don't know if you are going to be bullied or if everyone will be excited and wanting to talk to you," and "if I was a Syrian refugee, I think I would be so scared. I will be walking on eggshells all the time making sure that I am not coming across like the way the media is painting me."

The participants also developed empathy towards the anti-Syrian refugee Canadians. One participant said that both sides might have arguments that needed attention and:

It is aggressive, it is part of the hype, but there is a grain of truth in what they are trying to express. In certain places one bad person caused a lot of harm. So, to people who lost whoever friend or family in these attacks, or is scared to lose someone, they might feel that even one Muslim is way too many. I can get it.

From briefed bystanders to influential agents of change: Participants realize that they can and must disrupt the online discourses around Syrian refugees

Cohen et al. (2012) claimed that interest-driven activities such as gaming were the main predictor of youth's engagement in social media debates. Jenkins et al. (2009) deduced that these activities developed participatory skills, norms and networks that could be transferred to political activities. Another possible reason for engaging in debates on social media could be the feeling of being dissatisfied, alienated or ignored by traditional political institutions, which motivates youth to benefit from the unprecedented means of expression and action offered by social media (Cohen et al., 2012).

Our study revealed an additional factor that could trigger youth participation: their realization that their bystander stance was contributing to the alienation of Syrian refugees. Participants gradually remarked that their reluctance to be part of the conversation was actually harming the Syrian refugees as, most of the time, only one side of the story was being shared. One participant said:

There are so many people who are positive, so many who want you to feel welcome in Canada, but this is not the voice that is heard because we tend to be a more passive voice. There is so much more positivity that does not reach refugees. As a global community, we failed on a human level for not making them feel welcome.

By the end of the interviews, participants started feeling responsible for and capable of disrupting the negative online discourses about the Syrian refugees. They identified five instances when they never intervened before but would in the future.

First, the participants felt that they should show their support of positive posts about the resettlement of refugees to counterbalance the massive dissemination of hateful posts. Second, since the propaganda against the resettlement of refugees focused on disseminating fake news and alternative facts, they planned to report posts that were offensive or contained lies or misinformation. Third, participants would not be discouraged by the closed-mindedness of some and would provide people with alternative arguments or stories that would allow them to better decide, as explained by one participant:

> We must try to reply to negative posts. The author of the post will not change his/her mind, he/she will disagree with our comment, but others who have access to both our views would have the chance to reflect on both arguments and then decide.

Fourth, participants said they would make more efforts to anticipate behaviours after terror attacks to counter the violent accusations that would target Muslims and Muslim refugees. While many expected Muslims to apologize after each terror attack, they said they would shift the focus from Muslims as suspects to Muslims as part of the community, equally affected by the events. Fifth, they would acknowledge their own biases and actively communicate with people with opposing views. An example of comment from one participant was:

> I think we all have beliefs that are racist in a way even if they are very subtle. One thing I feel effective is asking questions. To be completely honest with someone if someone sees something that is problematic for the lack of a better word just say: what do you mean by that? How do you feel about that? Or if they make a statement: oh, why do you feel like that? Or have you ever seen that happen? Like do you know anything about that? Do you know anything about Syria? As simple as that.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in a context where many signs and surveys were pointing out to the fact that there were an increase of an intolerant, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment in Canada (Cooper, 2017;

Harell, 2017; McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, 2017) and urgency to motivate members of the Canadian civic society, including youth, to cease being bystanders and actively participate in facilitating the inclusion and the integration of Syrian refugees. However, this civic society was exposed to an aggressive online propaganda against the resettlement of Syrian refugees, and programs in educational settings were ill-designed to equip youth to face racism, to withstand the online flux of disinformation, and to play their role of agents of change.

We engaged twenty-two young participants in in-depth discussions using interview methods stemming from George Kelly's Personal Construct Psychology. Participants in this study were exceptional Canadians, as per Bloemraad's (2012) definition, who needed to trust that their voice mattered and that they could influence others to change. They acted as bystanders until they realized that their inaction was actually an action against their own beliefs about their humanitarian duty towards refugees. Impressively, their observations, explanations and predictions in regard to the rising of an anti-immigrant anti-Muslim sentiment almost matched our explanations based on group theories and results by researchers, experts in immigration.

On the one hand, through the interviews, the participants developed an understanding of their own understanding of the online discourse about the Syrian refugee crisis and of the role they played in shaping this discourse. On the other hand, the researchers identified the learning and the skills that can be developed when youth are involved in recognizing and construing their construct system and others'. This could have a significant influence on how social workers and professionals in the education field create learning and training programs focused on peace education.

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3

Finding Ways to Connect: Potential Role of Social Media in Peace Education

Nicole Fournier-Sylvester

In a speech marking 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, then United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated:

> Like never before, global challenges have local impacts. Local events can have global impacts. This compels us to strengthen cooperation—expand the space for dialogue—and replace the barriers of distrust with bridges of understanding. (United Nations, 2010, para. 3)

He went on to say that "Without a profound understanding of the histories, cultures and civilizations of the peoples of the world, extremism, discrimination and conflict will only increase" (United Nations, 2010, para. 11). These sentiments have been echoed by educators, scholars and researchers who have been advocating to place critical intergroup dialogue at the center of peace education and global citizenship curriculums (Banks, 2008; Blades & Richardson, 2006; Brantmeier & Lin, 2008; Merryfield, Lo, Po, & Kasai, 2008; Reardon & Snauwaert, 2011; Ross &

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Lou, 2008). Betty Reardon (2013), in particular, writes with urgency about the need to resurrect the space for authentic dialogue in classrooms, claiming that we are currently faced with a "debased political culture in which civility and dignity have been deeply corroded by an acidic climate of contempt and absolutism, the antithesis of that which we aspire" (pp. 2–3). Creating effective activities to help students understand social and political issues and conflicts from alternative perspectives "is one of the most significant challenges educators face, yet it is very difficult to accomplish in traditional classroom settings" (Ross & Lou, 2008, p. 5). In addition to addressing some of the institutional, logistical and inter-personal challenges to facilitating in-class discussions, social media may provide a vehicle for students to engage with the diversity of people and viewpoints that this curriculum requires. Indeed social media may be used to facilitate access to typically marginalized viewpoints, forms of expression and ways of knowing, offering new paths towards understanding. Although using social media to advance civic and peace-building ends may hold its appeal, without a strong critical pedagogy coupled with critical digital literacy training, the integration of social media into peace education may only serve to exacerbate the inequalities such a curriculum would aspire to combat.

Social media refers to online applications that "rely on openly shared content that is authored, critiqued and reconfigured by a mass of users. Social media applications, therefore, are those that allow users to engage in a number of specific online activities: conversing and interacting with others; creating, editing, and sharing textual, visual and audio content; and categorizing, labeling and recommending existing forms of content" (Selwyn, 2014, p. 106). These applications include but are not limited to "(a) social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, (b) media sharing sites, such as YouTube and Flickr, (c) creation and publishing tools, such as wikis and blogs, (d) aggregation and republishing through RSS feeds, and (e) remixing of content and republishing tools" (Greenhow, 2011, p. 140).

Challenges to Dialogue in a Traditional Classroom Setting

Despite the compelling reasons why peace education curriculum should emphasize critical dialogue, there are some concrete challenges to attaining the necessary conditions for productive intergroup contact in a traditional classroom setting. These challenges can include a lack of diversity in the classroom as well as generalized student and teacher anxiety around classroom management issues. Teachers often avoid open dialogue due to the perception that they lack the requisite knowledge and skills to work through complex social and political issues. Many teachers report that they have had no training in this area and feel ill-equipped to deal with the unpredictability of student reactions. Additional teacher concerns include fear of repercussions from administration or accusations from parents of trying to push a personal agenda (Civic Mission of Schools, 2003; Galston, 2004; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004).

There are also many reasons why, even despite a teacher's best efforts, many students may be reluctant to engage in political discussions in the classroom. Common reasons for withdrawing from these discussions include shyness, feeling ill-prepared, large classroom sizes and having insufficient time to think about a response. The fear of looking stupid in front of peers and teachers has also been widely reported. In many classrooms students shy away from saying anything that could elicit criticism and put their peer relationships at risk. This is particularly true for students from non-dominant groups who may feel easily discredited (Hess, 2001; Lusk & Weinberg, 1994). In addition, in-class discussions are often limited by the fact that some students simply resist participation while others tend to monopolize (Dutt-Doner & Powers, 2000).

Given the challenges of dialogue in a traditional classroom setting, online learning environments in general and social media in particular may well serve future and necessary developments in this area. By providing venues for dialogue and mobilization, many scholars have argued that online communities and networks may provide new opportunities for civic and peace education (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, Wells, & Rank,

2009; Delli Carpini, 2000; Middaugh & Kahne, 2009; Naseem, 2008; Rheingold, 2008).

Key Considerations Before Using Social Media for Peace Education

The vision of students using social media to break down barriers of communication both locally and globally for peace-building purposes is very appealing. Before making a case for the integration of social media in civic and peace education curriculums, however, there are certain assumptions underlying its integration that must be addressed should a critical educator purport to advance peace-building. The first involves the recognition that social media often serves to reinforce rather than challenge prejudice. The second consideration is that, instead of facilitating dialogue across difference, social media often promotes superficial exchanges, conformity and consumption. Finally, social media is not culturally neutral and, if not coupled with critical media literacy education, may do little more than reinforce Western forms of discourse and the dominance of the English language.

Reinforces Existing Viewpoints

It was originally hoped that social media would promote equality and democracy by bridging cultural divides and expanding the public sphere. This was grounded in the assumption that because the internet made information readily available to more people, access to the internet would necessarily lead users to learn about and address social inequities and forge intercultural relationships. However, social media often enables the "naturalization of the dominant perspective" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370) and individual viewpoints through mechanisms such as algorithms that constrain the perspectives people are exposed to in their web searches. Research on youth in the United States suggests that students' online communities are just as racially and economically homogeneous as their actual social networks and that social media use patterns often

mirror existing problems or tensions thereby reinforcing deep-seated beliefs and assumptions (boyd, 2014). Teens that do reach out and initiate new relationships tend to seek people who are "like-minded" and share their cultural background (Ito, 2010, p. 349), therefore, these largely racially homogenous groups can encourage social media users to believe that differences are innate, thereby replicating and exacerbating social divisions (boyd, 2014). Just as Allport (1954) purported in *Reducing Prejudice*, boyd's (2014) observations suggest that mere access to different groups and viewpoints will not necessarily reduce prejudice and can instead serve to reinforce it.

Promotes Shallow Communication

As with most forms of media, social media is primarily used for consumption, socializing and distraction (Shirky, 2011). Selwyn (2014) suggests that most participants in social media are "temporary clusters of individuals built around communal preferences in consumption or lifestyle rather than involving 'real' action or meaningful, sustained engagement" (p. 117). Social media can actually work against critical thinking and engagement by engendering a particularly shallow type of communication in which people are encouraged to "join", "participate" and "like" and where actual actions and knowledge are highly conformist and consensual (Selwyn, 2014). As suggested by Rheingold (2008):

> This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance: although a willingness to learn new media by point and click exploration might come naturally to today's student cohort, there is nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of democracy. (p. 99)

boyd (2014) found that although teens may have the capacity to make their own media or share content online, this did not mean that they were able to critically reflect on what they were creating or consuming. Even social media efforts that explicitly aim to promote intergroup communication are often reduced to "bumper-sticker sentiment and short on any useful action" (Shirky, 2011, p. 7). As such, rather than opening up

dialogue opportunities, social media-based participation often embeds users within pre-existing relations of power and norms of communication that are largely "ritualized, and composed solely of mantra and cliché" (Campanelli, 2010, p. 29, as cited in Selwyn, 2014).

Supports Epistemological, Linguistic and Technological Hegemony

Global online learning environments often privilege a "Western" style of education and discourse that centers on the development of deliberative skills which emphasize debate (Araujo e Sa, de Carlo, & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010; Bali, 2014). If social media is to support dialogue at a global level, then peace education initiatives should acknowledge and overcome:

> The ethnocentric privileging of Western rationality (as a universal form of reasoning) and of dialectical thought (as a universal form of deliberative engagement) that establish the specific parameters of validity and recognition of what can be known and how it can be communicated. These parameters are intimately associated with aspirations for unanimity and consensus and make it impossible for other forms of thinking, knowing, being and communicating to "disagree" or even make intelligible contributions in Western-led and structured sites of conversation. (Andreotti, 2011, p. 2)

Additionally, global online dialogue interventions inevitably impose a "linguistic hegemony" due to the fact that they, at least for the time being, necessarily occur in a shared language (Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012). The privileging of English as the default language of discussion sets up an asymmetrical relationship between native speakers and the "other"/non-native speakers that may not feel equally comfortable participating (Bokor, 2011).

Another challenge of technology-mediated dialogue is the fact that students from different countries do not have equal access to technology. Needless to say, those who have regular access to technology as well as the internet are advantaged from the beginning (Bali, 2014; Berg, 2012; Helm & Guth, 2012). In addition, ease of participation is severely affected by economic and regional differences. Although some students, for example, can easily participate from the comfort of their own homes,

other students are left competing for limited lab time within their own institutions or are faced with intermittent connectivity/WIFI access.

The likelihood that bringing different groups together will necessarily lead to positive outcomes has also been challenged by the evolving field of intergroup contact theory. Allport's (1954) groundbreaking *Reducing Prejudice* demonstrated that, without being supported by certain "necessary conditions", dialogue in multicultural classrooms generally failed to explore and openly address issues of inequality and social justice and often only served to reinforce stereotypes and intensify conflicts. Referring to dialogue as "intergroup" points to the fact that, especially in the cases where open conflict or inequality exists, when people come together, it is often their group memberships and not their individual characteristics that will shape communication. boyd's (2014) research appears to suggest that this is replicated in an online environment as well.

The Affordances of Social Media for Intergroup Communication

Despite the challenges associated with the use of social media as a conduit for peace-building dialogues, its use can also present opportunities often not present within traditional classroom settings. By supporting learning that is "active, collaborative, conversational, complex and reflective" (Selwyn, 2014, p. 112), social media applications share many of the characteristics of intergroup dialogue pedagogy. In addition, social media can have the added benefit of facilitating access to a multiplicity of viewpoints and forms of expression. Leveraging the interactive capabilities of social media for dialogue can also help equip youth with the skills necessary to engage in civic discourse for social justice and peace-building ends.

Compatibility with Critical-Dialogical Learning Processes

One of the appealing features of social media is its seeming compatibility with current trends in pedagogy, in general, and critical intergroup

contact in particular. Using social media in education fits well with contemporary constructivist approaches to learning in which knowledge is viewed as being actively constructed by learners within collaborative settings that allow for dialogue and reflection (Selwyn, 2014). The communication and psychological processes, as described by Gurin, Nagda, and Zuniga (2013)'s critical-dialogical framework, are equally described as relying on educational spaces in which relationships can be formed, understanding developed and collaboration fostered.

As dictated by a critical-dialogical approach, taking time to reflect is a key component of effective pedagogy (Gurin et al., 2013). Rarely available in a traditional classroom setting, social media may encourage students to engage in "reflexivity practices" by providing the time needed to consider multiple perspectives and develop one's own position (Ghodarti & Gruba, 2011). Brookfield and Preskill (2005) confirm that this type of reflective opportunity encourages independent and critical thought:

> In face-to-face discussions the phenomenon of groupthink, of everyone moving toward the consensual mean, is a constant danger. Few want to risk being the odd person out by expressing a contrary view. In cyberspace, however, the pressure to move quickly toward a shared point of view under the eyes of the teacher is felt much less strongly. (p. 232)

In addition, by responding and posting in written form, students are also more accountable for how they present their positions than in a traditional classroom.

Being able to determine the pace of interactions is particularly important for peace education programs in areas of intractable conflict. Firer's (2008) study on Israeli and Palestinian students, for example, revealed that while face-to-face encounters with the "enemy" could be extremely anxiety producing, internet-mediated contact allowed participants to take their time in getting to know each other at a pace with which they were comfortable. Firer (2008) described online dialogue as allowing time for reflection and "internalizing the new impressions and change of emotions" (Firer, 2008, p. 196). Similarly, Yablon (2007) stated that internet-mediated contact between Jewish and Arab youth provided a "base for meaningful interaction while affording a sufficient feeling of

safety for a personal disclosure and intergroup contact" (p. 102). Also in the context of the Middle East, Yablon and Yatz (2001) found that online communication allowed for deep and meaningful connections by facilitating disclosure between a wide range of participants while also allowing them to pull out of dialogues that made them uncomfortable.

Another advantage of social media for peace-building purposes is that when participants do not see each other they are relieved of obvious markers of social status and group affiliations (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). According to Lea, Spears, and de Groot (2001), the lack of "individuation cues" allows for greater and deeper opportunities for connection. Students participating in online discussions often report feeling more comfortable sharing their views online because discussions center around the quality of arguments as opposed to the individual who is taking the position (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). As such, students who may typically be introverts or self-conscious in a traditional classroom setting may feel more comfortable sharing ideas in the written form (Johnson, 2001). In this way, Jenkins and Thorburn (2003) suggest that internet forums may expand the range of voices that can be heard.

Unlike in the case of a win-lose debate, a critical-dialogical framework strives to build mutual understanding, not agreement. Within this framework, differences are not taken as points of division; rather they serve as a means to identify assumptions, encourage inquiry, develop mutual understanding and foster collaboration (Gurin et al., 2013). As such, through a critical-dialogical framework, educators are called upon to work with students to resist conceptualizing social and political issues as being made up of opposing positions:

> Most essential in discussions of controversial and contentious social and political issues is to be cognizant of the need for reflected exchanges in lieu of the mutual vaulting of predigested, ideological positions. In fact, reflective inquiry is stressed as a possible antidote to the ideological reductionism that infects present political discourse. (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2011, p. 8)

Discussions on conflicts thus shift from an adversarial and competitive win–lose struggle in which one version of truth must prevail to a mutual

problem that can be resolved as a group (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009). This shift requires students to understand knowledge as being constructed within a particular time period, context, culture and experience. Through a critical-dialogical approach the classroom is transformed:

> from a location for the dispensation of knowledge to passive recipients into a place where knowledge is disassembled, approached from multiple and missing perspectives, and reassembled in ways that create both critical understandings and paths for social change. (Hilton, 2013, p. 603)

Social media is well positioned to facilitate this reconceptualization of knowledge. Wikis, for example, can be used to encourage interactions that can lead to the creation of new knowledge. Instead of promoting a singular perspective of a historical event or social issue, a wiki can be used to incorporate multiple perspectives simultaneously thus facilitating a move away from forced agreement to one of mutual understanding.

The ideal conditions for intergroup interventions include strategies to maintain relationships over time so that new perspectives can be integrated into one's worldview in the long term: "Crucially, what ICT brought to the Contact Hypothesis was the potential for longterm contact to be sustained" (Austin & Hunter, 2013, p. 21). Social media can thus address this "transferability challenge" by allowing students to maintain long-term relationships which are more likely to facilitate the integration of new ideas into students' real-world contexts.

Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1970), Gurin et al.'s (2013) critical-dialogical theoretical framework also points to the importance of developing commitments and actions that address inequality and injustice. As stated by Freire (1970):

> When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter…denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. (p. 87)

Relationships built within this context are expected to provide alternative spaces and possibilities for building alliances and taking action in the

name of social justice (Gurin et al., 2013). Given that social media is increasingly recognized as a conduit for mobilization and social change, its effective integration may therefore facilitate achieving this objective.

Facilitates Access to Multiple and Non-dominant Perspectives and Ways of Knowing

In addition to encouraging reflexivity and progressive contact, by transcending geographical boundaries and time zones, students can use social media to gain access to a diversity of people and viewpoints to which they may not have access in a traditional classroom setting. As such, internet forums can provide students with opportunities to talk to other students who may hold divergent views and with whom contact would not be otherwise be likely (Johnson, Zhang, Bichard, & Seltzer, 2011; Middaugh & Kahne, 2009). Further, when used deliberately and with intentionality, social media can allow for a more democratic or egalitarian approach to knowledge construction, rendering visible marginalized knowledge systems and discourses of non-Western or non-mainstream social groups (Eijkman, 2009). An emancipatory online learning environment for Indigenous learners, for example, must recognize students' capacities to construct their own knowledge, bring prior experience and culturally preferred ways of knowing to learning tasks so that they may develop a sense of ownership and pride in their own knowledge and forms of expression (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000).

Social media is conducive to facilitating a more "Narrative Approach" to intergroup dialogue which relies on storytelling as a way of sharing and engaging with how other participants experience or are experiencing conflict. The strength of this approach stems from the power of personal stories to help people work through their unresolved pain while also eliciting empathy from group members:

> discussion of these issues through personal stories enables an increase of intergroup acceptance and understanding while avoiding dead-end arguments about who is more moral and more humane. (Maoz, 2011, p. 121)

Again in the context of work with Indigenous learners, McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) recommend adopting an epistemology in online learning environments that incorporates personal sharing in a way that validates narratives and storytelling as legitimate ways of knowing.

Encouraging more visual communications—such as representing emotions and viewpoints through images—may also help address the previously mentioned cultural and linguistic barriers inherent in social media communications (Bohemia & Ghassan, 2012). Visual representations of emotions, worldviews and perspectives can open up a personal dimension of dialogue that may not be as easily experienced in the traditional classroom setting. Adding both visual and creative elements to the dialogue process in an online environment thus introduces ways of understanding other participants through a different lens. Truong-White and McLean's (2015) research suggests that digital storytelling, which involves the "blending of personal narratives with multimedia content" can "allow students to express lived experiences in poignant and dynamic ways" (p. 7) which was shown to encourage reflection and engagement with non-mainstream perspectives.

Develops Skills to Engage in Public Discourse

One fairly straightforward argument in favour of participatory media integration in peace education is the fact that many young people are already present in online social spaces. The growing ubiquity of internet capable mobile devices has also directly contributed to the accessibility of social networking sites worldwide. In addition to being both flexible and economical, the integration of social media in peace education capitalizes on the fact that many youth are already at ease with various forms of social media (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006; Firer, 2008; Yablon, 2007).

Since the rise of the internet in the 1990s, networked users have increased from millions to billions. Over this period, Shirky (2011) suggests that social media has become a fundamental contributor to civil discourse and enhanced citizens' opportunities to access different viewpoints and partake in public action. Castells (2012) also points to the fact

that social media has facilitated communication between disenfranchised peoples allowing them to share their frustrations, empathize, mobilize and instigate many of the recent social movements around the world. With political and civic groups often turning to social networking sites to reach youth, digital literacy skills, defined as the ability to critically navigate, evaluate and create information using digital technologies, need to be considered essential civic and peace-building skills (Van Hamel, 2011).

A good teaching participatory media skills is thus to facilitate the transfer of young people's more individualistic involvement in social media, to the development of a "public" voice that can be used for civic and peace-building purposes (Rheingold, 2008). In fact, the use of the internet for expressing and sharing opinions and concerns has been shown to impact young people's civic interest and commitments to engagement (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012). Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee, and Philippi (2008) further contend that young citizens who are not comfortable learning and taking part in internet-mediated dialogue will be at a disadvantage and potentially excluded from future civic discourses. By integrating social media into peace education curriculum, students will be exposed to tools that they may apply in the pursuit of peace and social justice.

Conclusion

The necessity to fully explore the potential role of social media as a tool to facilitate dialogue in peace and civic education curriculums has been made by international organizations, scholars and educators from around the world (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006; Austin & Anderson, 2008; Austin & Hunter, 2013; Bachen et al., 2008; Dutt-Doner & Powers, 2000; Firer, 2008; Ghodarti & Gruba, 2011; Johnson et al., 2011; Laouris, 2004; Middaugh & Kahne, 2009; Naseem, 2008; Rheingold, 2008; United Nations, 2013; Vrasidas, Zembylas, Evagorou, Avraamidou, & Aravi, 2007; Yablon, 2007; Yablon & Yatz, 2001). Although this chapter advances the call to explore the role of social media in peace education curriculum, it also warns against assuming that the integration of social media will lead to a "single pre-ordained outcome"

(Shirky, 2011, p. 2). As has been explored, social media may just as easily reinforce pre-existing social arrangements as challenge them, serving as a tool of either oppression or resistance (Herring, 2001). The integration of social media in peace education classrooms must be done in such a way so as to maximize its capacity for dialogue and collaboration, all the while coupling the experience with the necessary critical skills to recognize and challenge the potentially exclusionary, conformist and consumer-related practices this medium can engender. As stated by Akintunde (2006):

> just as this medium can be a conduit for change, it can also, without fore-thought, careful criticism, and analysis, be a conduit for antisocial elements we do not want proliferated. Critics of the Internet have argued that the Internet only connects the privileged and that its very presence is indicative of the globalization of capitalism. (p. 35)

A critical-dialogical pedagogy is proposed as an approach that reflects the interactivity capacities of social media while also expanding the public voice and audience of today's emerging peace-builders.

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4

From Head to Hand to Global Community: Social Media, Digital Diplomacy, and Post-conflict Peacebuilding in Kosovo

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We live in a world of instant communication, where an idea conceived sipping a cup of morning tea can go viral by noon if information communication technologies (ICTs) are used to rapidly disseminate that idea to a global audience. The distance from head to hand to global community has narrowed considerably. Technological globalization has fueled unprecedented interconnectivity that holds promise, hope,

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and considerable danger. Individuals, groups, governments, corporations, and other powers have unprecedented access to the minds and hearts of global neighbors, citizens, and consumers. ICTs have decreased the chasms of space and time and have opened up a new world of opportunity characterized by connectivity, collaboration, conflict, and potential chaos. The distance from a person to the global community is no longer measured in kilometers; amid technological globalization, the distance is now measured in seconds.

Social media are ubiquitous in economic, political, and social spheres given the potentials for viral consciousness raising and political mobilization. Much different than Pony Express, snail-mail letters, and even telephones, social media provides opportunity for networked engagement that spans far beyond one's family and community to reach global audiences—in seconds and minutes. Once connected, one can revisit these networks when need and circumstance arise. Yet, there are dangers of hyper-inflating the power of social media. For individuals, social media saturation can create engagement with others, different ideas, and variety of social and political causes. Without a critical orientation to social media use, a general feeling of anomie can have the opposite effect, creating disengagement from cyber engagement via "smart" technologies.

A critical orientation to understanding the power of ICTs (and related social media platforms) must be employed in an ongoing analysis of merits and drawbacks of this medium to create sustainable peace. ICTs hold potential to shift the locus of power from privileged elites and governments into the hands of ordinary citizens—this is true. Social media provides counter-narrative potentials where dominant discourses of the State and the power elite can be checked, contradicted, and transformed by ordinary citizens who historically may have had little voice or power on issues of public importance. Social media holds civic engagement and counter-hegemonic possibilities because, in some but not all cases, they are unregulated and not controlled by hegemonic actors who use the internet to promote ideological positions, to control information, and to create a sense of normality, rightness, and truth in the way everyday

relationships and regulations govern human life (Gramsci, 1971). However, in several cases, we see how States control information dissemination through ICTs in order to squelch counter-narratives (Brantmeier & Richardson, 2009; Naseem, 2008; Richardson & Brantmeier, 2012).

Through digital diplomacy, governments are using social media as a tool for civic engagement and campaigning. A fundamental, critical question arises, however. Is digital diplomacy a form of "peace education or propaganda?" (Gramsci, 1971) In this chapter, we explore two fundamental questions through a specific study of digital diplomacy efforts in Kosovo in order to expand evidenced-based understanding of the role of social media in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. First, how can social media be used as a tool and/or space to rebuild societies in the aftermath of violence and conflict? This first question requires an analysis of the ways that ICTs and related social media are used to create and share information as well as motivate people to engage. Yet do all social media efforts translate to engagement and change? Why or why not?

Second, how do social media efforts translate to purposeful engagement and impactful change in the case of Kosovo? Exploration of the second question is important to determine the causes and conditions that generate change through social media efforts.

Analytical Domains of ICT4Peace

The field of information and communication technology for peace (ICT4Peace) focuses on how modern digital technologies can be used to promote peace. Stauffacher, Currion, & Steinberger, (2005) noted:

> ICT has a key role to play in improving communication, facilitating negotiations, increasing transparency, and building trust. The consequences of conflict must also be dealt with, and ICT plays an increasingly important role in humanitarian response, peace operations and reconstruction processes. ICT is often one of the most crucial tools used by those carrying out vital work. (6)

Table 4.1 Analytical domains of ICT4Peace

Domain	Acts towards peaceful conflict transformation
Consciousness raising	Information dissemination
Political mobilization	Organizing protests, marches, e-campaigns, activism
Dialogue	Truth recovery, establishment of perspectives, change conditions and common ground. Knowledge creation.
Reconciliation	Establishment of common ground and forgiveness
Renewal	Social, political, cultural and economic transformation

Source: Richardson and Brantmeier (2012)

The authors also note how the field lacks clear analytical frameworks. However, frameworks that are developing acknowledge that ICTs are being used before, during, and after conflict. Additionally, Stauffacher et al. (2005) noted how ICT4Peace frameworks are not built on discrete conflict stages. Stages in conflict exist on a continuum "where multiple stages in a given process may occur simultaneously" (9) (Stauffacher et al., 2005).

One such framework was proposed by Brantmeier & Richardson (2009) and later refined by Richardson & Brantmeier (2012). Table 4.1 details the analytical domains of ICT4Peace. This model has been used in various contexts to explore how ICTs have been used to foster peace and reconciliation.

Consciousness raising in this model refers to creating a shared identity while also disseminating the right information to the appropriate stakeholders. Under this domain, awareness must be raised of the injustice. *Political mobilization* refers to how groups unite in preparation of accomplishing a given task. The domain of *dialogue* includes finding the truth, establishing different perspectives, and working to gain a common ground through which knowledge (and resultant empathy) can be created. The *reconciliation* domain is based on transparency and the acts that actually foster a common understanding about key issues, vital components of the conflict, and forgiveness of past atrocities. Finally, the domain of *renewal* is fostered through manifesting social, political, and cultural transformation. Reparations might be offered to right historical wrong.

This model was first developed while analyzing events in Tibet as well as Cambodia. Brantmeier & Richardson (2009) noted that in these two contexts, ICTs were allowing marginalized citizens who were most impacted by past and present conflicts to have a voice. In Cambodia, ICTs were "being used to raise consciousness, build connective relationships, and renew a positive sense" (232). In Tibet, ICTs were being used to give "voice to Tibetan people amid exile and occupation—a voice that would not be heard globally without ICTs" (233).

Richardson & Brantmeier (2012) used this model to analyze the events of the Egyptian protests in 2011. The analysis revealed how ICTs can be used to both help and hinder the reconciliation and peace process. In the case of the Egyptian protests, protesters were using ICTs to mislead the police. Additionally, the government used ICTs to subvert the efforts of the protesters. This case demonstrated how the peace process was impacted by ICTs and how ICTs were used by multiple parities in a variety of ways to achieve different ends.

Case Study: Historical Context, Contemporary Challenges in Kosovo

Kosovo is a multiethnic and secular country, with over 90% of its population being Albanian. Ethnic Serbs make up the second-largest ethnic group, consisting of around 5% of the population. The dominant religion in the country is Islam. Over half of the population is under 30 years of age (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012). Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe, with a poverty rate of 29.7% of the population. The unemployment rate is between 35 and 45%. Among young people of age 15–24, the unemployment rate is 60% (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.).

Kosovo came to world media attention in 1998–1999 when the Serbian military and police forces entered in an open conflict with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an ethnic Albanian guerrilla organization, which sought the secession of Kosovo from Serbia. Kosovo was a province of Serbia, with over 80% of its population being ethnic Albanian

(Brungborg, 2012). The ethnic conflict resulted in about 10,000 deaths, the vast majority of which were Kosovo Albanians. An estimated 800,000–1,000,000 people, an equivalent to around half of Kosovo's population at the time, were forced to flee their homes to neighboring countries during the conflict (School of Public Health, University of California, Los Angeles, n.d.). The conflict ended in June 1999, after a 78-day bombing campaign of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against Serbia (Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.).

Kosovo emerged out of the conflict in 1999 and was under the United Nations administration for eight years until it declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 (Bilefsky, 2012). The country's independence has been contested by Serbia (Krasniqi, 2014). The legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood largely depends on its recognition by other countries. Kosovo has been recognized by 109 members of the United Nations to date, including the United States and the majority of Western European countries (Solomon Star, 2014). Russian Federation, a member of the Security Council and a traditional ally of Serbia, opposes Kosovo's independence and has blocked its recognition by the UN (Sekularac, 2014). As a result, one of the country's main foreign policy goals has been to be known and to consolidate its statehood internationally, be known and recognized. In addition, like other Western Balkans countries, Kosovo aspires to become a member of the European Union.

Kosovo's image has largely been associated with the conflict in 1998–1999. As an attempt to breakthrough from the image of a war-torn place, Kosovo's government contracted Saatchi and Saatchi, an internationally recognized branding company, for $7.3 million to develop a one-off nation branding campaign to depict Kosovo's vibrant youth and highlight its European identity in 2008–2009. The campaign was called the Kosovo Young Europeans (KYE) and was built around a professionally made one-minute TV ad that was showcased in main international media such as CNN and BBC (Philips, 2009; Wählisch & Xharra, 2010)

Internet penetration and usage in Kosovo is among the highest in the Balkans. The Internet World Stat survey found around 76.6% of Kosovo's population is connected to the internet and social media outlets such as Facebook (Marusic, 2014). Kosovo's youth are seen as keen users of the

internet, and embraced online activism for the recognition of Kosovo in the online fora (Boyes, 2013).

Kosovo has had varying levels of tensions with Serbia and its ethnic Serb residents. Tensions in the ethnic Serb populated areas in northern Kosovo heightened after Kosovo declared its independence in 2008 and resumed throughout the end of 2013 (International Crisis Group, 2013). Ethnic Serbs largely opposed Kosovo's secession from Serbia, boycotted local elections, and ran parallel local institutions. Kosovo and Serbia signed an EU-brokered agreement as part of a multi-year dialogue to normalize relations between themselves in April 2013 (European Union, 2013). As a result, ethnic Serbs from northern Kosovo participated for the first time in local elections in Kosovo, which led to the establishment of legitimate local structures under the Pristina rule (Balfour & Pappas, 2013). Although tensions in northern Kosovo have declined, the situation remains fragile, as political tensions between Serbia and Kosovo remain high. The EU-brokered dialogue has halted in November 2019. Serbia has refused to resume the dialogue until Kosovo removes a 100% tax on goods produced in Serbia, which Kosovo has pledged to do so only when Belgrade recognizes Kosovo as a sovereign state (Bytyqi, 2019).

For the sake of brevity, we will not include a thorough coverage of the historical context of ethnic conflict and war in Kosovo. However, this brief overview serves as background for examining a digital diplomacy campaign by the Kosovo government and allies to rebrand the country.

Digital Diplomacy Through the InstaKosova Competition

The Kosovo government has implemented its National Digital Diplomacy Strategy, which it developed jointly with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Norwegian Royal Embassy in Kosovo between 2012 and 2016 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Kosovo, 2012). The government of Kosovo undertook a number of digital diplomacy efforts that focused on engaging Kosovars both inside and outside

of Kosovo in efforts to create digital diplomats. Recent activity was Digital Kosovo, a platform for citizens to lobby online for the recognition of Kosovo by internet entities. Another was an initiative called App Camp Kosova, which aimed to encourage app development about Kosovo. Two other initiatives aimed at enabling individuals to generate online content about Kosovo: WikiAcademy and #InstaKosova.

In specific, InstaKosova was a project designed to create an online community inside Kosovo given that there is a significant diaspora population using the social media platform Instagram (http://instagram.com/). The purpose of the intentional effort was to reimage Kosovo given that internet search engines about the country typically only brought up images of the 1999 war (available at: http://www.mfa-ks.net/?page=2,4,1564). In essence, the government wanted to reimage Kosovo by providing counter-narrative photos that portray other aspects of Kosovo beyond ethnic conflict and war. Voluntary participants in the InstaKosova social media campaign were encouraged to submit photos of places, people, and events in Kosovo. They understood that selected photos would be used in social media outlets. This digital diplomacy effort was sponsored by the British Council, the Norwegian Embassy, and the Kosovo government. The sponsors put in place a set of financial incentives as well as provided space for public acknowledgment of the top photography submissions by volunteers.

The results of this digital diplomacy campaign included over 1000 online photo submissions. Members of civil society, government, and media juried these submissions. This process thus engaged citizens in collaboration and networking. A Kosovo television news story, now available on YouTube, documents the event (available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x2Nd8LRdVQ). Winning photos were rewarded monetarily. Photos were made available free on Wikipedia Commons and crafted into a photo book that documented the virtual process in print copy.

Methods

As mentioned above, the InstaKosova photo project included over 1000 photographs submitted online by the citizens of Kosovo. The use of photographs to re-imagine and provide a counter-narrative to the existing images of Kosovo as country torn by war, is supported by a qualitative method called photovoice. As stated by authors Ozanne, Moscato, & Kunkel, 2013, "when people take pictures, they acquire great power to represent the personal, cultural, and economic influences that shape their lives and present obstacles to their vitality" (p. 46). Photovoice is a method in which participants use cameras to document their lives and, in the case of the InstaKosovo project, to visually represent Kosovo's strengths and future. The use of photography taken by citizens to study the social world was first proposed by (Wang & Burris, 1994). This qualitative approach has often been used in participatory action research (PAR) and with populations of individuals, groups, and communities that have been marginalized or have little voice. The method directly involves participants in the re-imaging process and is uniquely positioned to influence policies, opinions, and situations (Wang & Burris, 1994). The photographs generated by participants become central artifacts for discussion and analysis, as discussed below.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the images submitted under the InstaKosovo project were coded by the researchers and analyzed for themes using thematic analysis and emergent grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on the foundations of grounded theory, this method assumes that theory emerges from data in a purely inductive way (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thematic analysis helped draw out the strands that tie groups of pictures together (Spradley, 1980).

To begin the analysis, we first reviewed the photographs and began to get acquainted with major patterns, meanings, and discrepancies. Then inductive coding was employed to examine major themes regarding

Table 4.2 Newborn national identity

National identity

Kosovars reimagining of their country's future. We then constructed the following themes: national identity; marriage, fun, love; urban beauty; emergent infrastructure; nature as a national treasure; and international friends.

The two photos in Table 4.2 feature Kosovars with the new flag of Kosovo, a symbol that represents newborn status as a nation in 2008. In one photo, a skier is proudly wearing the Kosovo flag. In the other photo, a young child is looking upward at the new Kosovo flag—an image that depicts youth and emergence.

Two photos in Table 4.3 depict themes of fun and love. A bride and bridegroom are playing basketball in one photo, and a youth is doing a hand plant on a skateboard in the other. Combined, the two photos send the message of youthful, playful energy.

The three photos in this thematic group (Table 4.4) feature urban scenes in Pristina and Prizren, in the context of seasonal and natural beauty. One photo depicts an active nightlife, another a seasonal, snowy river scene, and yet another a moon over an urban landscape.

Table 4.3 Marriage, fun, love

Table 4.4 Urban beauty

Photo theme five has two photos of bridges in rural landscape (Table 4.5). The significance of these photos is that they represent development and access to various parts of the country via quality roadways. Commerce and tourism can follow the access that these emergent infrastructures provide.

The focus on food and agricultural products such as grapes, strawberries, and sheep in Table 4.6 convey rich agricultural resources and traditional Kosovar dishes.

Kosovo has a tremendous amount of natural beauty and ample natural resources. Images in Table 4.7 depict some of the breathtaking natural vistas of Kosovo.

The photo in Table 4.8 depicts Kosovo's positive relationship with the United States, particularly the Bill Clinton presidency. On a main

Table 4.5 Emergent infrastructure

Table 4.6 Food and agriculture

Table 4.7 Nature as a national treasure

Table 4.8 International friends

intersection in the capital city, a statute of former US President Bill Clinton stands as a monument of international friendships. The US and NATO interventions in the Kosovo conflict is perceived as pivotal to changing the outcome of the 1999 conflict. In a demonstration of social media interconnectedness, one small photo depicts Chelsea Clinton's tweet about a photo of her mother, former Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, standing in front of the statue of her father, former US President, in downtown Pristina.

Discussion

InstaKosova was an attempt at the positive reimaging via digital diplomacy in the aftermath of violent conflict. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Kosovo attempted to engage the Albanian diaspora

and in-country youth in positive identity generation. In essence, they outsourced the branding of Kosovo to citizens with cameras and hand-held mobile devices. Small countries, such as Kosovo, have little resources and capacities to brand themselves. Social media however enables the citizens of the country to do it for free or with small incentives. In addition, by outsourcing this effort though ICTs and related social media, the government enabled and engaged citizens with the responsibility of image building—a decentralized movement away from a government's control. The process resulted in greater impact and outreach and exposed the world to different images of Kosovo.

Unlike the $7.3 (EUR 5.2) million KYE branding campaign, the process of reimaging Kosovo through the InstaKosova campaign received little or no criticism by civil society, media, or individuals (Bytyqi, 2019; Collaku, 2010). One of the main criticisms for the KYE campaign by civil society organizations and opposition parties was the fact that it aimed at imposing an image and a new identity that did not fully represent Kosovo's people. Equally criticized was the fact that the image was being imposed on the people by outside entities. Although smaller in scale, financial investment, and outreach, the InstaKosova campaign appeared to take a different approach. It enabled individuals to depict Kosovo through their own eyes, true to the empowering methods of photovoice. The process was more inclusive whereby representatives of the media, civil society, and celebrities got involved.

It can be argued that the InstaKosova social media effort translated into purposeful engagement. Nevertheless, impactful change is questionable. The InstaKosova digital diplomacy campaign engaged over one thousand individuals in the process. Through empowering people to document their lives and represent their country, it promoted the engagement of ordinary citizens to participate in image building of the country. In this sense, it empowered the average citizen through a competitive and transparent process. The process brought together governmental, nongovernmental, and celebrities together into building awareness. In a sense, it built bridges among these parts of society. However, it failed to get opposition political parties involved, thus limiting the overall engagement and impact of more diverse voices. There was limited external engagement however including the independent Serbian online

newspaper, *E-novine*, covered the digital diplomacy effort. The lasting impact of the initiative remains unknown and is hard to trace (E-novine, 2013). In addition, with several years lapsing since the campaign, it could be argued that InstaKosova was a mere moment in digital diplomacy with no long term and lasting implementation and impact. After governments changed in Pristina in 2016 and 2017, many initiatives, including InstaKosova were abandoned. Do citizens of Kosovo, the Albanian diaspora, and the global community now have a more positive image of the country from the photo competition? This would be a difficult research question to answer and is beyond the scope of this book chapter.

Peace Education or Propaganda?

Was InstaKosova a form of peace education or propaganda? The digital diplomacy effort did not specifically focus on inter-ethnic peace between Albanians and Serbs. Selected photos focused mostly on people, nature, and infrastructure and did not focus on reconciliation in the context of present day, significant historical societal divides of ethnicity, religion, and claims to territory. InstaKosova did not seem to address these social divides and the audience appeared to be internal and external Kosovar Albanians.

The InstaKosova campaign touched some of the analytic domains of ICT for Peace (Brantmeier & Richardson, 2009). InstaKosova raised consciousness about the natural beauty, emergence infrastructure, the rich agricultural resources, and other key aspects of the country. In addition, it politically mobilized Albanian citizens to engage in positive identity creation, and it helped to populate the internet with a more positive narrative in comparison to photos of death and destruction. Serious reconciliation efforts would need to take into account the historical atrocities and related legacy of trauma committed in the name of ethnicity, religion, and territorial disputes. If multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious societies will prosper, especially in the aftermath of violent conflict, dialogue, reconciliation and renewal domains need to be integrated into social media and face-to-face efforts of peaceful conflict transformation. Specifically, dialogue focusing on truth recovery, the establishment and

understanding of multiple perspectives of the past conflict and future potentials of the country, and economic and political conditions necessary for peaceful change are paramount. Reconciliation efforts toward forgiveness—efforts that address psychological and community trauma and establish a common ground of experienced suffering and hope for change seem necessary. Finally, renewal processes that include social, political, cultural, and economic transformation require a shared vision of the future of Kosovo, one that encompasses and folds within that vision short- and long-term issues of sustainability—social, economic, and environmental.

It is important to note that other diplomatic efforts, such as InterfaithKosovo, did focus on interreligious dialogue in an attempt to heal the derision, division, and wounds of war. In 2014, the government of Kosovo and international friends such as the Norwegian Embassy and Tony Blair Foundation hosted a conference focused on interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. The conference theme of InterfaithKosovo was "Engaging Global Audiences, Bringing Domestic Faith Communities Closer." Speakers at this conference included the President of Kosovo, Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic religious leaders, and current and former Ambassadors of Kosovo. In addition, external guests included Jewish Rabbis, Muslim Imams, and multiple international observers from the European Union and United Nations. Social media efforts via Facebook and Twitter were used and encouraged often throughout the multiday event in Prizren, a historical city in Kosovo that exemplifies the religious diversity of Kosovo. The question remains of how impactful this conference and related social media efforts were at promoting a positive external image of Kosovo and internal bridges among conflicted groups.

Conclusions

Kosovo is rich with national treasures and newborn potential. Yet it is also burdened with systemic, economic, societal, and environmental challenges in the aftermath of the 1999 war and related violent communal conflict in its wake. Digital diplomacy efforts have focused on an ideological campaign to re-image Kosovo. Rather than an army of

soldiers wielding rifles, toting grenades, and launching rockets, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has enlisted an army of citizens equipped with modern digital technology, such as smart phones, within Kosovo and extending outward into the Albanian diaspora in places like Switzerland, Germany, Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Whether or not these digital diplomacy efforts are peace education or propaganda is still in question.

Several situational factors compliment the future of peacebuilding in Kosovo. Flannery (2014) noted the following factors:

- High unemployment.
- Varying levels of tensions with Serbia and Serbians in Kosovo.
- An underdeveloped infrastructure that currently inhibits economic growth.
- The potential for the rise of Islamist extremism.
- Dependence on other nations for electricity.
- A relatively new educational system that needs to prepare over a quarter of the population to be adaptive problem solvers as the country faces new challenges.

These factors will inevitably play a role in the future of Kosovo. It is yet to be determined the extent to which ICTs will be used to foster peace and reconciliation or to foster division.

Can ICTs generally and social media specifically be used to engage a disproportionately large youth population in raising consciousness about societal and environmental concerns, for dialogue, reconciliation, and renewal? Generative social media efforts aimed at positive group identity creation through active youth participation in solving messy problems through identifying hopeful opportunities in their communities, country, and world could prove promising to engage youth. However, the digital divide is also a complicating factor—who has reliable access to ICTs varies from city to city, community to community? The digital divide itself contributes to social division and inequality.

Finally, ICTs can be used to promote civic engagement, a positive and inclusive national identity, and push human identity beyond the national to gray areas of transnational identity. From head to hand to heart to

global community is a short distance with powerful technologies such as cell phones and cyber cafes. How shall we use them to promote peace for the children of the world and this beautiful planet we ride?

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5

Educating for Sustainable Peace: Neoliberalism and the Pedagogical Potential of Social Media in Creating Conditions for Civic Engagement and Peace

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In this chapter, I investigate the potential of social media, especially Facebook, in creating conditions for civic engagement and peace in the larger context of neoliberalism and its impact on education. My arguments are premised on three contentions. First, while there is evidence from scholarly research on social media in relation to education that the former does affect new ways of learning, there is little empirical evidence to show if it actually creates conditions that motivate civic engagement and social justice seeking behavior in youth. Second, a majority of the scholarly studies do not factor in the impact of neoliberalism while investigating social media's role in relation to educating about civic engagement. Finally, other than problematizing what social media might be or analyzing how social media has transformed the landscape for youth,

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there is little discussion about the particular contextual factors in which social media is accessed by the youth. Because of such de-contextualization, few (if any) scholars question the seemingly automatic relation between the use of social media and civic engagement.

My main contention is that the neoliberal influence on education both depoliticizes and commercializes education. Thus, in the absence of critical social media education, it might be erroneous to assume that the widespread use of social media by youth will automatically result in enhanced civic engagement (boyd, 2017; Buckingham, 2017; Mihailidis, 2018).

Important questions that underlie my arguments in this chapter can be summarized as follows: One, do social media have the power to offer resistance to the neoliberal influences on education? Two, do social media offer an epistemology that can lead to a social critique of the status quo? Three, can social media as educational spaces by themselves, or in conjunction with education, lead us to restore a human(ist) sensibility that can replace economic instrumentalism?

I have organized the chapter into three sections: In the first section, I lay down the wider context in which students are accessing social media. Given the impact of neoliberalism on almost every walk of life, including education, it is vital to be aware of the contemporary political, economic and social forces that affect the ways in which the youth learn to engage with civic issues in their online and offline environments. In this respect, I briefly discuss the marketization, privatization, and commercialization of education under the neoliberal rubric. The profit-driven understanding of education that results from the commercialization and marketization of education not only marginalizes but also quite often eliminates the civic engagement and peacebuilding potential of education (Selwyn, 2013; Sidhu, 2006; Wilkinson, 2016; Wubbena, Ford, & Porfilio, 2016).

In the second section, I briefly touch upon concerns about the youth's disengagement from civic issues. I follow up with the dominant and established visions of social media/ Web 2.0 in scholarly literature, especially including arguments about their educational and emancipatory potential to encourage young people to engage in civic and social justice issues. Finally, I present the results of a qualitative narrative research

project on social media, pedagogy, and civic engagement to argue that in the absence of critical social media education coupled with formal civic education, it is ambitious to assume that social media alone can motivate the youth for enhancing civic engagement in their respective milieus.

Education and the Neoliberal Context

Economy-Driven Educational Agenda

The epistemology of neoliberalism and its impact on education is best captured by the Slovenian scholar Primož Krašovec's observation. Parodying the popular MasterCard advertisement, he writes, "one is no longer required to know why only how. For everything else, there is the market" (Krašovec, 2013, p. 69). Contemporary educational policies and agendas are essentially economy driven in nature. Scholarship in the area has demonstrated the trend towards the commercialization of education (and thus knowledge) at all levels and in all forms (Altbach, 2015; Arshad-Ayaz, 2007; Giroux, 2014a, 2014b; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Naseem & Arshad-Ayaz, 2012, 2016; Parreira do Amaral, Steiner-Khamsi, & Thompson, 2019). As a result, a trend towards running educational institutions as economic enterprises with economic understandings of "productivity" and "efficiency" as the gold standards has developed (Arshad-Ayaz, 2007, 2013; Stromquist and Monkman, 2000; Strihul, 2019). Following this restructuring, educational institutions have begun hiring more managers while cutting back on academic and support staff and courses deemed not to be "productive." Universities, for example, increasingly close down or merge departments that do not produce "marketable" graduates, enlarge class sizes, and use contractual faculties to teach large course sections. In sum, under the neoliberal doctrine, the market becomes the centralizing systematizing principle for organizing social, political, economic, and educational realms. Students are articulated as human capital, clients, and as knowledge workers who are self-regulated and economically self-interested. Educational institutions, on the other hand, are understood as service providers. Educational

outcomes are framed in a technological-rationality perspective and measured against standards of wealth production (Arshad-Ayaz, 2013; Brancaleone & O'Brien, 2011; Kurian, Wright, Munshi, & Kathlene, 2016). Identification with an economic value system deprives education of being considered as a public good. Education (and thus knowledge), like other things economic, becomes a commodity with a monetary value attached to it. Commercial exploitation of knowledge thus replaces the coveted end of education, that is, self-actualization in the broader context of community relations. What is lost in the process is the experiential, ontological, and epistemological basis of knowledge that is essential for youth to articulate and understand civic issues in relation to their individual and communal self.

Normalization of Neoliberal Disciplinary Apparatus of Power

We have a generation of young people who have grown up in a system where education under the neoliberal doctrine has been organized through overlapping and interrelated regimes of surveillance and disciplinary apparatus (Barouch, 2019; Leistert, 2013). Educational subjects—students, teachers, and staff—are policed in the name of accountability through these disciplinary apparatus and compliance is ensured. The disciplinary apparatus range from performance indicators, standardized testing regimes, internal and external audits, performance reviews, and benchmarking, to name a few. These regimes of surveillance and disciplinary apparatus with their associated requirements of performativity, productivity, and conformity create an educational ethos where gold standards of the market (competition, comparison, incentives, and control) are applied to mandate and evaluate educational processes and outcomes. These disciplinary apparatuses, which Foucault calls regimes and technologies of "truth," constitute the educational subjects that are students as consumers of disciplinary knowledge and as knowledge workers. Many educational practices that may seem abnormal and too commercial to someone who grew up in the 1960s seem normal and unquestionable to many young people today. It is in this context that we

have to gauge youth's assignation with social media as well as their engagement with civic issues.

As Chopra (2003, p. 419) writes, neoliberalism has become "an unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth." In Bourdieuian terms, it has become a Doxa. What this means for education is that any practice, process, or outcome that does not conform to the doxa becomes an anomaly that must be corrected by whatever means are at the disposal of those who control the field of judgment and the means for enforcement. Thus, neoliberalism has transformed the field of education in a way that renders any critique of capitalism systematically excluded in educational spaces (Krašovec, 2013, p. 78). Furthermore, while allowing for profit-driven research and creativity (the lifeblood of neoliberalism), it depoliticizes the educational subjects (teachers and students) as well as the institutions to the extent that "subjects, emerging from neoliberal schools, can be creative, developed as persons, and intellectually sophisticated, but they are politically conformist and "adjustable" future "stakeholders," who see life as an economic challenge and no longer believe in a possibility of collective political emancipation" (Krašovec, 2013, p. 78). It is, thus, the "individualistic and depoliticising neoliberal Weltanschauung" (Krašovec, 2013, p. 78) that must be interrogated in order to explore the potential of social media in creating conditions for civic engagement and peace. Let me now turn to a brief discussion of social media and the hype around its potential for educating about peace and civic engagement. My main concern here is, skills development/learnification is not a substitute for education. The increase in civic engagement cannot be assumed due to increasing numbers of youth's engagement with social media. As Bayne (2015), while examining the role of technology-enhanced learning argues, such learning, "carries with it a set of discursive limitations and deeply conservative assumptions which actively limit our capacity to be critical about education and its relation to technology" (p.7).

Understanding Social Media

Participatory nature of the "new" media: Social media are a ubiquitous feature of the contemporary world. Unlike the traditional one-way media (print, TV, etc.), which are considered authoritative in their one-way transmission of views, social media are widely considered participatory and collaborative. One key feature that distinguishes social media from other traditional media is that youth do not only consume the media but also actively produce it. According to Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, and Zimmerman (2016):

> participatory politics might be described as that point where participatory meets political and civic participation, where political change is promoted through social and cultural mechanisms rather than established political institutions, where citizens see themselves as capable of expressing their political concerns – often through the production and circulation of media. (p.2)

Youth network across space and time, collaborate, cooperate out of their own will and participate and engage with issues that are of importance to them (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2019; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; Hundley & Shyles, 2010; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2016; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). While evidence from scholarly literature suggests that alliances and networks on social media are still primarily based on geographical proximity and commonality of interest, new (social) media offers youths the opportunity to transcend physical structures and be a part of global publics with global audiences (Arshad-Ayaz, 2015). Youth interest in using participatory media can be understood as a function of their need to explore identities and experiment with social interaction in non-traditional spaces afforded by social media (Rheingold, 2008; Ellison et al., 2007). Does the interest of the youth in using participatory social media for connecting with the wider global publics on issues related to society in general translate into informed civic engagement? While some scholars argue that the youth are keen and willing to get engaged civically and for activism (Hobbs 2010; Xenox & Foot, 2008; Earl and Schussman, 2008; Montgomery,

2007), others such as Arshad-Ayaz (2015), Rheingold (2008), Buckingham (2017), Mihailidis (2018) and boyd, (2008, 2017) argue that such transference might not be automatic and thus should not be taken for granted. boyd (2014) argues that having a concern does not translate into the capacity to act, whereas Morozov (2013) points out the possible threats to democracy and civic participatory practices resulting from online discursive techniques.

Rheingold (2008) believes that networked youth have not yet exploited the potential of the participatory social media for increased civic engagement, expressions of agency, and collective action. Jenkins et al. (2016) highlight the need to develop critical thinking abilities that would empower youth to imagine alternatives to current social-political and economic conditions. Mihailidis (2018) further argues for the need for cultivating abilities to deconstruct texts so that young people can reform media in a way that allows them to coexist together and support a common good.

Networked public: A central feature of participatory social media is their potential to create networked publics. The notion of networked publics rests on the active participation of individuals in the production and consumption of cultural, social, and political meanings and knowledge (Arshad-Ayaz, 2014; boyd, 2008; Dutton, 2018; Rheingold, 2008). This feature is predicated on the belief that individuals and the publics are not mere consumers of the media. Rather, youth "create" the media through their participation and actively produce new meanings and knowledge. boyd (2008, p. 125) defines networked publics as "spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks (i.e., the internet, mobile networks, etc.)." She argues that social networking sites are both the spaces where publics gather and also the publics themselves in that they allow for speech to happen. At the same time, the network sites distinguish between public and private in a more conventional way (i.e., who can see what, Friends only=private; everyone=public).

According to boyd (2008), networked publics are mediated publics in that digital media mediates the (social) interaction. Social media as mediating technologies help to bring out persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences as four essential characteristics of networked publics (2008, p. 126). The networked publics can be a

fundamental part of civic engagement between the subjects, the subjects, and the state and, when understood through Habermas' articulation of the public sphere, as public opinion. According to this perspective, matters of general interest bring the public together so that they can express their opinions freely without any fear of coercion (Rheingold, 2008)

Social media can act as public spheres in that they provide opportunities for civic engagement through online cooperation, consultation, co-creation, and collaboration. Rheingold (2008), following Michael Warner, argues that a networked public "only" comes into being in relation to a media text and not prior to it. For example, a blog or a wiki as social media texts bring together people whose sole common interest might be the issue at hand. However, what remains to be seen is whether or not this potential of social media by itself works to bring people and voices together on civic and peacebuilding issues.

There are two crucial features of networked publics that distinguish social media from traditional media and which are central in their potential to bring about social change. The first of these features is "voice" as a unique style of personal expression that "distinguishes one's communication from those of the others...[it] can be called upon to help connect young people's energetic involvement in identity-formation with their potential engagement with the society as citizens" (Rheingold, 2008, p.101). Voice can be individual and private or collective and public. The private voice pertains to the self-expression of the individual, whereas the public voice points to civic participation. In both iterations (private and public), "voice" is agentic. Rheingold (2008, p. 101) argues that the "public voice is learnable, a matter of consciously engaging with an active public rather than broadcasting to a passive audience." Social media, it is argued, has the potential and provides a space in which the private voice can transform into a public voice and realize a collective agency that could be instrumental in civic action. The second key feature of participatory social media is "audience." Networked spaces provide the publics with an audience beyond their immediate communities and individual interests.

These audiences form communities of interest that have fluid boundaries and have global as well as local allegiances (Abdi & Naseem, 2008).

The networked publics need a networked audience for civic engagement. However, none of them exist a priori. The networked public generates a networked audience and is in turn, generated by it.

Genres of participation: A unique feature of participatory social media is that networked participants and publics are not bound by specific means or genres of participation. They have at their disposal a variety of genres through which to participate in the production and consumption of social, political, and cultural meanings. Genres of participation, according to Ito et al. (2009), are situationally specific and can be understood as diverse personal investments that youth (as networked publics and audiences) make in specific processes of civic participation.

In sum, participatory social media through their potential for more inclusive, democratic, networked publics, public voices, and transnational audiences and multiple genres of participation have the potential to provide spaces in which youth can redefine political, social, and cultural meanings, identify new foci of networks, and engage with fellow networked youth outside of the traditional parameters of affiliations and allegiances on issues related to peace and social justice. However, the question remains: to what extent is this potential of participatory social media realized, especially when pitted against broader discourses like neoliberalism that constitute not only the subjects and their subjectivities but also how various fields of judgment are navigated. In short, do social media have the potential and the dexterity to transform the subjects as well as the dominant discourses to change the rules of what can be said, by whom, and when? Can interaction on social media engage youth in a culture of questioning fundamental to the needs of critical engagement and civic responsibility? In the following sections, I take evidence from a qualitative research project on social media and civic engagement to answer these questions.

Social Media, Civic Engagement, and Education[1]

For this research, civic engagement is understood as individual and/or collective actions that aim to identify and address issues concerning the quality of life in the context of social media usage. This is adapted from popular definitions of civic engagement used in literature (Lin, 2019; Gil de Zuniga, 2015; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014; Warren, Jaafar, & Sulaiman, 2015; Warren, Jaafar, & Sulaiman, 2016; Hay, 2007; Putnam, 2000). In the traditional sense, civic engagement is largely understood as individual and collective involvement in local and national contexts. However, in the networked (and globalized) world, civic engagement assumes non-territorialized associations that are fluid, issue-based, overlapping, and subject driven. While reflecting the larger socio-political discourses, these online engagements also condition the offline engagements of individuals and groups in relation to civic participation.

There has been a growing realization that the youth is increasingly disengaged from the traditional political process and the polity (Blandford, Taylor, & Smit, 2015; Carpini, 2000; Howe, 2010; Milner, 2013). There have been concerns about the declining public sphere and the weakening of the sense and spirit of citizenship. There are complaints about the youth's apathy concerning voting and participation in the political processes at the local, provincial and national levels (Bastedo, Ilona, Lawrence, Rudny, & Sommers, 2012; Hay, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2008). Canada-wide data shows that the youth are less inclined to get involved with the formal political parties as compared to charitable and public interest groups (Gidengil et al., 2004; Howe, 2010). These concerns have resulted in calls for a renewed effort to revive citizenship education to reinvigorate civic engagement and participation (Arshad-Ayaz & Rabah, 2015). Authors of an influential report by the Canadian Policy Research Networks titled the "state and potential of civic learning in Canada," for example, argue that:

> civic learning is characterized by procedural knowledge and compliant codes of behaviour that do not envelope students in collective action for

systemic understandings of political issues. Civic learning in our schools, stemming from our culture, has contributed to a value-neutral approach to politics. Large scale possibilities for change-making are thus lost in the eyes of students. (Llewellyn, Cook, Westheimer, Molina Giron, & Suurtamm, 2007: p.2)

The report recommends a renewed effort to make social justice and citizenship the focal point of the educational and learning environment.

In this context, many scholars from fields as diverse as communication, computer science, and political science have argued that since the networked citizens are interested in and apt at using technology, there should be more research on the potential of ICTs, especially social media, to reinvigorate interest in citizenship and civic engagement. Evidence from politics and social movements has led many within educational establishments to look at participatory social media as community-building and mobilization tools that can be used to educate students in becoming more engaged in civic and political issues (Arshad-Ayaz, 2013, 2015; Badouard & Monnoyer-Smith, 2013; Oostveen, 2010; Veenhof et al., 2008).

These arguments are based on the understanding that in virtual social environments, young people are more interested in sub-cultures and sub-politics rather than the larger political system. Similarly, networked youth are more engaged on issues that they or their peers identify as important. They are more engaged with the social movements and social associations and causes of their own liking and are not bound by geographical confines in defining their communities (Arshad-Ayaz, 2015). Therefore, many are interested in exploring the possibilities of using social media to increase community involvement, political awareness, and literacy, and to use social media for conversations about citizenship and civic participation. This interest is partly based on the argument that the evolution of participatory technologies has enabled a greater level of participation, collaboration, and knowledge construction among students. There are two other factors that have led to increased interest in examining the role of social media in enhancing youth civic engagement. First, recent actions on a global scale, events as diverse as the Arab Spring (Karolak, 2017; Waechter, 2019), 2008 US presidential elections (Borah, 2016; Dylko,

Beam, Landreville, & Geidner, 2012), the occupy movement, and the student protests in Quebec (Bonin, 2016; Raynauld et al., 2016), "BlackLivesMatter" (Clark, 2019; Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, 2017), "Me Too" movement (Fileborn, 2019; Gibson et al., 2019) have one thing in common—the role played by ICTs and social media such as Twitter and Facebook in mobilizing citizens in the context of civic engagement and active citizenship. Several scholarly studies make a case for a direct link between the availability and use of social media and the various social movements (Chiluwa & Adegoke, 2013; Ghonim, 2013; Howard, 2018; Howard et al., 2011). However, there is emerging evidence that indicates that social media were mainly tools used by those involved in these social movements and that social media by themselves were not enough to bring about either the discontent or the resultant social movements.

Instead, it was the oppression and alienation resulting from extreme neoliberal capitalist subjugation, which allowed those who already possessed critical voices to use social media to take action (Arshad-Ayaz, 2014; Poell & van Dijck, 2018).

Social Media, Civic Engagement and Educating for Sustainable Peace[1]

The findings of our narrative study highlight some interesting aspects of civic engagement in and through participatory social media. Almost all participants interviewed for the project were engaged with issues of civic participation and social justice to varying degrees. The participants engaged with different genres of participation. Out of the twenty-one individuals interviewed, five participants can be called "truly and deeply" engaged with issues related to civic engagement, social justice, and peace. These participants were well networked, posted in almost all categories identified through interviews with the participants (engagement in ecological, social justice, poverty, electoral reform, etc.). Their engagement varied from challenging some of the assumptions and arguments posted by others, to "likes," "shares," and "comments." In

this sense, they made use of social media, especially Facebook, in networking "globally" with an audience on issues that were of mutual interest and social significance. Facebook as social media, provided them with space where they could transform their "private" voice into a "public" one. It also provided them with the audiences and the opportunity to actuate change through civic engagement. Let me take some examples from interviews with two of the "truly and deeply" engaged participants, Paulo and Sara Lee (not their real names), to elucidate the observations made and results noted above.

Paulo[2]

Paulo, for example, was "engaged" in various ways through social media. He engaged on and through his Facebook page every single day. On average, he posted, reposted, shared, and commented more than 20–25 times a day. He told us that he accesses his Facebook page many times a day, as it is his primary medium of communicating with friends, colleagues, family, and his networks. Paulo has an immense network with more than 1400 friends and membership in more than 45 groups. In his interview, he jokingly told us, "in the world of social media there is an inappropriate term for people who have more than 500 Facebook friends… just as once a woman with too many male friends was viewed…you know what I mean…" (Interview). However, he said that he doesn't mind, as Facebook for him, is the space that provides an opportunity to connect with a large number of people in all parts of the world. This is something that was not possible before he started using this social medium. Paulo's posts range from views on events taking place in his immediate local vicinity to national news and events (mainly political and social), developments at school, social justice issues such as daily wage controversies, environmental degradation, US politics, racism (especially in Canada and the USA), media, Palestine-Israel relations, colonialism, and issues related to education and juvenile incarceration. His engagements range from merely "liking a post" posted by one of his friends or a group that he is a member of, to sharing what he finds interesting and wants to disseminate, to commenting on (and engaging with) many of the posts. He engages with and

through multiple genres of participation in social media. These genres include posting opinions on events that interest or infuriate him, sharing articles, reposting from various websites and group pages, posting photos and pictures from various sites, sharing alternative texts, videos, and musical pieces. Paulo was asked to analyze his Facebook and reflect on who he engaged with most, and what those engagements signified for him. According to Paulo, his Facebook page shows that while not all of his 1400 "friends" engaged with him on issues close to his heart on a regular basis and a significant number actively engaged with him. Subjects that appeared to get most engagement were environment, racism, peace (or the lack of it thereof) in the Middle East, and domestic politics. Some of the conversations/engagements spanned over weeks, while others lasted a day or so. There were also instances where, according to Paulo, no conversations ensued even though he thought that the issue at hand was important and worthy of engagement. As he outlines, "I was surprised (and sometimes even angry) at how people could not engage with such an important issue."

When asked about what motivates him to engage through social media on civic issues and those related to social justice and peace, Paulo responded as follows:

> Facebook is a big part of my life. For me, it is not just a ...umm... pastime. I know some people think that Facebook is a leisure activity...some even say it is unproductive...umm... kind of distraction ...something I should only do in my leisure time...outside of work. I don't consider it as separate from my life...what I do. It's the world in which I live and interact with people. It is where I talk to people, make friends, carry out conversations.

Paulo went on to say that he does not watch a lot of TV, but he is an avid reader of news. When asked why he was so interested in civic and social justice issues, he said that he was not always interested in these issues. Paulo credited the development of his real interest to three courses that he took at university. He said that he used to be quite disgruntled with the political processes at local and international levels. He explained, "it is not that I was not aware of the issues...you have to be really dumb not to see them...I use to think most issues were beyond my reach... I

used to think I as an individual could not make any difference." When asked what changed after he took the three courses, Paulo said, "I was very lucky to have professors who not only gave us materials to read, but they used a lot of videos, YouTube clips, etc. to show us how individuals have the power to change the society…in one of the classes, we screened Naomi Klein's 'The Take' which shows how people have the power to undo wrongs… I think taking those three courses has changed me…yes, I think I am a different person now…. I see things differently."

Paulo feels that with social media, he can be heard and can talk to like-minded people, but more importantly, he feels that he can change people's thinking just as his thinking was changed by engaging in a class where they discussed important issues facing the world today. For Paulo, social media provides him with an opportunity to interact with people from almost everywhere. However, as stated above, Paulo attributes his engagement in social justice and desire to have a peaceful world to his formal education at the university level. According to Paulo:

It was courses in critical sociology, critical pedagogy, and citizenship that piqued my interest in and understanding of these and other issues. Facebook (and Twitter) provided me with the space in which I could further understand and talk about these issues. My engagements with my Facebook friends on these issues are not always without contention…we disagree on a lot of points…try to convince each other of our respective points of view…you know… sometimes things get heated…but where else can you have these conversations with such a large number of people?

Sara Lee

Like Paulo, Sara Lee is another participant in the study who engages deeply with her Facebook friends on a wide variety of issues related to social justice, societal harmony, peace (in a broad sense), racial relations in Canada, and the USA, and Canadian national politics. Sara Lee has more than 1200 Facebook friends. She also defines herself as an "active member" (interview) of twenty-three groups, six of which she initiated. Her posts correspond to her self-definition. The groups she is involved with through her Facebook page range from sustainable agriculture/

environment, media education, human rights in Canada and the USA, travel music, and US politics. Sara Lee accesses her Facebook page several times a day. She said that for messaging to keep in touch with friends and family, she prefers using Facebook to sending emails.

Facebook, to me, is like TV, newspaper, and email all folded into one… it's a great place…However, I am aware that it is not a perfect place. Y'know…I am aware that it (Facebook) cannot and must not substitute real-time connections…and…like…they have bylaws that are not great… but the… Facebook is so much easier (Interview).

Sara Lee posts on her Facebook many times a day. Her posts range from issues related to media, racism, race relations, Islamophobia in North America, women's rights and feminism, hijab, and Canadian politics. As a responsible citizen, Sara Lee is really worried about the recent intolerance and Islamophobia in North America towards Muslims. She is especially perturbed with the Islamophobia that targets Muslim women in particular. During the interview, Sara Lee reflected on this issue:

> I had grown up thinking that Canada and Quebec are tolerant societies and that with our Charter of Rights, religious rights are guaranteed for everyone. But this wave of Islamophobia and especially the targeting of Muslim women is deplorable. I mean, how can we live with this…how can we understand ourselves as Canadians? This has to stop…It is our responsibility that this s*^# stops…right here…period. (interview)

When asked why she was concerned about Islamophobia and Muslim women's rights, Sara Lee told us that it was in her undergraduate program that she was drawn to women's rights, feminism social justice issues. "In taking classes with a professor (name withheld), I started to understand what women go through and how they are oppressed…I also started to connect with women's conditions…umm in the Third World…like Mexico, the Middle East, China. Professor (name withheld) also taught us the necessity of speaking out against injustice and not being silent."

According to Sara Lee, she uses social media, especially Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to talk to her "friends" about these and other social justice issues. As she told us, "it makes me happy to think that I am

not being passive and silent. I am spreading the word that we cannot remain bystanders...not only to my immediate family and friends but also to other people who I come to know through Facebook" (interview). She also said, "talking to friends in other parts of the world... friends that I made on Facebook...I got to know so much that I did not know before... like how they live, their problems, how they think...you know." When asked if, in her opinion, her engagements on Facebook have had any impact, she said, "Ummm...I cannot be sure...I mean how, can you say... measure...but yes, I think so...like some of our discussions led us to sign petitions against homophobia, women's rights and anti-Muslim... Islamophobia. I don't know if that can be called success. I guess just getting the word out is also important."

When asked how, if at all, her online engagement (on Facebook) has affected her understanding of civic engagement, she told us the following:

> Look, I got interested in social justice issues as a student. I would have been involved; in fact, I was...in any case. That's who I am. My professors made me aware...that I have to be involved. Facebook provided a good way...y'know...a good tool...and fun too. Also, Facebook makes it so much easier. How else could I have talked to (name withheld) in Tunisia or (name withheld) in Colombia...I don't know...I don't worry about results...I just do it...keep on doing.

She added, "I also use Facebook to connect with my family and friends... we have fun...catch up...y'know...we talk about family, music, kids, pets... Social justice is important, but so is family, and love and fun and happiness and sharing... Facebook makes all that happen simultaneously."

The engagement of other participants who have thus far participated in the study, however, was not as deep and significant as that of Paulo, Sara Lee (noted above), Justin, Kiera, and Rosa (not reported). The other sixteen participants (interviewed) also fulfilled the basic quantitative criteria in terms of being well networked through a large circle of Facebook friends, membership of various Facebook groups, and showed activity on their Facebook pages by engaging with their "friends." Nevertheless, when interviewed in-depth and asked to go back on their Facebook pages to analyze their engagements and activities, they reflected that their

engagements were often personal, familial, and situational (status engagements). Interestingly all participants in the study initially defined themselves as "active civic citizens." A screening questionnaire was used to recruit participants for this study, which required the participants not only to have active Facebook accounts but also to define themselves as active and engaged civic citizens. Only those who saw themselves fitting these categories were then recruited for in-depth ethnographic interviews. Out of the remaining sixteen participants, six did engage somewhat on issues related to students' protest over Duchenne issues in Quebec, but on the whole, their interaction with their friends remained more personal than social or political. The engagements of the ten other participants on their Facebook pages did not demonstrate any deep sense of civic participation. The majority of the participants defined Facebook time as their time to unwind and de-stress. They do not want to engage in "burdensome" activities through this medium.

They do not want to bring issues from their school environment into their personal spaces. One participant expressed this in the following words: "As it is, there is too much talk of things not being right…of injustice… It is at school, in the news …everywhere. I just don't feel that I should be talking about these things in my leisure time." Another participant was of the view, "what is the point in talking about these issues all the time? We can't change things in any case, at least not just by talking about them. What good will it do if I posted or liked something? Only my friends will know how I feel. They already know me." Yet another participant believed that "everything has its place. There are places and institutions where these things should be discussed. I mean, people can go and elect representatives for this, right?" Some other concerns were expressed, for example, "what is the point of wasting time on issues that can get me in trouble…you know what I mean…there is a tremendous amount of surveillance going on." Another participant said, "I don't have to prove I am a good Canadian… anyway what is a good Canadian… are we peacekeepers or are we fighting the bad guys…I don't know the difference anymore." One participant said, "I cannot take action based on information on social media as I am never sure about what is real and what is propaganda? Everything is made up on social media, it's all fake." Participants showed a rather vague understanding of issues. For example,

two issues repeatedly identified were environment and economic crises. However, when asked to elaborate on what was problematic about these issues, participants could not identify concrete problems.

One participant summed up the current situation as "why would I trust all the people on Facebook…yes, they are my friends, but you know…I don't really know what is going on in their lives and minds… today you cannot trust anyone…every person has to look out for herself than to try to help others." When asked to comment on how information on social media helps participants get informed, one participant responded, "honestly… I feel lost in the overload of information…how do I make sense of what is true and what is fake…there is simply too much information, too many viewpoints…let's admit Facebook is a space for me to look good to others…some people do it through pretending to be responsible …I don't like this hypocrisy…I don't pretend."

Conclusions

Based on the responses of the interviewees, it appears that there is no definite pattern of civic participation in the new participatory media environment; participation is more individualized and temporal. It is short term and adheres more to passing fads. Self-analysis of Facebook pages and reflection by participants shows that participation on Facebook cannot be termed as project-oriented because many projects are not seen through and left in the middle. Members of the youth who we interviewed are dejected and generally suspicious and are more focused on the "individual self" than the "collective self." At first glance, it seemed that youth were more interested in issues like social justice, politics, and the environment. When asked about how international, national, regional policies, or elected officials have an impact on the day-to-day lives of the respondents' none of the respondents could come up with an example. Similarly, when asked what did they do to address this concern other than "sharing" and/or "liking" some posts (clicktivism) on global warming, intolerance, and so on via Facebook, it was evident from the youth's responses that online interest does not translate into offline action. The overall values, interests, and everyday peer talk of the youth on Facebook

was mostly about displaying their own lives and interests and sharing funny videos. It seems that the new participatory media and social networking has not really changed the dynamics of networked citizens' negotiations/engagement with civic participation: even though space is there, it is not being used by the youth to discuss or negotiate collective issues.

However, the views and online (Facebook) behavior of those who can be called "deeply engaged" clearly demonstrates that there is a link between online engagement and prior knowledge of issues related to social justice, peace, and so on. It is, for example, clear from the accounts of Paulo and Sara Lee that it was the knowledge gained during their graduate and undergraduate years at the university that got them interested in the issues. It is also clear that Facebook provided them with space and the tools with which to engage with others on these issues and attempt to make the change, albeit small.

However, for the majority of the participants, understanding of political, civic, and citizenship issues seemed confused, it was clear that they do not subscribe to earlier firmly entrenched and well-established norms of citizenship, but it is not clear if there are any new common political, civic, and citizenship issues for them. There also appears to be a strong sense of bleakness about the future. Many participants seemed to be convinced that the Canadian social-health system and other social services will be privatized like the neighboring USA, and they will have to fend for themselves for essential social services when they are older. For them, therefore, it feels more important to engage with economic issues while they are young.

The results of the study correspond to Carpini's research on youth's disengagement in civic life, where he reports, "young adults express declining interest in serving in appointed or elected government positions or in pursuing careers in other public-sector jobs such as teaching, public law, or the non-profit sector...enrollments and majors in political science courses are declining, as are applications for public policy and public affairs graduate programs" (2000, p. 343).

Carpini (2000) terms the civic engagement gap as follows: "the current civic malaise that has engulfed America's youth appears to be an ingrained generational characteristic rather than a stage in the life cycle that will

remedy itself with time" (p.343). Our study shows this civic engagement gap needs to be analyzed in the context of other "gaps" created by the excessive imposition of neoliberal economic rationality in every walk of life. Many economists have voiced their concerns about how widening income disparities may have various damaging side effects in other areas of life. It is important for social scientists and educators to connect civic engagement gaps with the rise of income inequalities, apathy and the disillusionment of youth today.

The results of the study reveal that young participants see a lack of opportunity to be motivated towards engaging in civic issues. This generation has grown up connected to their digital devices and has experienced less of public life in meaningful ways. This is a generation whose public spaces, parks, and green spots have been appropriated by businesses. This is a generation whose behaviors are being explored by researchers and policymakers for disengagement without making important connections as to how the physical environment and wider material structures impact their social interaction, psychological well-being, and civic engagement. We see youth today boarding buses and metros with eyes glued to their computing devices, ears plugged with headphones and fingers engaged in texting. Eye contact is avoided, so is any exchange of pleasantries. There is a general distrust and disregard of the politicians and Canadian national and foreign policies. The majority of the research participants in the study were aware of various problems but felt overloaded with information and did not feel that there was much they could do to address these problems.

Five highly engaged respondents, who believed that Facebook provided them with the opportunity to convert their "private voice" into "public voice" by engaging with other online communities and groups, defined their engagements as civic involvement in public life. They saw social media as a venue to engage in politics, community, and organized collective action through sharing resources and signing online petitions. However, it is important to note the commonalities between the engaged participants. All five were full-time students fortunate to have enough time for these engagements (none had to work an extra job to pay their tuitions), and their narratives clearly show that it was specific graduate/undergraduate courses that raised their consciousness about social and

civic issues and enhanced their self-worth by highlighting the power of their agency.

On the other hand, the majority of participants who initially categorized themselves as "engaged civic citizens" but after the interview process (7–8 hours broken down in three sessions) through reflection and analysis of their Facebook pages (during the last four weeks) re-evaluated their initial categorization. These participants also had some commonalities. They were all stretched for time in addition to being full-time students (they had one or more jobs). They were very conscious of their own precarious positioning in society. Their narratives show that they distrust political leadership and although they had partial awareness of many issues, they felt that it was beyond their power to solve these. They also felt that they had no means or time to enjoy offline life and felt that social media and online space was their only avenue of leisure and entertainment, which should not be contaminated with burdens of social responsibility and civic duties and obligations.

As stated above, any meaningful analysis of social media and its potential to educate youth needs to move beyond mere problematizing of what social media has been used for or can be used for, to analyzing and connecting wider contexts in which social media is accessed and consumed by the youth. It is the larger landscape defined by neoliberal economic policies that impacts and creates everyday experiences of the youth and their perceptions of where their involvement will make a difference and in what ways do they have freedoms to act.

As educators, we need to ask how the current neoliberal positioning of youth, which paints youth activities with suspicion and creates a climate of fear by constant surveillance, influences the way that youth make choices about engaging with civic issues. Before searching for the possibilities that social media can provide to engage youth, we need further in-depth narrative research about multiple realities and the tensions and paradoxes that youth are living with, in the current phase of neoliberal economic rationality. After all, it is the youth, unfortunately, who form the new marginalized group worldwide. Perhaps discussions on these

issues need to be rejuvenated in the educational systems. Narratives of the young people interviewed shows that it cannot be safely claimed that networked citizens share more political opinions and views on Facebook as compared to offline lives, even though Facebook provides them with that space.

The study found that the overall picture of young people's political engagement is not straightforward. There are confusions in their accounts as to what is civic just as there is an ambivalent sense of citizenship. There are no clear definitions of "a good citizen," "civic participation," and so on. Definitions are fluid and change with what catches the networked youths' fancy. Their loyalties and sympathies shift from local to global, and they mostly see local and global, or national, and international in binary terms rather than as a unified world. Their reference point is certainly not modern welfare capitalism, but they do not have enough knowledge about the workings of global information networked capitalism either. The findings suggest that youth are redefining the mainstream definitions of "civic," but unlike earlier well-established and fixed definitions, these are fluid and shifting. Results also suggest confusion on what counts as civic, and finally, Facebook by itself may not play a significant role in enhancing understanding about civic issues.

Thus, youth's access to technology and engagement with various social media in itself should not get educators and policymakers excited. Mere access and engagement do not guarantee the type of education needed for developing attitudes and values that promote peace or responsible civic citizenship. Youth's extensive engagement with technology and social media is not directly proportional to educational endeavors. Such assumptions can lead to a false sense of security. The process of "learnification" which is related to the development of skills and gathering information, should not be confused with "education." Education has to do with critical thinking abilities that allow learners to convert skills and information into knowledge that can be applied to make a positive social impact and result in civic responsibility and peacebuilding.

Indeed, social media with affordances such as participatory nature, potential to create networked publics, and flexibility in allowing various genres of participation, has not been able to produce the educational response needed to contest and deconstruct the very bases of inequality

and injustice prevalent in the current neoliberal economic model super-imposed on every aspect of the social and cultural life. The results of the study show that enhancing civic engagement cannot be achieved with high levels of engagement with technology alone but needs to be complemented with critical education. Only then various affordances offered by social media can lead us to restore a human(ist) sensibility that can replace economic instrumentalism.

Notes

1. Arguments in this section draw upon the paper presented at the Second International Conference on Education in Muslim Society at University Islamic Negri (UIN), Jakarta, October 2014. I acknowledge the permission of the conference organizers to reproduce parts of the paper published in conference proceedings. The author wishes to acknowledge the funding provided by The Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for this research.
2. Names of all interviewees/respondents have been changed to safeguard their identities.

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6

Social Media for Peacebuilding: Going Beyond Slacktivim and Hashtagavism to Sustainable Engagement

Craig Zelizer

Introduction

Over the past decade, the world has been significantly impacted by the exponential growth of the Internet, mobile technology, and social media. A decade ago, the Internet was largely a platform accessible solely via computers. However, the world has transitioned from a Web 1.0 of passive access to information of Web 2.0, to Web 3.0 we currently have. Today individuals throughout the world, who might only have access to a mobile phone are able to connect to like-minded peers around the world, to connect to global social movements, to organize for positive or negative change, and document revolutions in action and much more.

Social media has become such a pervasive force for billions around the world that many people spend hours per day on consuming online content and news both via the Internet and ecosystem apps such as Facebook,

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Twitter, Instagram, and others. As social media has become more prevalent, it has also become an essential tool for groups around the world seeking to advance their conflict goals, such as ISIS, in recruiting new participants in their effort to capture new territory and establish an extremist safe haven. However, social media has also been used to help foster connections across divided societies, to help connect peacebuilders and much more.

The growth in social media tools means that what happens in one corner of the world, such as the ongoing atrocities in Syria, can often be documented by everyday citizens and activists (Singh, 2013), or that an entire protest movement in Hong Kong can be connected through innovative use of text messages (Mutsvairo & Harris, 2016; Parker, 2014). At the same time having more information about atrocities or conflict doesn't necessarily lead to positive change or action. Social media is neither inherently good nor bad, instead it is a set of tools that can be used for a multitude of purposes to foster social change as well as social disruption around the world (Aday et al., 2010; Curran & Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

One of the central debates around the use of social media for social change that has emerged in recent years is, given the incredible avalanche of data present these days, how effective is social media to help mobilize for positive change? There is a great deal being written about how social media will help usher in a new age of disruption, democracy and citizen participation, or what Evgeny Morozov, would call "magical qualities" (Morozov, 2012; Schmidt, 2014). In addition, much has been written about the power of social media to help connect, disrupt, and foster change, such as during the Arab Spring (Himelfarb & Aday, 2014; Howard et al., 2011).

However, the research is mixed, with some scholars pointing to the direct role of social media in contributing to change, while others are more skeptical and believe there is too much hype. Many scholars do believe the medium played an important role in helping to inform and shape the political debate, to mobilize people, and spread ideas (Howard et al., 2011; Blogs and Bullets, 2014) and continues to do so, as with the recent political changes in Burkina Faso in which some say Twitter played an important role (Cummings, 2014).

There have been many critiques of the phenomena, and in particular of the younger generation of millennials, who might see clicking on a Facebook page or signing a petition as a form of taking positive action to help those affected by conflict. This has been termed Slacktivism (Morozov, 2009) and Hashtagavism. Morozov, a critic of the magical idea of social media changing the world, has said sarcastically, "In other words, let them tweet, and they will tweet their way to freedom" (Morozov, 2012). Furthermore, as social media has begun to spread, nation states have increasingly been using tools to monitor and respond to any challenges that might come from social media platforms (Morozov, 2009, 2012).

What then is the proper role of social media in the sphere of peace-building education and helping to reduce conflict in general? Many have said that technology has ushered in a new era that can help more effectively map conflict trends and provide the tools to help reduce conflict (Aday et al., 2010). Is this a new age of tech for peacebuilding? Will the increasing connectedness of billions around the world help increase the chances for peacebuilding? Or is this merely hype, where social media and tech is not necessarily more effective than other forms of peacebuilding that often require a long slog working with the difficult relational and structural changes needed to help reduce conflict and facilitate more sustainable peace.

This chapter will explore the intersection of social media and peace-building and provide an overview of the nexus in order to examine how it is being used as a force for good, as well as explore the underlying critiques and challenges. Particular attention will also be devoted to concrete recommendations as to how educators and peacebuilders can better utilize social media to enhance their work.

What Is Social Media?

In order to understand social media it is first essential to examine the growth of the Internet and how the web has transformed from a 1.0 version to 3.0. In the initial launch of the Internet for use by the public, it was largely used as a one-way means of distributing information.

Individuals could go online and search out information mostly based at static webpages. This was a basis for learning and gathering data (Aghaei, Farsani, & Nematbakhsh, 2012).

This changed with the emergence of Web 2.0 when individuals and groups could begin interacting with one another online and also through the emergence of smartphone and smartphone apps. Thus, instead of merely being passive consumers of information, Web 2.0 provided the opportunity for individuals to be content creators and part of the networked age. As defined by Silva, Rahman, and Saddik (2008), Web 2.0 is "the empowerment of the end user to actively create content and participate in the Web to expose themselves and relate to other users."

Web 3.0 has emerged more recently and goes beyond simple human interaction and creation to a computerized generation and sharing of content. It is also moving away from exclusively web-based information to a focus on apps. A critical part of Web 3.0 is the idea of big data, and that the increasing amount of information present in social media can provide useful insights and tools regarding human interaction and societal trends (Silva, Rahman, and Saddik, 2008; Rudman & Bruwer, 2016). Web 3.0 is about community as well as the creation of specialized content for users (Silva, Rahman and Saddik 2008).

There are varying definitions of what social media is, but in general the terms refer to the larger ecosystem of online tools, apps, and Internet sites that enable everyday individuals and organizations around the globe to interact with one another in a horizontal peer-to-peer system. Merriam Webster defines social media as "Forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)" (Social Media, n.d.).

Of course, it is important to acknowledge several caveats to social media. The ideal of social media is that anyone can be content creators and get their message out to a global audience. In reality, social media is a huge business and there is an increasingly crowded ecosphere to compete with in terms of reaching an audience. Maintaining and developing Internet and app platforms often requires financial resources that can involve huge corporate interests, such as Google, Facebook, and other similar organizations that are providing a wonderful public good.

However, inherent in their financial models is that open or transparent access to information involves the collection of enormous amounts of data, that can be used in their own advertising and commodification of an individual's s interests and tastes (i.e., tailored ads or suggested posts on Facebook).

The Connection of Social Media to Peacebuilding

Over the past decade, as social media has expanded it has been an increasingly important tool in the peacebuilding arsenal of organizations and individuals around the globe. There are several ways in which social media is being used to mitigate conflict including connecting peacebuilders, advocating and organizing for peace, and bridging conflict divides. Each of these will be explored in some depth below, with relevant case studies highlighted. It is also important to emphasize, as stated in the introduction, that social media is neither inherently biased towards peace or conflict, instead it involves a number of tools that be used for social good, social neutrality, or to generate conflict. In the next section, the relationship between social media and conflict will also be explored.

Connecting Peacebuilders

Over the past decade, social media has become an increasingly important platform for peacebuilding organizations and individuals in the field to connect with one another. A decade ago, there were few if any online networks or websites that link peacebuilders. Nowadays, there are countless networks around the world that use the Internet and social media to help peacebuilders connect both as a global community and also in more focused organizational, sectoral and regional hubs.

As the field of peacebuilding has grown, or what could be termed peacebuilding 1.0, to peacebuilding 2.0 and now peacebuilding 3.0,[1] these online communities and networks are becoming increasingly

critical in helping to professionalize the field and to facilitate learning, lessons learned, bridge building, and much more. The online networks, in some cases, complement existing institutions, while at other times, they are independent entities. These networks are vital to helping foster further Growth of the field, share practice across diverse geographic areas, and also help individuals and organizations who might feel isolated, particularly those working in challenging conflict contexts to incorporate them into the like-minded and global community.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a complete overview of all the networks, several key ones will be discussed in brief. One of the key platforms that I founded over seven years ago is the Peace and Collaborative Development Network (PCDN), which has rapidly become the go-to hub for over 33,000 peacebuilding individuals, organizations, and others in related fields. The mission of PCDN is to democratize access to information to empower changemakers to have the tools, resources, and connections they need to scale up their work and impact. Although PCDN started as a completely volunteer run effort out of a personal passion, three years ago we incorporated as a company and are currently running PCDN as a sustainable social enterprise that seeks to empower, connect, and give back to peacebuilding and changemakers globally.

Other key networks in the field include the Peace Portal, organized by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. The network seeks to connect peacebuilding organizations and individuals from around the globe and has over 2000 members. Another key network that shows the power of having more specialized and professional communities is the Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation for Peacebuilding. This niche network helps to advance practice and collaboration around learning, best practices and networking regarding peacebuilding impact and measurement. This organization has played a key role in helping those in the field better demonstrate impact and collective learning, a critical issue that has been increasingly required by both donors and implementing organizations alike.

There are many other networks related to peacebuilding, such as the online platform of the Alliance for Peacebuilding, which helps connect individual and organizational members, LinkedIn groups (such as

organized by PCDN but there are countless others), Facebook groups, and more. However, there are still several challenges for these online professional networks. First is that creating, and more importantly, sustaining a professional peer-to-peer network requires a significant investment of time and resources. A platform needs to be developed, but more importantly, constantly updated and opportunities for member engagement need to be provided. Having a network sustained by volunteer efforts often will not last for the long term or at least it will often run into issues of lower user engagement, spamming, inappropriate posting, and more. There is also the danger of assuming if one builds a site the members will come or creating a platform to engage without fully understanding the audience and market forces. Numerous online networks in peacebuilding and related fields have been created, sometimes with significant fanfare and resources, only to fall apart or become passive sites once the funding runs out. While a good peer professional network, therefore, does require resources, equally important is providing high-quality information to fill a gap in the field.

As highlighted above, one of the critical challenges in all of the peacebuilding and related work is the issue of sustainability. Often donors will provide funding for professional networks over a limited period of time, but it is very challenging to sustain efforts in the long term and I have seen numerous high profile networks with access to huge resources last only 2–3 years.

Part of the reason for launching PCDN as a social enterprise and not a nonprofit is the desire to demonstrate to our membership and the larger field, if we do build and have the strong, engaged community, it is possible to create a sustainable enterprise that is providing a product needed by the public. In addition, we are seeking to increase our revenue streams and have developed four key resources that include advertising (largely of educational, fellowship, and training programs), voluntary member payments, organizational members, and employers. However, core to the PCDN mission is ensuring open access and if members are unable to pay, they can access the network without having to pay dues (currently only 2.7% of our membership makes a payment in support of our work, which we would clearly like to increase).

A few other limitations of professional online networks engaged in social media include finding the right platform, while staying ahead of and relevant to the game. In terms of platforms, there are many open source and commercial products that can be used to host and engage communities. The risk is that if the right product or vendor isn't used, platforms can fall out of use, or break down over time. In my over 15 years of trying to facilitate online professional networks, I have experienced great frustration and expense in building community sites that don't function as promised or fall apart (despite repeated promises by tech companies that this will not be the case). Thus, there is a critical need for any organization or individual seeking to build or revise a site, to work very carefully with tech companies or others who are able to speak a common language.

There is also the danger of an ever-expanding pool of such sites, which while it can be incredibly beneficial in terms of ensuring everyone has a place to go, could be harmful in terms of market saturation as people can only join so many networks. With the pervasive nature of the Internet, people are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the constant information available and reaching "digital overload" (Digital Overload, n.d.).

One of the issues faced by professional networks is how to demonstrate the impact of such work. There are common tools such as providing analytics that demonstrate the number of users, pageviews, data on the specific users, but this doesn't provide sufficient evidence about the outcome and impact of such networks. For PCDN, one of the core means of tracking impact has been to gather concrete stories, metrics, and narratives about the impact of the network from members on a regular basis through surveys. However, there is still a need to develop much improved and more reliable indicators about the concrete results in terms of relationships built, skills developed, opportunities that members have been able to pursue, and even more important the cumulative impact of a network's work that needs to be improved in terms of data measurement.

Addressing Conflict and Building Peace

One of the more recent trends regarding the use of social media has been the incredible explosion of social media tools as a direct means to help document, prevent, mitigate, and transform conflict situations. This has become increasingly possible due to the widespread use of mobile technology (including dumb and smartphones) as well as the rapid spread of Internet access to a sizeable percentage of the world's populations.

The permutations of how social media as well as tech tools are being used around the globe are almost endless, with individuals and groups using cell phones and text messaging to help prevent violence around elections, to creating online platforms for individuals from conflict affected regions to build relations, understanding, and at times take collective action. Some herald, this new era of social media and tech for peacebuilding as a promising new wave of community led action that has dramatically increased the ability of ordinary people to increase their reach and impact through connection with larger networks and channels. While others have indicated that one of the challenges in any type of conflict prevention work is not so much documenting or exploring what is happening or likely to happen regarding outbreaks of violence, but rather translating warnings about conflict escalation into coherent policy responses that make a concrete difference.

What is clear about the current way of tech and media is, as Dr. Sheldon Himelfarb comments, "Data, tech and media" are all being used to "run at the drivers of conflict (Himelfarb, 2014). Instead of communities being studied by experts, it is unprecedented to see the data collecting, reporting and gathering been done in conflict zones (often by locals) to encourage direct positive action on the ground. The main difference between the data is that today the large scale use of social media in many areas of the world is as Himelfarb explains "we know have data on sentiment that is the DNA of Human Conflict" (Himelfarb, 2014).

One of the pioneering uses of mobile tech to humanitarian crises was the creation of the Ushahidi platform after the electoral violence in Kenya in 2008 (Ushahidi, n.d.). As the election-related violence escalated hundreds of thousands of Kenyans were displaced and thousands killed. The

platform composing of a website and the use of SMS messages were used to help report on "incidents of violence and peace efforts" (Ushahidi, n.d.). Since then, Ushahidi has grown to include many platforms that are all dedicated to helping empower and engage communities in diverse circumstances ranging from conflict affected communities, during large-scale storms, natural disasters and much more. The platform has had over 2 million users and is one of the pioneers in a new very rich field of crowdsourcing information (Ushahidi, 2013).

An entire industry has emerged where mobile technology and social media are now being used in thousands of locations around the globe as a connector in conflict situations. There are varying terms for these emerging fields, including crisis mapping (more on the humanitarian and conflict end) and Peace Tech (Himelfarb, 2014), which is more on the positive peacebuilding.

Connecting Conflict Affected Groups

There are also increasing examples of groups in conflict areas using social media as a way to engage groups across the conflict divide (Larrauri, 2014). Tech and peacebuilding expert Helena Puig Larraur (2014) asks a central question, "Too often, communities in conflict know very little about each other. There is fear in the unknown and peacebuilders work hard to share stories across conflict divides. Yet persuading people to reach across to those they fear can be difficult. Can local peacebuilders use social media as a first step to bridge this divide?" (p. 10).

There are countless examples of groups doing this at local, regional, and international level. For example, an online platform has been created called Mepeace.org which has provided a central hub for many Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers to connect, dialogue about the challenging context, learn about personal narratives and also organize offline and live events to foster increased collaboration.

Many other groups in the region and elsewhere have used social media to gather and connect across conflict divides. The Parents Circle/Families Forum is one organization. They are a group composed entirely of Israeli and Palestinian bereaved family members working for peace established

an online Facebook project called "Crack in the Wall". The project has provided a space for over 10,000 people on both sides to interact with one another through this space. As the PCFF explains, "In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the two peoples remain alienated from one another, a separation which is fortified not only by borders, barriers and law but also by feelings of fear, hatred, mistrust, and dehumanization of the other. Given the very limited opportunities to interact, each side of the conflict has become entrenched in its version of history and views the other side as a severe threat to its security. In the face of such adversity, the PCFF launched the CITW in order to foster interactions between Palestinians and Israelis and generate civic engagement" (Crack in the Wall, 2012).

Another example of social media being creatively used to connect across conflict divides is there was an effort organized within Facebook in partnership with Stanford University that for a time mapped out all the connections generated by Facebook across conflict divides in a given period. For example, on a given day in September 2012, over 19,000 new Israeli and Palestinian connections where created within a 24 hour period.[2] Unfortunately, the Facebook effort ended some time ago.

Challenges in Addressing Conflict and Peace

There are a number of challenges involving social media and efforts around peacebuilding, including evaluation and impact, scale, technical expertise, funding, and sustainability.

One of the critical challenges in social media work in engaging directly on building peace is demonstrating the impact of such work. Efforts to explore the impacts are still relatively new and the documentation and mechanisms are lacking to a large degree. As noted, expert, Dr. Sheldon Himelfarb explains in reference to tech and social media efforts, "the bottom line is this is really promising stuff, but we are not getting the results we like" (Himelfarb, 2014). Part of the reason for this challenge is there have been many, many pilot projects related to social media as well as tech and peacebuilding, but there has been insufficient resources and effort toward scaling up this type of work (Himelfarb, 2014).

There is also the question of what the right metrics are to measure change, particularly for social media efforts that take place via website, Facebook, or other platforms. Does the number of users on a page or site indicate some change, or is it the number of page views? But these basic metrics don't indicate either attitudinal or, more importantly, behavioral change. There is a danger of over relying on the traditional metrics of web engagement, but better metrics are needed to explore how social media engagement links directly to peacebuilding.

A related challenge is that social media tools and processes require a particular expertise and skill set. Over the past decade social media has become a dedicated profession and organizations around the globe are hiring social media professionals who work in PR, community engagement, and other areas. Many organizations run the risk of having a social media effort that is not adequately staffed or does not have the necessary expertise. Having a high-quality ongoing social media for peacebuilding effort, requires someone with skills much more detailed than basic Facebook or Twitter usage, and include content generation, data analytics, community management and more.

As highlighted earlier, there are countless efforts now to work with social media and peacebuilding, but nearly all run into challenges of financial and technical sustainability. Most peacebuilding social media platforms that I have engaged with struggle to find sustainable sources of funding, in order to create high-profile efforts. Instead, smaller social media efforts often fade over time. Even the highly touted Facebook Peace Friend project that was one of the dynamic efforts to track connections at a macro level stopped over two years ago.

Another challenge is ensuring the accuracy of data and reports from crowdsourcing efforts, whether by text messaging or online. One of the goals of crowdsourcing is to help dispel rumors that can lead to violence and ensure the accuracy of data. Thus, most crowdsourcing tools have created mechanisms to try and ensure, to the highest degree possible, that data isn't false. As Juliana Rotich, a co-founder of Ushahidi, explains "tapping into the wisdom of the crowd takes some hard work" (Ushahidi, 2013)

Advocating for Peace

The two uses of social media highlighted above largely focus on closed communities; the first on fostering and building the peacebuilding community itself and the second on broader ways of creating connections, understanding, and ideally action across conflict divides. The third and perhaps most widely touted use of social media related to peacebuilding is trying to engage the wider public in issues of peace and conflict resolution. In this space, there have been many notable campaigns, ranging from Kony 2012 to Bring Back Our Girls that have received widespread recognition, praise, and critiques. Through the use of online platforms, websites, social media, and other tools, individuals and organizations seeking to mobilize the public to take action on behalf of a cause has become a phenomenon.

In the past, issue-based organizing largely took place through in-person meetings, canvassing by organizers, issue-based mailings and phone calls. Today, while these still remain important factors, due to the reach of the Internet and social media organizations, causes can reach the global public in the click of a mouse.

One of the most widely cited cases of the use of social media to advocate for peace-related efforts is the Kony 2012 campaign organized by the Invisible Children. The organization made a video about Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, which reached over 100 million views within the first six days of its release (Kony, 2012). The goal of the video as stated by the organization was "Could an online video make an obscure war criminal famous? And if he was famous, would the world work together to stop him?" (Kony, 2012).

While the effort was one of the most successful viral social media campaigns in history, there are many critiques that have been made. First, many saw the campaign as patronizing in nature, as showing the need for Africa to be saved by the West and totally ignoring the dynamic work that peacebuilders, civil society and many others were doing in the region. Furthermore, there were strong critiques about the inaccuracy of many of the "facts" presented in the video (Keating, 2012). Even more importantly, invisible children asked people to take several steps to help support

Kony 2012 that included signing a pledge, buying Kony 2012 materials and donating to save the children (Keating, 2012). Invisible children raised countless millions, and a significant portion went to their own and marketing work (Visible, 2012).

The long-term impact of this short-term viral campaign is unclear. While it generated countless critiques and lead to the very public meltdown of the film's creator, some would say that perhaps the film and the work of invisible children and others did pressure people to help, including the US through support of the Uganda army in their search for Kony. As one US official stated in an interview about the increased presence of US troops in Uganda "Let's be honest, there was some constituent pressure here. Did 'Kony 2012' have something to do with this? Absolutely" (Gettleman, 2012). It is important to note that Joseph Kony does remain at large and although Invisible Children and others continue to press for his arrest, public attention has fallen away from the issue.

Another recent example of an effort to assist a conflict affected area was the global social media campaign launched to Bring Back Our Girls, in response to the mass kidnapping of almost 300 Nigerian schoolgirls in the spring of 2014. The campaign received global attention as even celebrities and politicians around the world took selfies of themselves holding Bring Back Our Girls signs. The campaign attracted nearly 4,000,000 tweets, but this has dwindled to a trickle recently even as this issue has continued to be in the news (Carter Olson, 2016; Kirkland, 2014).

The campaign generated both praise and criticism. Praise for putting increasing pressure on the Nigerian government to take action, but still a number of strong criticisms have emerged. Similar to the Kony 2012 campaign, critiques say that many Westerners have jumped on this campaign in a patronizing and othering way that ignores the activity of Nigerians themselves (Srivastava, 2014a). Moreover, although local Nigerians initiated the campaign, media and narratives experts noted that it was co-opted by western organizations that then used the hashtag for bolostering their own projects (Srivastava, 2014a). Lina Srivastava (2014b) explains that what really started as a local Nigerian initiative seeking to pressure the government to take positive action to bring back the girls was hijacked to some degree by international groups. A number of groups that started using the Bring Back Our Girls campaign to raise

funds for programming, although it touched on the issue of girls' education, didn't have any direct connection to Nigeria.

Another critical issue related to both Kony 2012 and Bring Back Our Girls, is that often groups committing acts of political violence or terrorism do so in order to generate media attention for their particular group or cause (Hoffman, 2013). The long-term horrific acts of Kony and Boko Haram have received massively increased media coverage through these types of viral campaigns. And this can potentially increase their recruits and support for their work due to this increased media recognition, no matter how horrific their particular acts.

A more critical issue regarding social media campaigning for peace or around such issues is passive action that affects no real change. As Lina Srivastava (2014a) explains, despite the widespread growth of such campaigns, "There is a strong argument that much of hashtag activism is ineffective or is merely passive action that substitutes for real change." Increasingly many people around the world may feel they are taking positive action for social change by clicking on a Facebook like, retweeting for a cause or more, but in reality, they may not be doing much at all. As JP Singh (2013) explains "there is also increasing concern among media activists that 'slacktivism,' or online activism—often limited to joining Facebook groups or sending and receiving Twitter feeds—is not only a less viable alternative to traditional 'in-person' activism, such as call-ins and protests, but it may be detracting from much needed-activism" (p. 242).

Social Media as a Generator of Conflict

Although there has been much talk and writing of social media as a tool to help build peace and reduce conflict, it is essential to remember that social media isn't inherently good. Similar to more traditional broadcast media, radio, film, and TV, there are both positive and negative examples of how the use of media has inflamed conflicts. In fact, many movements and organizations around the world working to mobilize and incentivize individuals to take action directly related to generating increased conflict and violence are using the tool.

Often elites, whether representing political power, or groups seeking to challenge existing structures, will use media as a means to broadcast their messages, attract followers, instill fear in enemies and sometimes encourage people to undertake direct action. In a radical shift from the previous hate media that often was isolated to specific countries or regions, the Internet and social media have provided a platform for such efforts to go global. Thus, there is much concern over the emergence of the Islamic State as a transnational threat to the Middle East Region and potentially other states, and with particular regard to their sophisticated online social media recruiting techniques via Twitter, Facebook, gaming, and so on. Some report that this has helped attract thousands of foreign fighters to their cause. As J.M. Berger (2014) explains, "The advance of an army used to be marked by war drums. Now it's marked by volleys of tweets". ISIS and other groups now are actively engaging in social media, live tweeting horrific acts, successes, and have even developing apps to distribute their message. They have even created hashtags as a way to generate more awareness (Berger, 2014).

The use of social media as a means to mobilize others is not limited to only non-state insurgent actors. Many conflict-engaged groups today are actively pursuing social media campaigns to broadcast their message and viewpoint in real time. For example, during the recent war between Gaza and Israel, both sides actively promoted their causes with tweet in real time about events, trying to sway the public and international community. However, it isn't clear if the competing social media narratives are having much of an impact on the wide perception for each side, or just solidifying support within each community. As Anand Varghese (cited in Mekouar, 2014), from the United States Institute of Peace explains, "I don't think social media users are making any great difference on the discourse on the Israel-Palestinian conflict,…The conversation is just as polarized and, on the margins, just as hate filled."

Core Skills Needed for Social Media for Peacebuilding

As social media has become more prevalent around the world, it is clear that practitioners, students, and scholars engaged in peacebuilding need to increase their understanding of how to use the tools, their limitations, and future opportunities. This section will provide some key recommendations for programs at all levels to better understand and utilize social media for peacebuilding.

First, it is important to reiterate that as social media has grown in scope and size, it has begun to also become a profession in its own write. As Singh (2013) explains, "most agencies for peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, or social advocacy now offer some form of social media platform for activists (p. 240). To be effective at social media means much more than knowing how to use Facebook, or twitter, or just being a millennial. There is a need to train people in the art of storytelling, data analysis and measurement, communication and much more (Millington, 2012). It is no longer enough to create content on a website, but organizations must know how to engage users in a conversation, to go beyond one-way communication, to measure how people use a particular platform, and to see the return on investment in terms of both time and resources spent.

Very few academic programs in conflict resolution or peacebuilding are offering classes or adequate training in social media for peacebuilding, let alone media for peacebuilding. There is a need for graduates of academic programs in the field to have the practical tools and experience to maximize their impact, to contribute to advancing the overall field, and use rigorous methodology and measurement. For example, in the Georgetown Conflict Resolution MA program, several one credit skills classes are being offered to better prepare students for work in this area including storytelling, tech for social change and data visualization.

Second, although social media holds promise to help contribute to understanding, knowledge, and peacebuilding, there is a critical need to prepare implementers and beneficiaries about risk and security management. According to Himelfarb (2014) five years ago it was possible to have secure communications, but over the past few years, repressive and

even democratic governments are increasingly gaining access to monitoring and using information from social media platforms to track and at times threaten activists. For example, several leading NGOs and security experts recently created the Digital First Aid Security Toolkit (Digital, 2014). There are countless examples of governments and others using social media tools to harass and even kill their opponents. This can range from relatively harmless hacking of sites, to targeting activists accounts to gain information on opposition figures that can lead to their arrest, as has happened in Syria, or worse (Galperin & Marquis-Boire, 2012). There are many examples in more media restrictive societies where individuals have been jailed for social media postings. For example, in Thailand, a US citizen was jailed for five years for posting part of a banned book (Finighan, 2011). While in Mexico, a citizen social media activist was killed by Mexican cartels for her work online encouraging accountability and citizen activism (She Tweeted, 2014). The cartel responsible for her kidnapping and death hacked her Twitter account after her murder and posted warnings for her followers on social media to stop tweeting about the cartel and human rights (Rodriguez, 2016).

Thus, while social media can help connect, inform, and inspire. There is a need for people to be aware of the significant risks that can result from such public outreach and ensure people make informed decisions. There is a basic principle, developed by Mary Anderson (1999), that peacebuilding should try, to the degree possible, to do no harm and this should be a guiding principle for social media in peacebuilding work as well.

A third point that is critical for practitioners, scholars, and students is the issue of voice and representation (Srivastava, 2014b). Often social media can take away the agency of groups in conflict regions, by claiming to speak and advocate on their behalf for a particular cause. This type of public outreach and support can do a wonder of good by promoting awareness, but it is important to ensure that local voices and leaders play a central part. As illustrated by Kony 2020 and Bring Back Our Girls, there is a danger of outside organizations seeking to oversimplify or twist facts on the ground to advocate for their own interests and causes (Srivastava, 2014b).

The fourth critical point is that social media is not a panacea for ending the conflict. While there is significant potential, it is important not to follow the ideas that social media will solve all problems or tech will magically transform all of our problems. There is incredible power in reaching out to populations around the world and encouraging citizen participation through social media and mobile technology, but the challenges cannot be ignored.

Fifth, an issue that isn't highlighted enough in social media work, is the issue of privacy and sustainability. Many of the major social media platforms, are motivated to a large degree by profit. While this can be essential in generating a successful platform and many companies seek to do good, the commodity many companies are acquiring and selling is user data and therein lies the danger (Morozov, 2012).

Sixth, there is a need for more peacebuilders to engage with tech and social media and vice versa. Having worked at this intersection for many years, it is inspiring to see many initiatives to bring the fields together. For example, the crisis mapping and crowdsourcing fields are have a direct and positive impact on the ground. Several new initiatives are in the process of launching such as the Peace Tech Lab, which will bring together media, tech, engineering, and more to develop, innovate, and launch products and tools dedicated to transforming and ending conflict.

Seventh, there is a need for peacebuilders to better engage with the issue of big data, which refers to the incredible amount of information available via social media and the Internet. It is estimated that 90% of all this data has been created in the past two years (*Apply new*). There are efforts to harness the power of big data and computerized as well as human run analytical tools for conflict forecasting. As Sanjana Hattotuwa explains (2013), "Although commonly associated with big business, 'data philanthropy' by governments—the anonymisation and sharing of even sensitive data for public use—will grow and bolster peacebuilding by providing new insights into complex political emergencies, peace negotiations and peace processes, including post-war state-building and reconciliation" (p. 227). Hattotuwa, also cautions big data can be used as a conflict generating mechanism as well. There is a strong need for peacebuilders to develop the technical and data analysis tools to make sense of

big data, and to increasingly work with data scientists and others who are taking the lead in this area.

Lastly, particularly for scholars, there is a need to do more open source work, and in particular, foster a community of blogging and sharing ideas on social media platforms. As Patrick Dunleavy and Chris Gilson comment "Blogging is quite simply, one of the most important things that an academic should be doing right now" (Dunleavy & Gilson, 2012). Blogging in many cases has helped to get research out to a wider public constituency that often academic articles and even books may not do.

Conclusion

It is clear that social media has the potential to affect significant change in the practice and scholarship of peacebuilding. Much of the work around the world today runs the risk of passive clicking to support a social cause, in its most superficial sense. There is even a risk of doing harm through such actions by trivializing or ignoring the work of local peacebuilders, overselling the role of outsiders, and of course putting people are at risk when names or data are released or appropriated by forces without good intentions. However, social media can also be the "gateway drug" (Vaynerchuk, 2013) to more positive action of understanding, interaction and change.

Social media also has the significant potential to provide real time interactions and monitoring of peace and conflict, at levels never possible beforehand. Since social media can potentially serve as the pulse of a society, it is now possible to see potential disruptions, unhealthy or dangerous trends, as well as positive opportunities.

There is no magic formula or clicking on a particular link that will end all conflict. However, it is clear social media has the power to convene, inspire and motivate people to potentially take action and the peacebuilding field and educators need to learn how to better utilize this opportunity to create the means for sustainable engagement for peace.

Notes

1. See the work of the Alliance for Peacebuliding in this area, http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org.
2. See https://www.facebook.com/peace.

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7

Gendered Hashtactivism: Civic Engagement in Saudi Arabia

Jana Fedtke, Bouziane Zaid, and Mohammed Ibahrine

Recently, several female Saudi Twitter users have emerged as significant players on digital platforms. One of their primary goals is to enforce the logic of public visibility, social mobility, and civic participation in Saudi society. Saudi women use Twitter to disseminate specific and relevant information and promote their social agenda that remained unrecognized and invisible in the mainstream media domain and thus in the public sphere. Our paper explores to what extent Twitter can empower Saudi women or reinforce their social immobility and invisibility.

One of the prominent trends in the digital Saudi space in recent years is the boom in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. As of 2018, Twitter has over 17 million users in Saudi Arabia (Global Media Insight, 2018). The growth rate of Twitter is

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still increasing, and the population of new adopters and users proves to be comfortable with these technologies as they have a great deal of familiarity with social media platforms and mobile applications. Saudi citizens migrate conventional offline sources and embrace online platforms.

In the wake of the recent political instability in the Arab region, digital platforms gain importance for both personal and professional purposes. A conspicuously observable tide of social activism has risen, with Twitter playing an increasingly important role. In the literature, Twitter is being reconsidered as a civic medium because it allows for social activism and civic participation. However, there are still important limits to the social influence of Twitter (Fuchs, 2015). One is its inability to influence important actors within mainstream media who in turn, frame issues for a wider public.

This chapter focuses on three kinds of empowerment through Twitter in conservative and traditional Saudi society. We argue that Twitter makes a contribution to the development of civic culture, especially in female lives. The second section traces the process of technological diffusion as well as the social adoption of the new technology in a traditionally opaque society. As an analytical method, the book chapter uses three different yet related cases, examining the different strategies and tactics used by Saudi female Twitter users. Hence, the third section focuses on the interactive communication interplay between the Saudi authorities and their systematic attempts to circumscribe the spaces of the free flow of information and the opportunities offered by the microblogging platform.

Mapping the Twitterverse in Saudi Arabia

Some Arab countries have witnessed a rapid diffusion of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Social media is now making its mark on Arab digital communication. The rise of social media has been made possible by the huge growth of the Internet infrastructures and the low barriers to entry. As of 2015, there were 160 million Internet users in the Arab world with a total population of 300 million (Quartz), with more than 53 million users regularly posting their entries, sharing viral videos, and establishing social networking sites (Boudraa, 2013).

Social media has gradually developed into a mass medium; ordinary people as well as many public figures, opinion leaders, religious leaders, and intellectuals use social media to inform, to communicate, and to network with their audiences, followers, and communities.

Over the last five years, Twitter has become one of the most popular digital platforms. In 2014, the total number of active Twitter users in the Arab region reached 5,797,500 users. With about 2.4 million users, Saudi Arabia accounts for over 40 percent of all active Twitter users in the Arab region and for over four percent of the entire Twitter user population (PeerReach, 2013). Saudi Twitter users also account for 32 percent of the whole Saudi online population, which is the highest percentage worldwide, and for 11 percent of the Saudi population of 28 million (Arab Social Media Report, 2014). Riyadh, the capital of the kingdom, is one of the world's most active cities on Twitter. Twitter is currently number 21 on the list of the most visited websites in Saudi Arabia (Alexa, 2019).

Before 2009, the first wave of Twitter users in Saudi Arabia was initially limited to influential people and bloggers who knew about the platform. In 2010, the number of Saudi Twitter users was only several hundred thousand. After Al-Waleed bin Talal, a Saudi business magnate, invested US$300 million in the company in December 2011, Twitter gained some momentum (Arabian Business, 2011). Saudi Arabia grew more than 3000 percent from 2011 to 2012, and currently accounts to 50 million tweets monthly (The Social Clinic, 2013).

Compared to other digital platforms, Twitter is a simple medium. The fact that tweets have not much text appeals to Saudis, it is also easy for non-English speakers to adopt. During this time, there was no localized Arabic version. The availability of Twitter's interface in Arabic has contributed to a much wider adoption of Twitter among Saudis. Taghreedat, a group of 400 volunteers, translated the microblogging site. About 96 percent of Twitter users in Saudi Arabia tweet in Arabic (Hamid, 2019). Arabic has become the sixth most popular language on Twitter, used in 2.8 percent of all public tweets (Leetaru, Wang, Cao, Padmanabhan, & Shook, 2013). This surprisingly rapid and wide adoption of Twitter by Saudis sparked considerable global media coverage.

An estimated three million Saudis are active Twitter users, with male users (87 percent) far outnumbering female users. Twitter has a different position in digital environments than blogging or even Facebook. Saudis were not active bloggers, but even those who maintained a blog were exchanging "macro-blogging" for a microblogging platform. Twitter use is considerably high in Saudi Arabia, which indicates how connected the Saudi youth is.

Several demographic groups stand out as having high rates of Twitter usage relative to their peers: The largest age group of Saudi Twitter users is people aged 2534 years. The second-largest group is the youngest adults (those between the ages of 18 and 24) (Jiffry, 2013). Twitter use within most major demographic groups is likely to increase. While the majority of Twitter users are male, the number of female users is growing (Clement, 2019).

The average Saudi Twitter user is not married. Saudi males tweet an average of three times per day. Others tweet almost on a daily basis. Saudis post many tweets in the middle of the night. Twitter activities rise noticeably on Friday (the Saudi weekend). This indicates that Twitter is not just a background activity, meaning that Saudi Twitter users are emotionally and intellectually involved when tweeting and that their aperture is widely open to receive and process information.

Twitter was originally designed and tailored for digital natives who spend most of their time on digital platforms, particularly on mobile devices. Twitter users in Saudi Arabia are increasingly opting to use mobile devices rather than their PCs when using the microblogging platform. What makes Twitter so useful in the Saudi context is the synchronousness of messaging (Puschmann, Bruns, Mahrt, Weller, & Burgess, 2014: 429). According to a recent study, about 73 percent of Saudi Twitter users access their accounts through their mobiles (Social Clinic, 2013). Saudi Twitter users tweet on their mobile phones. The mobile makes it convenient for Saudi Twitter users to tweet. The overall trend of the move to mobile devices is evident more on Twitter than on almost any other social networking website. This suggests that Twitter activity has become an integral part of the everyday lives of young Saudis. Accessing Twitter from mobile devices has made this activity seamlessly interwoven with other social activities.

In fact, about 30 percent of Saudi Arabia's online population uses Twitter regularly, generating 150 million tweets per month (Social Clinic, 2013). Saudi Twitter users spread tweets to new audiences. They retweet relevant and informative tweets posted by other people. While some of them copy the text from the tweet into a new tweet and preface the post with the letters "RT" (RT stands for retweet followed by the @ symbol), others retweet a message by simply clicking the retweet button underneath the original tweet. The retweet helps spread information through the followers' network and beyond the reach of the original author of the tweet.

Gendered Twitter Use and Civic Engagement

In the last decade, access to higher education has contributed to the emergence of a better educated youth which is more socially active. The youth with higher education background is particularly affected by unemployment. An average growth of 6.25 percent over the last four years will not help solve the unemployment problem, since about 100,000 graduates enter the job market each year (Hoetjes, 2013). According to one report, university graduates account for about 78 percent of unemployed Saudi women (Ghafour, 2013). There are more than 500,000 young Saudi men and women without employment (Hoetjes, 2013). Recent statistics by the IMF indicate that the unemployment rate among Saudis has reached 12 percent (Hoetjes, 2013). What makes the situation worse is that more than two-thirds of Saudi Arabia's population is younger than 30 years (Hoetjes, 2013). These young people are disenchanted with unemployment. With the wide and easy availability of digital platforms, these young Saudis have started to express their dissatisfaction and circulate their opinions and views among themselves without the need of traditional media outlets or channels.

In the context of recent political instability in the Arab region, the Twittersphere witnessed a great number of hashtag activism campaigns. Close examination of the Saudi Twittersphere shows a widespread discontent with public service performance when addressing social issues such as unemployment, corruption, and mismanagement. For instance,

Salman Al-Awda, a prominent preacher, who has more than nine million followers on Twitter, says: "Twitter has revealed a great frustration and a popular refusal of the current situation" (Worth, 2012, para. 9). Some of these campaigns were massive and impactful. They have triggered social action in the hope of changing traditionally reinforced societal attitudes, hierarchies, and realities.

Digitally enabled strategies and tactics for combating mismanagement and corruption by female Twitter users have been aimed at changing how people think about women in society as well as overcoming women's exclusion. The campaigns are quite varied but share the basic objective of highlighting the current lack of women's mobility and the need to empower Saudi women.

These instances and examples demonstrate how Twitter was constrained by the authorities because of its potential to undermine hierarchies of authority and power. Female-led activism on Twitter has increasingly become a site of struggle over meaning, control, and civic participation. In general, Saudi women are not central actors within Saudi social life, but in the Twitterverse, they form a dense and influential network of "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973) within the digital sphere.

Twitter and Employment

In the following section, the analytical focus will be on the role of Twitter in empowering Saudi women to find a place in the professional realm. In recent years, women's rights have increasingly gained recognition from some segments of Saudi society. Saudi women now have better access to education and information, yet gender equality has not improved. However, progress is very uneven between different social groups.

Initially, Saudi women created their Twitter accounts for personal use and for expressing their opinions that were generally marginalized over the years. These Twitter accounts represent social actors, yet they are not at the center of the attention of Saudi society. Being aware of the importance and the potential of Twitter, some users began to attract some attention for their social causes. Thus, they started transforming the use of digital platforms from purely personal to civic and social ones. Fully

cognizant of the seriousness and sensitivity of tweeting on political issues, they did not tweet about what the government considers sensitive issues.

Women focus on obviously legitimate social demands like the right to employment as a way for social empowerment. Especially university graduates use Twitter for mobilizing support for their rights. For instance, a group of female graduates complained that they could not find employment. On Twitter, these women created forms of sociality to attract public visibility as well as the attention of government officials and ministers. For instance, in 2008, a Saudi female digital activist started a Facebook page calling for female employment. She asked for women to be employed in stores for female underwear because it was embarrassing and inconvenient to interact with male clerks about underwear. According to some Saudi experts, Twitter allows Saudi women to express themselves in ways that would be impossible with the mainstream media, which is limited by expensive production costs, lack of interaction with its audience, and biases in media filters that make it difficult to get divergent views past editorial gatekeepers.

Female Saudi Twitter users work together to uphold preferred self-images of themselves and their network partners through strategies like collectively encouraging social mobility or negotiating empowerment and social enhancement. One female Saudi Twitter user commented on her Twitter stream that she had lost her youth and age searching for employment. She echoed the voice of many Saudi women who had the same experience over the last few years. They often pointed to "*wasta*" and connections that can help them find jobs. In this fight for jobs, Saudi women received societal support from many stakeholders including Islamic scholars, *Shura* members, and other opinion leaders in the country.

The women have waged engaging campaigns that have been instrumental in raising awareness about the extent of women's exclusion as well as where and when major gains have been made. Twitter is inherently a social medium and has helped individual Saudi women to become social in the sense that they belong to a community where other women share similar concerns (employment) and similar demographic characteristics (university degree). In the sociability, and individual loses the aspect of privateness. Twitter campaigns reflect collective problems. The women

who voice their concerns form what Davis has called an "online elite discourse network" (Davis, 2010: 754). According to a recent study, 85 percent of Saudis think that social platforms have enabled better social activity (Xanthidis & Alali, 2014: 93).

The private problem is no longer an individual destiny disconnected from the collective. Saudi women convey a social meaning through Twitter and expect the authorities to be engaged in an interactive negotiation process.

For Saudi women, to build and sustain a virtual community is a compensation for the absence of physical mobility in the streets. Twitter helped them create structures of informed virtual communities that coalesce around local lifestyle choices and current social prospects (Rheingold, 2000). To argue with Rheingold, these digital-enabled networks of connected users transform Saudi women into smart citizens with a social consciousness that will be a key driver of individual and collective empowerment. Using the social network helps Saudi women realize that there are other women who share similar frustrations and aspirations.

Twitter has increased the sense of community among its different groups of users. It facilitates relations among different social and age groups. None of the campaigns orchestrated by female Saudi Twitter users led to political attacks against the Saudi government. The main objective for these women is not to translate digital activism into real life street protests, but to demonstrate and mobilize mutual support for shared interests and concerns.

Twitter has provided a plurality of actions and visibility. Female Saudi Twitter users have acted in virtual spaces and have made their voices heard by the authorities. The Saudi authorities regarded the actions of Saudi women as meaningful and as deserving immediate response and interactions. For example, Khalid Tuwaijri, Saudi Arabia's chief of the royal court and private secretary of the king, has tweeted for the first time since he created his account in 2012 (NPR, 2014). He asked people to send him complaints as a direct message on Twitter (NPR, 2014). The government responded positively to people's demands and has, for example, employed nearly 10,000 teachers across the country as a response.

One of the most useful ways that female Twitter users can influence their case is by reshaping public attitudes towards women in society. Changing traditional notions can increase the number of and the possibilities for women considering a professional career, as well as change how ordinary people and religious authorities view female candidates. Saudi women are contributing to the public debates about youth employment in growing numbers.

Recent research suggests that Twitter facilitates the integration and connection of diverse social networks (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011). Twitter has helped Saudi women to get connected and networked. One of their daunting obstacles is their free mobility in the urban centers. It is not possible for them to gather in streets or squares, not only because of the political but also the social limitations imposed on their mobility in the public space. Their tweets were instrumental in mobilizing public and official support for their social causes. Saudis and particularly Saudi women have adopted Twitter because it exhibits more flexibility and dynamism for enlarging their personal network.

The Twitter campaign has helped female activists to coordinate their actions. A famous Twitter user called for boycotting the lingerie, apparel, and cosmetics stores that are reluctant to enforce the royal decree to employ females in supermarkets and cosmetic stores. In 2012, they ended their boycott, since the government took some steps to enforce the new policy of empowering females in the job market.

Shura (Consultative) Council

The right to vote and hold public office has been demanded by Saudi women over the last decade. Many Saudi women campaigned for this cause on Twitter. Hard issues such as political, religious, and social issues have been debated among Saudi women on Twitter. Saudi King Abdullah has appointed 30 women to the proto-parliament, known as the Shura (consultative) Council which allowed them to vote and run in the 2015 municipal elections. The 30 women make up 20 percent of the Shura. This act was historical, yet some women announced to campaign to gain more seats, because women make up 50 percent of Saudi society.

Twitter appears to be more open, flexible, and is used increasingly for social activism to likely strengthen the social involvement of women, but is still very male-dominated and conservative voices are still very loud. Many conservative preachers reacted aggressively to this initiative. One of the staunchest critics was Saleh al-Sugair. In his words, there is no value in employing "females when we have unemployed males who are providing for their families." Al-Sugair has over 40,000 followers on Twitter and is known for advocating against women's employment and women's social mobility. In his tweets, he describes females as "whores" and "filth" (Saudi Gazette, 2013).

In Saudi Arabia, Twitter-based participatory actions emanate from the locus of a private, not a public sphere. Many Saudis keep their Twitter accounts anonymous. Twitter offers its Saudi users an important functionality, which is anonymity. Saudi Twitter users can hide behind an avatar to keep their privacy. Twitter allows private as well as public messages. In what follows, the term domain to refer to the digitally private domain is the focal point of much of these participatory activities. It has developed to mind-like audiences or digitally oriented groups. It remains within these confines of limited groups. It is a purely individual domain; the private sphere is not oriented towards a public sphere. The private domain is a starting point of individual reflection, personal expression, and self-presentation. What makes this private domain more powerful, present, and impactful in the long term is the connectivity and interactivity offered by digital social media. This authentic privateness is a kind of autonomy that fragments the collective mind-set preponderant in traditional segments of Saudi society. This autonomy was marginalized and powerless before the arrival of digital platforms, mobile communication, and social media. Digital platforms have enabled and empowered the individual and have made the personal social.

This digital activism momentum has attracted attention from many segments of Saudi society, including intellectuals and influential opinion leaders. Mahmoud Ahmed, a noted opinion leader at *Saudi Gazette*, an English newspaper, says that Twitter activism plays a role in the absence of government bodies as well as the absence of a consumer protection group that "simply does not exist" (Ahmed, 2013). In one of his articles, Ahmed said that he had been following this hashtag on Twitter on a daily

basis. When the campaign gained momentum and became massive, he even participated in it with a few comments. One of his famous comments and tweets said that, "every time there is a salary increase, prices triple. There is no need to increase salaries unless there are guarantees that prices are not going to increase." In his opinion piece published in the *Saudi Gazette*, he explained why he was not supporting the salary increase: "I am, however, not in favor of a salary increase for one reason. Every time there is a salary increase, prices triple. There is no need to increase salaries unless there are guarantees that prices are not going to increase. I remember the previous occasion when there was a 15 percent salary increase for all government employees a few years back. Prices simply jumped after the salary increase. We, in the private sector, suffered because the only increase we felt was the price increase" (Ahmed, 2013).

Twitter Combatting Corruption

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the Saudi Arabian government started to coordinate some efforts to combat corruption, a long-lasting and complex issue. In 2011, Saudi Arabia created the National Anti-Corruption Commission (Nazaha), an anti-corruption body, to promote transparency and to fight political graft. According to its official website, Nazaha is an entirely independent authority and it reports only to the King (Nazaha, 2014). Many skeptics said that Nazaha is just another façade and that it does not have the power to fight corruption. They said that Nazaha has so far failed to achieve its goal in combatting corruption since they cannot punish corrupt officials.

Against this critique, Mohammed Al-Sharief, head of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (Nazaha), urged the media to play its watchdog role to disclose the misdeeds of ministries and government departments. They have no right to hide information from public opinion. He also called on Saudi citizens to report cases of corruption and to highlight the use of social media in this concerted effort. Nazaha uses a YouTube channel to get Saudi citizens involved with answering questions. For instance, Mohammed Al-Sharief answered questions asked through Kingdom Dialogues on the YouTube channel.

Fighting corruption is a national responsibility for all stakeholders, including female segments of Saudi society. Nazaha planned to engage women to enhance its efforts to uncover possible corruption cases in various government departments. But many female members of the Shura Council have criticized Nazaha for its failure to contain growing corrupt practices. They said many segments of Saudi society have lost their trust (Ghafour, 2013).

Saudi Twitter users have expressed their disappointment and mistrust in Nazaha. The Saudi Twitterverse is filled with statements such as "Corruption and corrupt officials are everywhere, but nobody is there to protect you," or "It seems corruption is more powerful than Nazaha," or "We hear only talk and corruption is increasing by the day." Some studies have emphasized the role of shared emotions and opinions among Twitter users. As Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira pointed out, the spread of news streams and comments on the news on Twitter resulted in an affective mixtures of opinions, facts, and emotions. This affective sharing "nurtures and sustains involvement, connection, and cohesion" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012: 14).

The Saudi authorities mostly permit the dynamics of Twitter and accept the critical discourse. In 2013, some 3000 citizens signed a petition asking Shura members to bring up the issue of women driving for debate. One first stop for engaging Twitter users is the quality and spontaneity of the news and information. Whether Twitter contributes to the quality of information about topical issues and stories such as corruption, there should be little doubt that Twitter is changing how female Twitter users receive, exchange, and use information. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira argue that affective circulations of news storytelling create feelings of community with two eventual manifestations, either an expression in a dynamic movement or in an engaged passivity (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012: 15). In the specific context of the Saudi Twitterverse, the latter scenario will likely prevail because of the immaturity of its dynamic. People were able to demand the right for Saudi women to drive. The campaign on Twitter may have contributed to the change of the law that finally allowed Saudi women to drive in 2018.

The evidence presented here is an indicator for the gradual construction of civic culture. The conclusions of this chapter enhance findings

and observations made elsewhere about the fact that Twitter has lowered barriers to participation (Anduiza, Cantijoch, & Gallego, 2009). Twitter takes part in almost all of the collective action in Saudi Arabia, as Saudis will live increasing proportions of their social lives on digital platforms. Along with other digital platforms, Twitter has proven to be a significant digital agora for collective action by creating networks of "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973). The "weak ties" hypothesis suggests that weak ties enable reaching marginalized segments like Saudi women that are not accessible through "strong ties."

Twitter and the Authorities

The majority of Saudi Twitter accounts are public. Saudi Twitter users are individuals without any intended collective actions. Their tweets are individually composed streams and can be read on Twitter.com—with or without a Twitter account. In fact, Twitter is freely available; however, specific Twitter accounts can be censored when distributing any sensitive political content or calling for demonstrations in the streets (Freedom House, 2012). Fully aware that the use of Twitter can contribute to political unrest, the Saudi authorities have already figured out how to control Twitter users.

There are two distinctive approaches to react to Twitter use: The first one is sensitive. As far as Twitter users limit their activism on digital platforms exclusively to social issues without any intention to call to physical activities in the stress and squares. The Saudi authorities are very sensitive to the type of activism that does not bring "tweets to the streets" (Gerbaudo, 2012). Since Twitter is not used as a communication instrument for political activism on a wide scale to trigger political change, Saudi Twitter users are low in profile to attract censorship.

The second approach is authoritarian. When Twitter activists become political and plan to take their activism to the streets, the Saudi authorities have reacted hastily and harshly. Moreover, the Saudi authorities are diligent in censoring political content, including Twitter pages on human rights, political activists, and calling for protests. A case in point is the recent royal decree that prohibits Saudi judges from tweeting. About 45

judges had expressed their discontent with the mismanagement of the judicial sector through Twitter. For instance, Abdulaziz al-Gasim, a prominent Riyadh lawyer, said in one of his tweets, "There is a revolution in judicial circles." The Saudi authorities are sensitive to specific situations.

The growth of the number of people involved in Twitterverse is so exponential that the Saudi authorities changed their strategies and tactics. Initially, the Saudi authorities decided to monitor and to regulate the Twitterverse by making Twitter users register their accounts with their national identity. The Saudi authorities were concerned over the potential of Twitter, which is reflected in the decision to consider new rules that may require all users to register with their real names before tweeting. The Ministry of Culture and Information admitted that regulating the Twitterverse is increasingly difficult because of the very nature of the platform.

Twitter has proven to be remarkably resistant to online censorship. It has made it challenging for the Saudi authorities to track and monitor the stream of retweeting. The fact that the Saudi authorities have taken notice of the power of tweeting is in itself an indicator of its communication power. As mentioned before, Alwaleed bin Talal holds one of the largest stakes in Twitter. This means that the authorities can easily access Twitter data (Ahmed, 2013). It is, however, nearly impossible for them to regulate or control it. Alwaleed bin Talal has used Twitter to call on the Saudi Telecommunication Authority not to block social media platforms. He believes that blocking the Internet and Twitter, in particular, is a "losing war" (Smith-Spark & Ayish, 2013). For him, social media "is a tool for the people to make the government hear their voices" (Smith-Spark & Ayish, 2013).

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia is in the midst of an incremental development. The social gradualism has contributed to the emergence of empowered segments of Saudi society. One of the driving forces behind these dynamics is the empowerment of a personalized public on Twitter.

In the specific case of women's empowerment, this chapter has provided instances of Twitter offering new communication spaces for female Twitter users to take action with intended consequences for society. The Twitter activism with regard to women's employment and political representation affirms the notion that the microblogging platform is becoming an arena of struggle between traditionalists and modernists. The conflict between the two ideological forces of modernism and traditionalism holds a broader resonance for digital activism and bodes well for digital-based mediation of civic participation. It also shows the mobilization of marginalized segments such as women in Saudi Arabia, which are attempting to shape future modalities of the social space. The analysis reveals that Twitter appeals to a significant number of activists who are already engaged on the platform, but it is still too early to measure the impact of Twitter in empowering young female activists.

As a general prediction, the number of female Saudi Twitter users is likely to increase. Female Saudi Twitter users have created linkages of solidarity by sharing news and stories of their struggle. They have illustrated the importance of everyday interactions and solidarities which are renewed on a daily basis.

Twitter has helped the emergence of social activism, transforming the traditional relationships between authorities and peripheries. It has become easier for the powerless to collaborate and coordinate through the micro-blogging platforms to trigger some incremental and micro-social changes in Saudi society. It seems reasonable to conclude that studying Saudi society through traditional mass media is less promising than through social media, particularly the Saudi Twitterverse.

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The Peace Educational Potential of Social Media: Multilogues of National Self-Regeneration in the Pakistani Blogosphere

M. Ayaz Naseem

In this chapter, I examine the potential of the blogosphere for civic education.[1] My main argument is that in in-crisis societies such as Pakistan the blogosphere is a space where conversations and multilogues on issues that are crucial to societal regeneration are taking place. These conversations and multilogues in the blogosphere are democratic and inclusive in that they are not confined by the traditional articulations of "expertise", privilege and subject positioning. Neither the writer nor those who participate in the ensuing conversation have to be experts in a disciplinary sense. The participants are not privileged by credentials or by their positioning in the "knowledge" hierarchy. All agents of civil society can engage in these multilogues, some of which focus directly or indirectly on issues of national and societal self-regeneration.

In order to examine the potential of the blogosphere as a space for peace and self-regeneration (individual and societal), I examined a

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sizeable body of blogs written in both Urdu and English on various topics related to issues facing the Pakistani polity and society. These blogs were published on the blogging sites provided by the national newspapers. The situation of these blogs in national newspapers and media ensures a wide readership, and thus wide engagement. The analysis in this chapter is grounded in critical discourse analysis of blogs by two active bloggers, Rishadullah Sheikh and Farha Zahidi Moazzam in the blogging section of DAWN, a leading daily newspaper in Pakistan (www.DAWN.com). In particular, I examine the two blogs and the ensuing multilogues that stemmed from the discussions on the ideas presented by the authors. The first blog entitled "Confessions of a hijabi" by Farha Zahidi Moazzam explores the misconstrued issue of spirituality that has come to be essentialized through debates on the hijab.[2] This blog so far has 761 engagements. The second blog that I chose for analysis is written as a satire on various perceptions of terrorism. Written by Rishadullah Sheikh the blog entitled "My name is Khan and I am a terrorist" has generated a spirited multilogue with 139 responses and engagements. These blogs as multilogues carry in them contestations over meanings, articulations and representations of the "self" and the "other" in the broader context of self-regeneration of the Pakistani citizens, society and nation. These conversations highlight the civic and peace educational value of the blogosphere.

I have organized the discussion in this chapter in three sections. In the first section, I outline the main features of the blogosphere in order to highlight its potential as a new and unique space that enables new modes of existence, identity and representations. My main argument is that apart from the technological affordances that offer new possibilities for social interaction and engagement, the blogosphere has the potential to provide a new socio-political space in which the participants can engage in anti-hegemonic meaning making. My point of departure is Professor Barraclough's (1964) conceptualization of the "town" and the "factory" (see below) as conduits of change during the wave of decolonization. I argue that we can understand the social media and the blogosphere, in particular, as the new space that can foster similar change. In the second

section, I present the multilogues that ensued from the two blogs written by Zahidi and Sheikh. My purpose in reading and analysing these multilogues is to track the emergence of counter hegemonic "small-d" discourses on representation, regeneration of the self and the potential for discourse change. In the final section, I bring together the conceptual insights and the discursive evidence from the blogosphere in Pakistan to make preliminary conclusions about the potential of blogosphere as a space for peace education.

It would not be too far-fetched to depict social media as public commons. Metaphorically, it is a space where social agents forsake both the body and the place as discursively constituted subjects that consume as well as produce and shape the discourses in online and offline environments. The "meetings", interaction, relationships and conversations in social media range from sexual kinks to existing and emerging global orders and everything in between. The ensuing online and virtual relationships raise questions about representations, the relationship between "online" and "offline" forms of identity and behaviours, distinctions between the real and the virtual, and questions about the Self and the Other in online and offline environments.[3] Social media such as the blogosphere are seen (and sometimes contested) as spaces where technology mediates between the cultural and the social. It is where renegotiations between the Self and the Other take place. As public commons, social media offer a public space that allows pluri-vocalilty, transnational publics (and audiences) and transnational relationships. They also allow a space where the private voices of the citizens can be transformed into public voices (see Arshad-Ayaz in this volume). Social media can also be seen as space for contestations between what Deluze calls the "control society", where every action is monitored and the agentic society where digital panopticons are shattered every day. Social media are also an arena where a contestation between the corporations and states (that are oblivious to the "Hobbesian provisio") and the digital commoners (who are in a constant struggle to reclaim the digital commons) takes place continuously.

The Blogosphere

In its simplest form, a blog is a "frequently updated website consisting of dated entries in reverse chronological order" (Walker, 2003 cited in Davies and Merchant, 2008, p. 84). In order to create a blog, a user traditionally had meta filters. The first of these was for the URL of the referenced site, the second for the title of the entry, and the third for the commentary, text or analysis. Modern blogging tools are much simpler. The blogger, for instance, has journal-style blogging tools. The shift from the filter style to the journal style blog is responsible for the proliferation of blogs and bloggers. Both styles still exist.

The basic unit of the blogdom/blogosphere is a singular blog (Lampa, 2004, p. 4). By putting the latest first, the blogosphere emphasizes currentness, allows for interaction (engagement) through commentaries and facilitates interaction by providing hyperlinking among blogs. Unlike the traditional media, in a blogosphere it is the community who decides the importance of an issue (e.g. what is the top-rated issue or news). In this way, the blogosphere filters contents more democratically than the traditional media sources and thus forms its own mediascapes. Instead of deciding what will be most profitable (financially) to promote, the blogosphere promotes what its members find to be most interesting by means of both human and automated processes (Lampa, 2004, p. 4). "Unlike the profit driven enterprise of print-capitalism, the economy of the blogosphere is driven by the free dissemination of texts produced by unpaid amateurs" (Lampa, 2004, p. 2). This non-economic character of the blogosphere, according to Jay Rosen (2003 cited by Lampa) represents a shift from the status quo of the traditional print-media industry.

The absence of profit as a motivating factor is what distinguishes the new media from the old. Due to the profit motivation of the print media, it is the marketability and the profit orientation that hinders certain ideas to enter into cultural consciousness (Lampa, 2004). According to Greg Ruggiero, "[Old] media is a corporate possession…you cannot participate in the media. Bringing that into foreground is the first step. The second step is to define the difference between public and audience. An audience is passive; a public is participatory. We need a definition of

media that is public in its orientation" (cited in Blood, 2000/2013, p. 2). The new media does exactly that. Due largely to its participatory nature, new media transforms the passive audience into a public (boyd, 2008). It also affords the writer the opportunity to transform from a consumer to a producer of media texts or to a combination of the two. In the context of blogging, Lampa writes, "a blog empowers the writer with greater freedom to provide colorful, subjective, and political commentary than would be possible within the framework of a traditional media outlet, which has an economic interest in maintaining a sense of detached objectivity" (Lampa, 2004, p. 2).

While the not-for-profit motivation might reflect the general trend in blogosphere, this is not to deny that blogs can be used for profit motives (e.g. by corporations, businesses) or that bloggers can be employed by the businesses to write sympathetic, pro-business blogs. Thus, one must take into account the affordances of technology (the Internet, the computer, SMS, WEB 2.0) and the appropriation of media space that may lead to particular cultural and political landscapes and configurations by for-profit media, such as YAHOO's acquisition of TUMBLR. Some blogging sites are run and managed by for-profit print and electronic media and so on. Additionally, blog indices such as Blogdex, Technorati, Daypop and popdex may reintroduce the "gaze" and the "expert", which will be discussed below.

The sites and links chosen by the blogger to display their blog can be called, following Danath and Boyd, "a public display of connection". However, as Davies and Merchant (2009) suggest, it is important to understand "what blogging is, what it can do and how blogs work as part of meaning making" (p. 82). The sequential and chronological unfolding of a blogger's thoughts and ideas suggests that it could be useful in understanding the development of author's narrative. The blogger's voice invites and invokes feeling of accessibility and familiarity (Risdahl, 2006) and invites general engagement. This is the community aspect of the blog and the blogging community.

When one critically considers global Internet access and usage, it is clear that the blogging community represents a relatively small number of global elite who have the luxury of time, talent and expendable wealth

(Lampa, 2004, p. 5). However, as I shall argue below, it can also be understood as a community of engaged citizens weary of the gaze and the expertise of the so-called experts. Seen as the "new" town (Barraclough, 1964, discussed below) this is where ideas are disseminated to the wider community: the elite might be "elitist" in terms of having access to the technology, the Internet, time and language abilities, but they might not be elitist in terms of ideas and counter discourses. For example, Kevin Barbieux, who used Internet in public libraries to rise to fame as the "homeless guy", might not have had resources but it was his ideas that were counter-hegemonic and aimed at civic engagement (Luo, 2003; Barbieux, 2003 cited by Lampa, 2004, p. 6).

Blogging has been defined and understood differently by different scholars. For example, it has been defined by the authors of the influential PEW study on Internet use after 9/11 as DIY journalism. New literacies scholars Davies and Merchant (2008) define blogging as citizen journalism, as a text-making practice, and as a literacy practice. Richardson (2006 in Davies and Merchant) articulates blogging as Read-write-think-link. Two influential studies (The PEW (Rainie, 2005) and the Perseus (2003) studies categorize the blogosphere and the blogging community in terms of active bloggers (2–7%) and the passive periphery (what Perseus study calls the "teenage girls" who write blogs only for their family and friends). While the numbers might be illustrative, I find this categorization problematic on three accounts. One, it follows the Enlightenment binary of public/private with "teenage girls" situated in the second half of the binary and thus not as valued or valuable as the "active blogger". Two, epistemologically, it follows the Enlightenment schema on the sources of knowledge where personal experience is not a legitimate source of knowledge. This categorization overlooks the experience and agency of the teenage girls as a source of knowledge. It also precludes the possibility that valuable and important insights could be gleaned from the experiential texts written by the "teenage girl" bloggers. It also renders the "teenage girl" as less valuable and non-expert. Finally, the narrow view and definition of what constitutes a blog purely on a count of how often it is updated (Perseus, 2003) and the average life span of a blog leaves out the qualitative knowledge and meaning making aspects of the narratives that might not be updated with the regular

frequency of a technical blog. This is perhaps the key difference between a technical and a social or political blog.

When viewed in a qualitative and civic sense as a "community in a space", or when viewed as a (possible) counter hegemonic discursive space, the importance of blogosphere as the "new" social medium starts to emerge. To fully understand the importance of blogs and the blogosphere one needs to look at the qualitative (impact) side rather than just the quantitative aspects. Though understood as such, the community that the blogosphere represents (or might represent) does not necessarily has to be a community of bloggers—those who write and interact with other bloggers—rather, it should be investigated in terms of a community-of-purpose; a community comprising of the blogger and the reader and those who engage with both.

Graham Lampa, following Benedict Anderson, understands the "imagined community" in the blogosphere as resulting from the "shared experience of instant publishing" (2004, p. 2). Building on Anderson's notion of "style" in which communities are imagined, Lampa argues that the blogging community comes into the imagination in a "style" that stems from instant publishing medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, online imagined community. While useful, this understanding of the community ignores the reader—the vital member of the community who is not merely a consumer of the bloggers' text but one who engages with the text to produce alternative texts and thus the possibility of discourse change.

There are two important functions that the blogging community has come to perform in the recent years. First, it acts as a channel for counter hegemonic ideas. Second, it acts as a watchdog to ensure that ideas remain current even if they are not deemed newsworthy by the mainstream media. These functions not only separate it from the traditional print and media journalism community and give it a unique fifth estate status; they also lend members a sense of cohesion as a community by emphasizing their commonality of purpose. The blogosphere acts as a conduit for non-mainstream ideas (not considered valuable/important by the traditional media) to become a part of the cultural consciousness. Metaphorically, the new currency of this new medium is the idea that it may have been marginalized by the mainstream news producers. The "profit" motivation

is to get out of the experts' gaze, to put forth the ignored/marginalized idea. For example, during 9/11 bloggers were able to put forth "first hand unedited accounts of the common people in New York and Washington DC that otherwise may have been lost amid broadcast media's more pressing coverage of the overarching national security issues" (Rainie, Fox, & Madden, 2002 cited in Lampa, p. 3). On other occasions such as reporting the racist comments of the Senate minority leader Trent Lott, the bloggers kept the issue alive when the traditional media had let it slip. These two events reinforced the blogging community's own sense of purpose and agency. As Lampa argues blogging has a democratic effect that can evoke feelings of shared experience. It engages the users as both consumers and producers of texts and meanings. A third function that participatory social media such as the blogosphere have performed is to force the traditional print media to become more participatory. There is now greater participation allowed by the traditional media in shape of comments and so on, that they invite on every news item. Almost all of the major print media have their own bloggers and blogging sites. Similarly, electronic media have also instituted interactive features on their websites. However, one could argue that the selection of news and issues is still what marks the difference between the traditional media outlets and the more participatory social media/blogosphere. In the old media what appears as news is still under the purview of the editors/management. In new media it is the participants and the community that decides what becomes news.

The blog includes, brings in and brings to the fore the mundane (what a blogger noticed on the sidewalk, what she ate, the movie/book she/he enjoyed or otherwise) and makes it important. It makes the personal newsworthy, a source of new shared knowledge. Epistemologically, it brings the profane into the realm of sacred. Methodologically, it brings in the hitherto excluded sources and sites of knowledge (experiential, performative and personal) and positions them as counterweights to the holy grail of logic, empiricism and rationality. It personalizes the public and publicizes the private. It also aggregates the experiences of the readers and writers not in the immediate vicinity of each other, thus globalizing the local and localizing the global. In other words, it creates an imagined community of shared experiences that, in contrast to Anderson's print

media-based communities is not based in nationalism but on issues of shared concern, interest and experiences.

By providing hyperlinks, bloggers are able to provide the "audience" with the information on which the bloggers base their analysis. In doing so they may also be inviting the consumers/producers to make alternative meanings, read the texts differently, and to engage not only with the author but also with the texts that influenced the author in the first place (and perhaps engage with the reading of the author of these texts). According to Lampa "it is in these small, tightly knit bundles of blogs (texts and engagements) where a kernel of real interactive community lies…the most striking feature of the imagined community of blogging is that it enables users to both experience a shared base of knowledge and to contribute directly to that cultural consciousness" (2004, p. 4: Parentheses added).

Social Media: The New "Town" and "Factory"

Celebrated British historian Geoffrey Barraclough (1964) noted in his analysis of the decolonization of Asia and Africa that what the colonists failed to see in the colonized world was the remarkable ability of these societies at self-renewal. As he wrote:

> More fundamental in the long run than the pressures resulting from the interplay of power politics were two other factors. The first was the assimilation by Asians and Africans of western ideas, techniques and institutions, which could be turned against the occupying powers—a process in which they proved far more adept than most Europeans had anticipated. The second was the *vitality and capacity for self-renewal of societies* which Europeans had too easily dismissed as stagnant, and decrepit or moribund. (p. 149; emphasis added)

These factors led to self-renewal in the former colonies and saw the emergence of 40 new national and cultural identities in a short span of 15 years from 1945 to 1960 (Barraclough, 1964, p. 148). However, a number of these societies are again being written off as "failed states", "societies in

crisis" and "basket cases". Scholars, politicians and pundits both in the Western world and within the in-crisis societies are almost willing to write them off. Once again, what is being ignored is their capacity at self-renewal and their ability to make use of spaces made available by knowledge and technology to assert their identities and for self-renewal.

During the wave of self-renewal that led to independence, newer social and political spaces such as the "town", the "factory" and the "short wave radio" (along with the print media) provided the space where agency for self-renewal could aggregate. The civic educational potential of these spaces was immense and yet had been overlooked in most analyses of societal self-renewals. On the role that "towns" played in the self-renewal and the eventual decolonization of India Barraclough wrote:

> the most spectacular aspect…was the growth of towns; and the new towns generated both a social life of their own, unlike any that had previously existed…Four main consequences [of the emergence of towns] ensued. First, the towns threw up a new stratum of tough, emancipated, politically active men… Secondly, they provided a mass audience. Thirdly, they acted as new focuses of national unity, which cut through tribal divisions and formed an urban network… And finally, the tremendous improvement in communications which economic progress necessitated enabled leaders to forge organizations which covered the whole country. (1964, pp. 186–187; parentheses added)

As we refocus our attention to these societies, we must look for newer spaces that offer room for initiating and then aggregating (and disseminating) conversations and multilogues on possibilities of self-renewal. I contend that just as during the decolonization movement the "towns" acted as spaces for trans-ethnic/racial/religious congregation of the colonized subjects, the new media also provide spaces where people can congregate across their traditional loyalties and affiliations and engage in conversations about societal issues that stand in the way of self-renewal and peace. The new media, in fact, go beyond Barraclough's notion of "towns" in the sense that they are not geographically static as the "towns" were during the decolonization movements. Thus, people from various geographical locations can assemble, talk to each other and take back

ideas for dissemination. Secondly, new media as the new "town" is much more participatory. While the "town" provided an audience that the leaders of the nationalist movement could talk to and mobilize, new media as the new "town" provides a space in which audiences can transform into active publics. Finally, the new media offer a space in which the publics (if they so wish) do not have to follow the leadership (political, religious, academic, media). In the new space, ideas lead. There are no leaders, no followers, just comrades.

National and Societal Self-Regeneration in the Pakistani Blogosphere

Pakistan has been in the proverbial "eye of the storm" for the past many years. It is seen by many (both at home and abroad) as a failed state, a nexus of instability, and of late as the epicentre of both terrorism and the war on terror. According to a recent report by an influential think tank, since 9/11 there have been more civilian casualties in Pakistan than in Iraq and Afghanistan combined, where active military conflict is underway. In addition, there are deep political, social and religious schisms that are seen as the failure of the society (and the state). As a result, many analysts and critics have wondered about the future of the society and the state's function in the society of nations and states. In many of these analyses what is rather understated (if stated at all) is the potential of the society to self-renew and the means that can be instrumental to such self-renewal.

The two blogs I analyse here touch upon two of the issues that are the epicentre of debates in and on Pakistan, both at home and abroad. First of these issues is that of the Hijab, an issue that is considered central to the questions of identity in the Muslim world and in Pakistan. This issue also connects conversations on and about issues such as liberty, gender equity and democracy both in Pakistan and abroad. This, ironically, is also one of the issues to which conversations and analyses of Islamic identity are reduced. The second issue is that of terrorism, particularly the so-called Islamic terrorism that is central to many debates and

conversations today. Again, the reductive analyses see this issue related to the way we (the world) understand or should understand a people. In a larger context these issues relate to questions about representation, recognition, identity and subjectivity.

Conversations on these two issues (among many) have largely been carried out in the traditional media and academic spaces; analyses are rendered, verdict passed. These conversations, analyses and academic verdicts are undertaken from a position of power and privilege: the power and the privilege of "expertise" (political, journalistic, religious and academic). What is missing in a number of these conversations is the voice of the subject. This raises the question which Guyatri Spivak (1988) raised in her landmark article of the same title: "Can the sub-altern speak?" It is clear from a reading (and analysis) of the Pakistani blogosphere that the subjects, the sub-altern, the written-off people of Pakistan are speaking but as Frantz Fanon (1963) would say, they might not be interested in speaking to us (the holders of academic/political/religious power and privilege). They are speaking among themselves, to each other on issues that matter to them. In doing so not only are they initiating and carrying on conversations, multilogues and "small-d" discourses but they are also using their agency to deprivilege, deposition and depower us: they are making us irrelevant—they are saying do not undermine our capacity at self-renewal. They are using the new "town" and the "factory": they are using new spaces where the oppression of expertise, fancy initials after the last name and academic snobbery are absent. They are using the gathering grounds of the social media with or without the experts—with or without us—to redefine the issues and rearticulate them. Let me first take Farah Zahidi Moazzam's blog to illustrate this.

"Confessions of a Hijabi": The Journey; the Choice

Confessions of a hijabi by Farah Zahidi Moazzam explores the misunderstood issue of spirituality that has come to be essentialized through debates on hijab. This blog was posted on March 23, 2010, and has 761

engagements. Following is a paraphrased version of the blog. The complete version of the blog is available at Zahidi (2010).

In this autobiographical blog Farah Zahidi Moazzam, the blogger narrates her journey to wearing a hijab. According to her, she grew up in a democratic family where the kids were given the autonomy to think, disagree and question. During her teen years, the author started studying the Quran in translation in an "effort to better understand its meanings". According to the blogger, her teen years were not unlike those of any teenager with hairstyle and looking good being the prime goals in life. However, inspired by the study of the Quran, she started contemplating wearing a hijab. After a brief inner struggle, she started covering her hair not knowing if this change will be permanent or not. It was not an easy decision "for someone whose hairstyle was her signature trademark". Furthermore, according to the author, hijab was not as common in those days as it is now and thus, she had to face opposition and even ridicule. According to the author, people called her derogatory names such as "Ninja, Fundo, Taliban" and advised her to forsake the "life" and devote it to religion. The blogger, then, addresses the critical connection between religion, identity and personal freedom. As she writes, "Amongst all these reactions, what I wanted was fairly simple. I just wanted everyone to treat me as they always had, like a normal person. Just let me be. I wasn't abnormal. I was just a non-conformist who wanted to follow her religion. I was a woman making a choice, which is normally perceived as a sign of emancipation. It was strange to me that some as a sign of oppression, and worse, extremism differently saw my dressing".

Although framed within the traditional liberal lexicon of "choice", and "emancipation", this narrative clearly makes an attempt at border-crossing the boundaries between the religious, political and academic discourses/explanations on the one hand and between the personal and the public on the other. Although Pakistani and Muslim feminists have contended the meanings of hijab from a feminist perspective, as a subject and as an issue hijab has traditionally been discussed, articulated and contended in and between the religious, political and academic, ironically, mostly male authorities. Explanations and articulations from the traditional sources are either addressed to their respective counterparts or used to create particular ways of knowing (sermonizing) for the "not-knowing" subjects.

Moazzam's narrative, in its liminality, attempts to contend with the dominant explanations while trying to avoid the gaze of the experts. By opening up her alterity Zahidi seeks enfranchisement through engagement with her fellow subjects. Through an exposé of her alterity she also questions and reveals the fallacy of the dominant perception that hijab is a norm in Pakistan.

The multilogue that ensued the posting of "Confessions of a hijabi" clearly shows that people (read: the subjects of the hijab discourse in Pakistan) are disgruntled and dissatisfied with the explanations forwarded by the so-called experts and do make an effort to shun the expert "gaze". This is, for example, demonstrated by the fact that in the 761 engagements on the blog there are simply no references to the scholarly literature or discourses on hijab. Similarly, there are hardly any references to the religious scriptures, interpretations by religious scholars or the historical-nationalist narratives that Pakistanis grow up within their social, cultural and academic lives. The conversation that ensues is a social conversation not a religious one; it is an in-the-moment conversation which is also democratically multivocal in that it does not silence dissent or exclude contending opinions. Its epicentre understands hijab in reference to the subject of hijab, her subjectivity, her spirituality, reflexivity and choice. The multilogue is not, however, without contention. For example, Nissa, a participant in the conversation, writes the following in response to the blog that also accompanied a photograph of Moazzam:

> You wear hijab… you started studying Quran at a very early age… you wrote a very good article… but tell me how you justify publishing of your picture with kajal in your eyes and a broad attractive smile for everyone…. Islam do not [*sic*] let you appear like this in front of public means "na mehrum" … ???? I believe this is the biggest contradiction of girls wearing hijab….just covering head is not parda (Veil) in Islam…. you must lower your gaze while among public…you must not wear any make up… so what do you say now ….??????????????????????????????? (Parenthesis added)

Khalid Mahmood responds to Nissa as follows:

Well, some are questioning the consistency of some who wear headscarf and that is fine. However, with all that inconsistency (make up and all), if then a person wears headscarf surely there might be there some element of religious consciousness and/or concern for modesty, so why decry it? Another thing, how do we know that women who did not observe hijab when they were young and beautiful and when old adopted it are hypocrites and how do we from that infer that religion is a "show"? Also, how do we know they have a holier than thou attitude? Must not we avoid unverifiable conjecture? And, if we must guess it should be to give them benefit of doubt.

The exchange between Nissa and Kahlid Mahmood is reflective of the struggle to understand the meaning of hijab outside of the meanings that traditional religious, cultural and political discourses have fixed for hijab. Neither invokes any religious or traditionally authoritative sources to raise the questions or to make their respective points. What is interesting is also the struggle to test the boundaries of the public and the private. This can be taken as an example of attempts to shift the discursive meaning making that has traditionally been in the realm of knowledge authorities (political, religious and academic). Zehra Wamiq writes: "Good thing is that she is wearing hijab to please Allah and not people like Nissa, because no matter what one do nothing is ever good enough for them. They will always be judgemental and arrogant about their knowledge of religion". Rahul replies:

In another religion called Sanatan Dharm, they have a saying—all religions are but paths to God. Feel free to follow, as you shall arrive at God., who is one. I have kept this simple and it may deviate a bit from the actual in Sanskrit. The point is that the thoughts of the follower lead to God. Dogma, dress etc. do not. Unfortunately Sanatan Dharmis follow dress as a big thing to decide if they're godly or not….and I know too that so is the case in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam etc. where the dresscode is the accepted method to go to God, not the thoughts and deeds alone of the follower.

That's where there is a problem. Including for Farah and others. Dress incidentally (see Kara Swart's comments too) is to do with climate and geography, as is food, food habits and so on. Belief is in the six-eight inches

of the brain, and need not be something we need to "cover" ourselves with, unless, like the old saying "empty vessels make the most noise" …and daresay, the most covering up?????

As the multilogue progresses we see that the articulation (meaning fixation) is contended by the subjects on multiple levels and from multiple perspectives. The multilogue on hijab marks a clear shift in the discourse—from one(s) that either see/understand/constitute hijabi women as either victims of an oppressive religio-political order (the Western and Western-inspired discourses), or that articulate women only as religious and cultural subjects (the religio-political discourses endemic to Pakistan). The participants of the multi-vocal, multi-gendered conversation are using this newfound space to "talk" to each other and contest each other's perspectives from multiple epistemic political and social positions outside of the gaze of the religious, political and academic "expert".

My Name Is Khan and I Am a Terrorist

"My name is Khan and I am a terrorist" by Sheikh (2010) appeared on November 8, 2010. The blog, written as a satire on the sensitive topic of terrorism, especially in the context of youth radicalization in Pakistan, has generated a spirited multilogue with 133 responses. Let me start with a paraphrased version of the blog:

With a play on the title of a popular Indian film in which the hero, who suffers from Asperger syndrome, insists 'my name is Khan but I am not a terrorist', Rishad Sheikh addresses the issue of radicalization of youth in Pakistan through a satirical blog. According to the blogger, he was never a religious person and preferred to call himself an atheist or at best an agnostic. In fact, according to him, the ultra-religious elements in Pakistan might even have called him an infidel. He then goes on to narrate a satirical account of his journey/transition from being an atheist/agnostic to "becoming a Muslim firstly and then a terrorist willing to unleash my wrath on the enemies of Islam". According to Sheikh, he was young when the 9/11 attacks happened. Initially, he was 'shocked' at the fact that a group of Muslims had carried out the horrendous acts. He was also perplexed as to

what could "trigger Muslims to commit such an evil act all the while calling it Jihad in the name of God". He then witnessed the media trial of Muslims in addition to the US-led War on Terror that resulted in the US military action in Afghanistan, the second Gulf War, and phenomenon such as the incarceration of Muslims at Guantanamo Bay, killing of Muslims as collateral damage in US drone strikes, etc. According to the protagonist of the blog, he also witnessed the vilification of Islam and the entire Muslim population on Western media. Thoroughly perplexed, the protagonist started looking for answers in the usual places—academia, the religious institutions, and the political leadership. However, none of the traditional sources of knowledge could give him a satisfactory explanation. According to the protagonist of the blog, "I was young and the way events were unfolding around me got me really confused… Their failure to do so made me look elsewhere and that is where I found what you would call, "the radical camp". They inundated me with real Islamic knowledge and solutions with the help of religious texts and thus provided me with a ticket to Jannah (heaven). Inspired by heroes that stood up against oppression in the history of Islam…, I too decided that if I was going to die then it would be fighting against the enemies of Islam".

"My name is Khan and I am a terrorist" bares the discontentment with the available explanations emanating from both the Western media and the traditional sources in Pakistan on issues of terrorism and youth radicalization in Pakistan and the Muslim world. Sheikh's narrative can be seen as a lament of countless young Muslims seeking answers and explanations for the post-9/11 world. Written as a satire it attempts to reveal the struggle of young people in reconciling the tragic events of the 9/11 attacks and the equally ferocious and traumatic US response evident in its campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and the drone attacks in Pakistan. Sheikh bemoans the explanations from both sides for their partisanship and inadequacy. Especially, he blames the traditional religious (and academic) experts and authorities for not being able to provide the youth with convincing, comprehensible ways of understanding the post-9/11 world. It is not surprising that the perplexed youth (may) gravitate to the netherworlds of extremist explanations on the Internet, social media and such.

As with Moazzam's blog, Sheikh's musings about terrorism, its articulation through the "war-on-terror" discourse in the west and the

religio-political discourses at home, received a spirited engagement from fellow Pakistanis (and some across the border in India) in the blogosphere. Muhammad writes:

> Suicide in any form is Tabu (haram) in Islam or in any religion of Allah SBT like Judaism or Christinity. Your life is given to you to do good deeds in this world and pass on to eternity. Be a good beleiver and leave everything else on God to decide. You have no right to take any other life without a reason indicated. You need not be a scholler or a priest or a cleric to be a good believer. Allah knows what is in your heart and mind. Please read your holy books, obey the basic principles of your religion and be cordial towards other faiths. I am sure world will be a better place. Allah loves us all, muslims, christians, jews, even the non beleiver athiests and hindus as we all are HIS creation. His guidance is required and we all must prey for that. Respect others and be good listeners.

AZAD replies: "Thank you brother Mohammad, you are the first one to include all of God's creations in the same paragraph!!! We need more like you. We must spread the message of all beliefs and faiths being Allah's creations. That will help curb the crazies in our society". And Ali Ghafoor comments:

> Great write Mr. Rashid, but i would still disagree. Being a Khan, doesnt mean that people are more proned to being terrorist.
>
> It means that they live in an area, where Government fails to function. But i am yet to see a place where our Government does function. Take the latest example of Karachi.
>
> I actually find it really hard to believe when some times DAWN pretends to induce this new idea in the mind of our people that we are really bad. But the fact is WE ARE STARVED.
>
> We are starved of our rights. Living in our country, we stay afraid. The constitution of our country which is held so high by the politicians also provide us our rights, which we dont demand. An empy mind is the home of the devil.
>
> You can extinguish the smoke, but the fire still remains. We have to agree that we are a crowd of ignorant people with little or no patience for each other. We are bombed with advertisements of boys and girls speaking and talking to each other on various mobile networks. Coke advertises us as "

Kha lei, Pee Lei, Jee lei" We have branded our selves as time passers and we would not chose to contribute to our systems.

Muhammad's reply:

> Dude, you missed the point! The author doesn't blame the Islamic ideology. In fact, if you read his other article, he states that the Islamic way of dealing with such issues is not through violence, suicide bombings and killing of innocents. He is just pointing out that there are some scholars that encourage young Muslims to adopt these means that are against the principles of Islam.

Ahsen Wali Mohammad then points out that "The article is meant to be sarcastic!", while Asad Khan comments, "We dont suffer from Terrorism, we suffer from Starvation". In reply, Syed Rizvi point out that:

> There is no doubt that the extremists and fundamentalists have hijacked the religion of islam and are incessantly violating the basic principles of islam and making a mockery of it in front of the whole world. They are the one who have always acted in the interest of american and other imperial powers and have caused maximum damage to the muslims. until and unless we will not get rid of these nomadic mullahs we cant compete with the world and for that we will have to work really hard.

Written in an ironical parlance this blog relies on humor to say the unsayable: the traditional discourses on terrorism, disseminated through the media, the pulpit, the educational systems and the political podium are neither realistic nor do they have adequate explanatory prowess. The lack of satisfactory explanation pushes Pakistanis/Muslims to look for explanations elsewhere, mainly the Internet. And here the dark side of social media and the Internet kicks in and the extremist messages in the virtual space lure them to obscurantist discourses on Islam, jihad and so on. However, as the ensuing conversation and multilogue shows, young Pakistanis use the same space provided by the participatory social media that lures them to radicalization to talk to each other in an attempt to redefine and understand the sensitive, contentious and controversial issues that mediate their worldviews. What can also be noticed here is

that unlike Moazzam's blog on the issue of hijab, the conversations on terrorism inadvertently emanate from or go back to the mainstream discourses on terrorism (anti-Americanism, Islamic ideology, national security, etc.). Notwithstanding the seduction and power of the traditional discourses what is also apparent is that people in the conversation want a rupture in the discourse on terrorism to able to see (and show) that while this might be important it is not the only or the real issue that affects Pakistanis in their daily lives. Bigger issues, according to the participants of the multilogue, are poverty, lack of development and political apathy. Another issue is also the ideological overtones of the explanations that the media, the educational system and the religious elite provide. In these conversations there is a clear desire to redefine issues and prioritize them by their relevance to the problems that people face in Pakistan. Social media and the blogosphere provide these people with space in which to reexamine and understand these and other important issues, not through the academic, religious and political lenses provided to them by the traditional sources but by rejecting the experts and their gaze. They are redefining and reexamining the issues by talking to them in this participatory space.

Conclusions

The promise of participatory media such as the blogosphere is that voices, especially the ones that have been excluded and marginalized, could flourish, communicate and connect. The blogosphere as an important part of participatory social media provides people with no technical expertise the space in which they can be a part of the conversations that are about them but have been carried out by others in their name.

While social media are largely seen as catering primarily to the "connected" developed world and its citizenry, the have-nots also use them for airing their problems, issues and grievances. In this context, the potential of social media is immense. In another sense, however, there are still numerous limitations that have to be accounted for. To begin with, the populace of the developing world is only minimally connected to the Internet. Then, there are barriers of language, technical expertise and

education that further limit the potential of the use of the Internet and social media as a tool for the citizenry of the developing world to air and to try to solve their problems. Notwithstanding these limitations and problems, there is immense potential for participatory media to bringing people into a discursive space where they can reflectively and reflexively engage in discussion on contentious issues.

What emerges from a reading of the selections from the Pakistani blogosphere—both English and Urdu selections—is that the new space offered by the proliferation of social media is being utilized by the citizens of Pakistan to explore issues that previously were deemed to be under the proprietorship of the academic elite, the knowledge brokers, religious scholars and the clergy, the politicians and the media. As yet we do not know the impact of these multilogues, away from the gaze of the traditional meaning makers on what shape the agency of these Allah Rakhas (commoners) will take. However, as witnessed in the past few years, conversations in this new space have resulted in keeping the issues alive (e.g. Shahzeb case, the Massacre of the Hazara Shias). The blogosphere as one example of social media has also been influential in transforming private voices into public ones. But most significantly, it is in this space that new meaning making is taking place. This meaning making is disruptive, it is transgressive, and it could be counter hegemonic.

At the same time social media, especially the blogosphere, is only one of the avenues or spaces where this is happening. Meaning making in this space is in contestation with the other discursive processes that articulate the political, social, cultural and religious processes. Indeed, meaning making in this space is fluid and also in contestation with other discursive processes that are also a part of this space. It is in these contestations that I see the potential of societal self-renewal. Just as the town and the factory provided the space for ideas and meanings to be articulated and then carried out in Asia, and Africa at the start of the twentieth century, social media is perhaps the space where new ideas, those of self-renewal, will be articulated and carried out.

Notes

1. Based on research carried out as Georg Arnhold Visiting Research Professor at the Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany during summer 2013 and 2014. An earlier, abridged version of this paper appears as an article in Fall 2015 issue of *Journal of Education in Muslim Society*. I acknowledge the permission of the editors to use parts the paper in this chapter.
2. Hijab normally refers to the head covering used by Muslim women. From one society to another the form of covering varies from an absolute shroud (Burqa) to a large stole that covers the entire body (Chador) to a scarf that covers the head (Dupatta) and/or face (Niqab).
3. Although there are different and contending views about the separation between online and offline realities I believe that while both intersect and influence each other, online environments are unique in terms of how identities are performed by the 'digital' subjects and thus should, at least for the time being, treated separately.

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9

Tavaana: E-Learning and the Online Civic Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran

Babak Rahimi

The emerging capabilities of technology-based strategies for collective action have been documented in the case of numerous social movements. Regardless of their effectiveness and in their various political manifestations, social movements have adopted complex and multidimensional mediated practices to bring about social change in varied local and global contexts. As socially engaged actors, internet activists, engaged with the interconnected digital networks for political objectives with local and global reach, have distinctively demonstrated the capability to go beyond mainstream media, by and large, represented by various mass media outlets that reflect or maintain prevailing public opinions. As social movements with claims to create alternative existing media infrastructure, internet activism has also often employed network forms of interaction through information communication technologies (ICTs) to bring about civic and political change, at times with immediate impact. The most

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significant contribution of internet activism has been the embrace of participatory action articulated on various ideological frameworks and, more importantly, the implementation of a combination of offline and online practices with varying degrees of access and interaction. What defines internet activism are the actors who deploy technological resources and strategies for contestation in a variety of socio-political spheres and, in doing so, foster new experiences with technologies perceived as disruptive on politics and society at large.

The capacity to optimize the deployment of resources and strategies in the form of expediency and multi-faceted platform underlines a key feature of internet activism. But such optimization also entails discourses and practices, technological or otherwise, that contest frames of knowledge about the "common good" and contentious ways such frames are maintained and promoted in shifting social contexts. While gender, class, ethnicity, race and sexuality play a critical role in defining frames of internet activism, perceptions and implementation of technology for the promotion of civic life, in its various conceptions, are also vital in how political change is achieved. The promotion of "civic life" on internet activism does not only stress the participatory culture and social engagement from below, but also the desire in building trust and solidarity through technology as both resource and impetus for collective action.[1] The premise of civic action in its internet form is, therefore, the insistence on agency as critical response to dominant practices and representations of power, which the new technology is perceived to carve out as new spaces with the capacity to change on horizontal and decentralized ways.

The claim that the following study presents is that civic activism of the internet with the aim of education and peace building is rooted in technology imagined as agency of change. Broadly speaking, "online" civic activism shares what all forms of social movements entail, and that is: building solidarity toward a cause perceived as a public good. While attempting to build citizenry culture of trust and democratic plurality, online activism, by extension, also engages with collective strategies of technology-based activism in redefining the public sphere. Online civic activism, in a critical sense, is not about participation in a remote "virtual" realm with some "offline" impact, but indicative of social capital formation charged with norms of action and trust through collaborative

action, which are central to the production of collective welfare.[2] Such social capital may bring correlation of action tempered with competing notions of justice, at times promoted by the state apparatus, but for the most part it combines civic participatory values by employing technology perceived as a strategic action.

The following discussion examines the case of an online learning website, Tavaana: an "e-learning institute for Iranian civil society". Founded and operated largely by the Iranian diaspora community based in the US, and supported by state and high-tech corporations, since 2010, Tavaana represents a case of online civic activism that promotes democratic values through online education.[3] I demonstrate Tavaana's various features of the internet-based civic education for the promotion of democracy in Iran is in itself a performance *as* a political act. Essential to the case of Tavaana is the strategic use of technology by the Iranian diaspora to shape a publicly accessible and "open" educational platform as a critical space to promote civic participation and democratic norms in a country under the control of an authoritarian rule.

Though not the only online e-learning website, Tavaana is the first and arguably the most civic-minded and interactive online forum in the Persian-language internet domain. The e-learning site is also one of the most visited (over 620,000 followers on Facebook in 2020) and utilized e-service and, as a non-profit organization. It is also one of the best funded with state and corporation grants.[4] Moreover, Tavaana maintains the most active educational e-services on social media such as Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube with wide-ranging forms of e-activities such as manuals, video lectures, PowerPoint presentations, and podcasts.[5] As a civic and political e-learning service, Tavaana also has a mobile App, designed specifically for a booming smartphone market in Iran.

As Tavaana best demonstrates, online civic activism is also charged with conceptions of the new technology as a medium of democratic change. The politics of e-education is essentially, I argue, about how new technology has built-in political dimensions, and this aspect plays a key feature in the ways in which an advocacy agency such as Tavaana would involve a particular mode of network activism for its civic-minded online operations.[6] Tavaana's network operations signify multi-platform activities and leverage information to increase educational advantage through

interactive and collaborative projects in assumed decentralized organization forms and, more importantly, in transnational settings. What is promoted in the process, I finally suggest, is the reinvention of civil society through an enclave network mediation carried out through digital technologies perceived as a democratic platform to harness space for peace education.

The Iranian Civic Sphere

With renewed interest in civil society, particularly after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the idea of an independent sphere of civil public life has served to mediate conceptions about public life beyond the private and state domains. Though the civil sphere may inherently exclude incivility of action and consequence, at the heart of the concept sits the critical theme of social solidarity, civic and associational life. The civil sphere rests upon the degree to which solidarity depends, in part, on communicative practices that lead to organizational forms, collective action procedures, and civilizing ways of practicing politics in the public domain.

However, the civil sphere also comprises state-mandated institutional reconstruction of the public sphere and reconfiguration of structures of feeling and behavior in civilizing processes with varied consequences. The case of Iran best demonstrates the intersection of civility and state power, and by extension the entwinement of civic action and regulative processes in building or undoing trust in the formation of new collectivities. As Jeffery Alexander has argued, throughout the history of civil sphere the symbolic demands for recognition and expansion of civility in the public sphere has always faced legal and state interventions, and by extension inclusive and exclusive social formations, staging an ongoing contention and repair of norms of behavior and associations within the changing public sphere of everyday life.[7]

The ambivalence in solidarity is best demonstrated in the development of Iranian civil society and the emergence of public sphere in the early modern period. The modern origins of the Iranian civic sphere with its distinct Perso-Shiʿi identity can be traced back to the construction of the new Isfahan under the Safavids (1501–1722) in the late sixteenth and

early seventeenth centuries. Commissioned by Shah Abbas I (1571–1629), the formation of new urban spaces in Isfahan unleashed the institutionalization of new civic associations with a close connection to military-building and popular Shiʿi practices as imperial projects to convert the population to Shiʿism. The proliferation of newly designed public spaces of conviviality, exchange, and self-cultivation such as markets (*bazaar*), coffeehouses (*qahvekhwaneh*), travel lodges (*caravanserai*), public baths (*hammam*), schools (*madrasah*), squares (*maydan*), and sports clubs (*zurkhwaneh*), along with the promotion of ritual practices such as commemorative rituals of Muharram, overlapped with the consolidation of socio-professional groups, guilds, *futuvvat* (chivalry) associations, and religious circles.

While the eighteenth century witnessed enhanced interaction between urban spaces and civic associations with the institutionalization of Shiʿism in Iranian society, by the nineteenth century, under the Qajars, the bazaar, guilds and neighborhood complexes emerged in the form of formal and informal social ties of larger social organizations that included close cooperation with the monarchy. With the late nineteenth century tensions between the Qajars and civic associations such as the bazaar and the clerics grew due to royal concessions granted to Great Britain. However, what also emerged from the tension was a thriving civic sphere entrenched in a contentious politics for political change.

The 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution was unleashed due to a combination of strong (largely neighborhood-tribal-bazaar-guild-cleric) and weak ties (intellectuals-writers in diaspora) currents that identified a new democratic era. Meanwhile the Pahlavi modernization (1925–1979) introduced a new set of social relations and formation of the public sphere. It included the gradual consolidation of the monarchy under a centralized state under Reza Shah (1878–1944) with an emphasis on economic growth through education, industrialization, urbanization, and cultural capital. However, the bazaar, as a civic market institution, clerics and along with other emerging actors such as nationalist and leftist intellectuals continued to play a critical role in shaping the Iranian civil society. The eruption of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 can be partly credited to the active civic engagement of the bazaar network in the bolstering of the emerging militant clerics led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who

maintained close ties with the bazaar while in exile in Iraq and, later, France. In an important sense, Iran's revolutionary civic sphere was essentially a multi-organizational movement that operated through complex and intersecting networks that toppled the Pahlavi regime.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the Iranian civil sphere has hardly decoupled from the revolutionary ideals of social justice, civic participation as dissent. What shaped the first years of the post-revolutionary civil sphere, however, was the fierce involvement of the revolutionary state in defining the public sphere with the reinvention of Shiʿism in the form of a culture of martyrdom, mourning, and messianic expectations. In the 1980s, the struggle for defining the revolutionary project limited the post-Pahlavi civic sphere, in particular the media, to a civilizing process of shaping manners, attitudes, tastes, styles, and convivial life based on revolutionary asceticism and sacrifice. While dissident activism came under attack, the civic sphere primarily became defined as a state project.

The end of Iraq-Iran War in 1988, however, introduced a new era of economic development, consumerism, and urbanization. The demographic impact due to rapid population growth and migration from rural and provincial towns to larger cities, also growing at a fast pace, expanded the educational and private sectors, and accordingly enhanced cultural spaces of interaction, primarily visible in the younger middle-class segment of the population. The proliferation of new city spaces, consumer sites, new tastes shaped led by a growing youth culture underscored an opening of the civic sphere, though not necessarily a democratic tend.

An important outcome of the social changes brought about by the post-war period was the proliferation of social technologies such as satellite TV as new entertainment and information media, along with the rise of fax machines for the growing business sector. As the increasing economic involvement of a growing middle class in the Iranian public became common by the end of Rafsanjani's presidency between 1995 and 1997, the post-war Islamic Republic faced new demands for social change, pushing for the greater role of civil society as a prelude to political progress. The popular election of Reformist Mohammad Khatami in 1997 generated calls for profound changes in Iranian society with the empowerment of the middle class.

The demographic transformation that defined the Reformist era was not exclusively a middle class but a national youth phenomenon, cutting across gender, ethnicity and, in geographic terms, provinces, cities, and rural regions. By 1997 the youth constituted 25 percent of Iran's 67 million population (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 129). The emergence of the youth culture, partly an outcome of the Rafsanjani period's socioeconomic developments, served as a catalytic role in restructuring cultural spaces of everyday life, spaces wherein consumption of consumer goods and cultures of luxury intersected with growing leisurely activities and recreational spaces of conviviality. The proliferation of fast-food restaurants, shopping malls, health clubs complemented a booming educational sector, accommodating a growing youth population from both rural and urban areas, and a new educated class of young Iranians, many of whom joined the bureaucracy, public and also private sectors, though some remained unemployed due to economic mismanagement (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, pp. 105–127; Khosravi 2008). The new consumerist civic sphere underscored emerging aesthetics, fashions, tastes, discourses and ways of sociability that defined an era of youth culture and subcultures of revolt and transgression, new bonds of youth civility in shifting urban spaces.

The state policy to develop the country's communication sector, along with education, transportation, and manufacturing, helped restructure the country's ailing economy, despite US sanctions. Meanwhile, the Iranian post-war publics consciously pushed the population to decouple from their strong ties in order to reconfigure shared spaces of everyday life in the context of a burgeoning of consumerism. As the government strengthened public institutions, especially the educational sector with the rise of Islamic Open Universities, in order to develop a new skilled class, new demands for technological goods also grew in light of economic development and encroaching globalization.

The rise of digital spaces in mid-1990s, therefore, should be viewed in connection with the cultural reproduction of consumerism and urbanization. The state involvement played a key factor in the multi-layered development, as Rafsanjani and later Khatami administrations promoted the private sector by pushing for more efficient and globalized public institutions. By the early 1990s, the growing market for personal

computers, with software for personal productivity and leisurely activi-ties, underscored an individuation of technology with social dimension of interactivity through computer-based communication with global reach.

The introduction of the internet to Iran in 1993 from the educational sector coincided with the described economic, political, and social devel-opments. The internet served as part and parcel of a state-led readjust-ment of Iranian economy, and also a growing social demand for global communication tied to a growing computer market in the region. The internet, in a significant way, partly symbolized a postwar young genera-tion and its distinct cultural field of leisure activity and conviviality, pub-lic connectivity and social ties.

Internet as Social Capital: An Iranian Experience

In the Reformist era, the internet-based social ties among the youth included formalized educational and informal subcultures of leisurely, porn and dating activities (e.g. chat rooms). These formal and grotesque publics combined spaces of knowledge, learning, skills, along with par-ody, fantasy, fashion, and poetics, with wider entanglements with global youth cultures. With the formation of blogs, posts, and other online activities in the 2000s, the internet served as a space of social capital rooted in the emerging formal and informal civil sphere of youth cultural practices. By late 2000s, the internet as, partly, a symbol of Iran's young culture, became a domain of imagined conduit for progress and building cooperation, and by extension shaping distinct form of trust in terms of weak ties.

As explicated earlier, the civic sphere is a distinct collective space where social realities, encompassing small-scale and broad social movements, can impact a political order. The extent to which the intersecting collec-tive resources and actions become manifest in quality, type, and force maybe considered as social capital based on connections shaped by resources of support and reciprocity or, in what the late Charles Tilly

(2005) described, the "networks of trust". Interactions through collective processes are built to acquire resources, and in doing so they play a central role in the way trust and support is produced between diverse individuals and group of people through either bonding based on internal relations or "bridging" based on external relations. In other words, the way individuals create new connections with people outside of their known networks identifies a civic sphere of active citizens (Arshad-Ayaz, 2015; Woolcock, 1998). The network of relations serves as a social bond that allows voluntary organizations to engage in civic activism for the common good (Putnam, 1995).

In his 2000 Bowling alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, the prominent American political scientist, Robert Putnam, has lamented the decline of social capital in the American public life.[8] This is primarily because, Putnam argues, information and entertainment technologies such as television function in facilitating citizens to become passive, mere consuming subjects. Since active associations and degree of collective norms gained from civic participation indicate the extent of social capital, the rise of television has introduced a level of disconnection, especially among young Americans, that entails an erosion of civic engagement and trust. Bowling alone reflects a society of solitary individual activities rather than collective participation through civic associations (Putnam, 1993).[9] While civic and voluntary associations promote collective trust, in particular through face-to-face interaction, "passive" entertainment practices lower group solidarity and enhance fragmentation.

However, as Yochai Benkler (2006) has argued, information technologies, in particular the internet, promote extensive forms of collaboration that could potentially transform socio-economic sphere of life. With blogs and other online practices, activism could become more participatory, self-reflective, and collaborative that in the words of Clay Shirky (2010), create a "cognitive surplus" as a social resource for communal action.[10] Numerous other studies have demonstrated the complex ways in which information technologies, in particular the internet, can in fact supplement or enhance social capital by creating new modes of communication, sets of relations, and civic actions.[11] The many-to-many communication features of the internet and reduced costs in usability has in

part facilitated accessibility and enhanced circulation of information for solidarity, though level of collective action remains contingent to shifting contexts. Accessibility in particular implies that the internet can make social action more efficient in ways not possible in non-internet domains of everyday life.[12] Internet technology presents, in a significant way, a complex set of everyday embedded communicative practices with the potential to arrange, organize, and reconfigure experience on both individual and collective levels.

As Iran's experience with the internet first emerged in the mid-1990s, along with developments in the telephone system in 1994 and the opening of mobile cellular market, new modes of relations appeared on the internet to utilize the new technology to create and maintain online (sub)communities. While such communities identified self-contained associations, together with their symbolic and performative identity markers tied with broader global internet, internet-based associations primarily shifted conventional boundaries of social ties through cognitive networks around a common culture ranging from dating, blogging, and journalism to sports.

Distant and immediate communication, though not unique to the internet, served as defining feature of communities that increasingly pushed for publics that identified users who would interact through multiple social worlds and play numerous roles in everyday life. The proliferation of chatrooms, blogs, and news sites identified the formation of what Howard Rheingold (1993, 2008) has called "virtual communities," digital associations that operate through complex social networks of crossing physical, political, gender, ethnic, and sexual boundaries.[13] Utopian in orientation, such communities are also to be understood as transnational spaces of digital associations that do not necessarily recognize offline as more authentic form of sociability but an extension and a way to do cultural transmission (or transformation) or improve social life in its everyday sense.

In the late Reformist period (2001–2005), the diffusion of virtual communities primarily revolved around the emerging genre of blogs as interactive personalized spaces of social networking. Equally important before the 2005 elections, when the hardliner administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power, was the growing government-initiated

regulation of internet access and content, a process that would enhance in the post-Khatami era. Between 2005 and 2007 Iranian digital associations reconfigured with the growing popularity of social media sites such as Orkut, also popular in India and Brazil, and Persian language networking site, Cloob and Balatarin, link-sharing site designed in Iranian diaspora. Social media, in particular Facebook, signified a rapidly changing development within the Iranian internet public life, which the digital technology facilitated a new way of communication and self-formation in its networked form.

The 2009 post-election unrests and the use of internet for political activism, therefore, should be viewed in connection with the postwar social transformation, and more importantly the increasing reliance, materially and socially, on technology as a medium of change, particularly in its political form. While not the defining feature of the Green Movement, the movement that challenged the election victory of Ahmadinejad, the internet helped aspects of street mobilization and, more importantly, dissemination of news and communication between the activists, though not always successful in the course of demonstrations. Despite modes of censorship employed by the state, internet improved the protest movement's capacity to coordinate and spread news in order to frame ideas, images, stories, and discourses about dissent. What lied at the heart of the Green internet activism was the incorporation of digital technology within the core identity of the movement through its collective action's frame and political experience of transgression. Internet became both a technological catalyst and a symbolic capital for action.

Since 2009 Iran's internet activism has undergone consider change in organizational and ideological orientation. As a result of increasing privatization of internet, commercialization of social media has brought about new forms of online activism that to a certain extent revolve around celebrity cultures, state-sanctioned popular music, and e-commerce. In a significant sense, the growth of Iran's urban landscape with a growing markets and fashionable spaces of interaction, social internet has increasingly mirrored internet as a mediated site of consumption. Since the 2013 election of Hasan Rouhani, online civic activism has reflected the concerns of a changing middle class with greater demands for better

products and services (such as restaurant reviews on Instagram), combined with an enhance appetite for self-expression on social media, in particular Twitter. But such concerns have also involved contentious campaigns for the protection of animals, children, domestic violence, teacher salary, and other issues considered as public good. The 2017 and 2019 political uprisings, which saw the most political contentious acts of civil disobedience in urban Iran, in particular among the working-class population, relied on the internet not only to mobilize street-protests but primarily spread news about police repression. During the uprisings, the political impact of social media was limited. Networking sites such as Telegram allowed the construction of networks within family and friend ties, with limited reach for wider collective action. Social capital was built, but increasingly became fragmented through new social media ties.

The Case of Tavaana

The post-election period saw the swift reaction in the regulation of the internet public sphere by a mix of repressive and proactive strategies of control. The consequences of state regulation were several, one of which can be described as the suppression of Iran-based online activism as result of filtering and surveillance. Concurrently, a push to promote dissident activism in Iran was led by transnational activism. With relative disconnect from Iran-based network activism as state repression led to loss of Green Movement momentum, the transnational emerged to use the internet to disseminate and circulate anti-government news, reveal censorship tactic and unveil anti-censorship tools.

With the election of moderate Hasan Rouhani in 2013, dissident activism continued to be led by Iranian diaspora, particularly in the US, but also in Canada and Netherlands. As the Iranian state proved adaptive to challenges posed by the Green Movement, numerous online sites with a democracy promotion agenda in Iran, sites such as IranWire, Balavision, and Taghato, shared similar engagement with the Obama and the Trump administrations in the use of the internet to promote (liberal) democracy in Iran. The underlying assumption lies in the idea that with internet's relative accessibility, despite censorship, Iranians of all walks of life would

be exposed to information that would "empower" them to bring about democratic change. Information is inherently liberating, and so is the technology that delivers the information.

In this transnational political context, Tavaana.org represents a kind of diaspora internet-based activism that essentially operates as an educational resource institution for democratization in Iran. Led and organized by diaspora based in the US. Launched on May 17, 2010, Tavaana ("empowered" in Persian) emerged as one of the most innovative online public forums in the aftermath of the post-election turmoil in Iran. The educational project has focused on citizenship building with the aim of promoting civil society in Iran. The mission of the online educational service is described on the organization's website as public service to

> support active citizenship and civic leadership in Iran through a multi-platform civic education and civil society capacity building program. Tavaana holds a vision for a free and open Iranian society, one in which each and every Iranian enjoys equality, justice and the full spectrum of civil and political liberties.

While the core objective of Tavaana is citizenship cultivation, the online service also serves as a learning resource for various social, economic, and political purposes, empowering those in particular on the margins of Iranian society, in particular women and religious minorities.

Akbar Atri and Mariam Memarsadeghi, the co-founders and co-directors of the organization, describe their mission as the following: "The E-Collaborative for Civic Education sees democracy as the only political system able to secure equality, justice and the full spectrum of civil and political liberties for each and every citizen." In the spirit of democracy promotion, the role of technology is one of "leverage" to promote democracy and human rights in the form of robust civic activism, promotion of civil rights, especially women's rights, rule of law, and freedom of expression. Tavaana's use of the internet is strategized with the interplay of three sets of variables: (1) organizational and internal operations of the initiative; (2) forms of services offered to varied segments of the Iranian population through social media domains; (3) dissemination of democratic values perceived as a way to build peace in terms of

accountability and transparency. In what follows I briefly discuss these features to argue that what Tavaana represents is an advocacy association that develops democratic activities through the internet as a facilitator and a promoter of trust and civic solidarity. In mobilizing resources and advancing democratic practices, the site, however, represents more than an online civic association, but an advocacy group charged with contentious politics.

Democracy Advocacy

As a non-profit organization, Tavaana is a flagship program at the E-Collaborative for Civic Education, a US-based human rights educational organization in Bethesda, Maryland, which has secured funding from the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the US Department of State, National Endowment for Democracy, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USAID, and Google ("Tavaana Turns Two", n.d.).[14] Tavaana represents a multi-funded civic educational initiative that brings funds from both state and private sectors, highlighting the appeal the use of internet technology has among wide ranging civic and state actors across North America and Europe. As a self-proclaimed "free and open access e-learning institute" that anonymously seeks to educate Iranians about civil society and democratic development, the e-collaborative site is a democracy-building project with the Iranian citizens as its primary target. But it is also an educational initiative that can be viewed as an extension of state power in the promotion of distinct form of democracy in a region that continues to live under the shadows of colonial legacies.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Tavaana is the involvement of international and Iranian diaspora activists and public figures that according to their expertise cover a range of activities related to democracy promotion. Through its funds, Tavaana brings together activists and specialists of fields related to civic activism as a way of building a network of leading activists who share a common transnational concern about human rights and technological advocacy as a democratizing practice. In an important sense, Tavaana can be described as an advocacy group with

the adopted strategy to form public opinion and policy with the aim of using technology as a means of advancing a distinct conception of democratic politics in a target country, namely, Iran. The support of USAID and the State Department underline the overlap between civic activism and state promotion of democracy in a shared view that new technologies could potentially bring about democratic change, a view mostly solidified since 2009 Green Movement and 2011 Arab Spring.

In terms of strategy, there are two central aspects of Tavaana's advocacy dynamics. The first is to provide a platform for both political and technological advocates such as Ivan Marovic, Arsham Parsi, mehrangiz Kar, and Arash Kamangir to inform, discuss, and share mechanisms, strategies, and ways of understanding democracy through online activism. Closely linked to the first aspect, the second feature is the archival, providing a collection of audio and visual documents, recordings and data for preservation and dissemination. The element of virtual archive of civic activism in the form of case studies, interviews, translations, e-library, and animated public service announcements plays an important role in framing the internet in its inscription role to inform about a future of civil society. The relationship between what the archive (the internet) and what is archived (e.g. interviews) is fluid and essentially exchangeable. It is precisely the perceived fluidity of technology as both archive and actor of civic activism in the form of what is archived that highlights the technological liberation basis of Tavaana as an advocacy group.

Civic (Internet) Initiatives

Advocacy groups creatively adopt various channels of influence to change the political sphere. Tavaana too innovatively employs digital technology to promote democracy though a content platform that is essentially built around civic initiatives to disrupt the status quo in Iran, and this is done through facilitating educational modes of learning, skills, beliefs, and habits in democratic values. The educational technology promoted by Tavaana entails an array of new media and networking practices based on the learning experience of civic engagement of primarily non-violent

form. Such practices is what Henry Jenkins refers to as "spreadable" media with audiences as participants sharing, circulating, re-using, and remixing content on various social media sites (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).[15] The digitization approach in the form of e-courses or Webinars, animation, streaming video, news articles and public talks by leading intellectuals and experts in various fields, in particular democracy promotion, is intended to promote civic cultivation, and such cultivation is perceived to best realized by "empowering" the ordinary citizens with the internet.

With the online educational forum also lies news coverage of diverse social and political importance. The distributed news on the site is selective, and the content largely focuses on promoting democratic awareness for civil action. News dissemination operates in terms of interactive (re) production of news through social networking. With a participatory strategy, Tavaana's news dissemination, especially since 2013, works through and as a multi-sharing platform. The dissemination process involves posting of various news clips, articles, videos, and essays by other activist or news video-sharing sites in order to circulate information about economic, social, or political problems under the Islamic Republic. Social media sites play a critical role in the process as users on Facebook or Balatarin diffuse various news articles and clips circulated on Tavaana's site.

Democratic Peace as/Through Technology

An integral discursive feature of the Tavaana site is civic cultivation in a manner that can promote perceived democratic maturation in a country under an authoritarian rule. The core belief of Tavaana lies in its name: "empowerment" as the Enlightenment quest for what Immanuel Kant famously has described as "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity" (Kant, as cited in Gripsrud, Moe, Molander and Murdock, 2010).[16] The maturity fostered on the site is a sort of self-autonomy that would recognize citizens to rely on the self rather than elites or a ruler for governance. Since maturity depends on self-knowledge, the task at hand

is to cultivate learning about the self-imposed limits of one's social and political existence and finding a way to transcend.

What brings about transcendence is technology as agent of change. At the core of Tavaana's e-education project is that technology acts as a force of liberation, particularly democratic emancipation in a country under authoritarian rule. The ideals promoted are not only about democratic means of bringing peace and justice in Iran, but also internet's ability to circumvent repression and spread knowledge for democratic growth. The analytic assumption is that new technology can (or will) extend and expand social and political freedom in its liberal democratic form. The assumed conception of citizen creativity and innovative spirit is fused with technology that best expresses the openness of human activity. It is as though technology, in particular in its digital form, has an intrinsic value for emancipation of democratic force; as though without technology democracy cannot be realized.

What lies at the intersection of digital technology and education is civic solidarity in a perceived democratic ethos. The transnational distribution of e-learning resources for students and the general audience via internet, satellite television and other new convergent technologies is indicative of a social capital that grows with networks of technology users as citizens. In this conceptualization, Tavaana represents a form of digital advocacy association that advances democratic polity as the internet, and by extension enhance norms of trust shared through online activism. In mobilizing resources, Tavaana aims to cultivate new citizenry from networks accessed and made operational by users for civic action.

However, what ironically can be reproduced through such online civic culture is the polarization of activism with communication directed in singularity of ideas without exposure to alternative views and diversity of audiences as users. It is important to recall that Tavaana's focus on information and educational services framed in the discourse of civil and human rights are embedded primarily within groups of individuals connected on social networking sites of like-minded domains, at times with similar socio-economic class background and shared cultural capital. As activist network with an advocacy agenda, "users" as activists share distinct group identities, rituals, and values between online and offline spheres of interaction. What maybe at work with online advocacy groups

such as Tavaana is not the promotion of new citizenry but the reproduction of a network or a group with resources that promote social capital within enclosed networks, rather than open to range of networks from diverse social backgrounds, complex experiences and varying levels of access with the internet.

In an attempt to provide distinct information about civil society, Tavaana's online project rather reinforces a self-enclosed normative set of ideas, ethics, and values in shaping a distinct conception of civil society and democratic politics, and its future implementations in Iran through the internet. Ironically, by shrinking distance between like-minded users through technology, the site's social media presence widens distance between other-minded users networking in diverse and vast internet domains that continue to reconfigure in complex technological practice in everyday life. Although social capital may seem a positive basis of civic associations, at times the effect of trust on civic associations may not always lead to a pluralistic social outcome, as, online or otherwise, always carry the potential in the formation of closed associations, fostering balkanized speech and ultimately political exclusion.

By way of conclusion, as an online education site, Tavaana represents a civic space through a "multi-platform" social media capacity with the aim to support citizenship and democratic politics. What inherently limits such capacity is the ideological investment in the new technology as agency of change. Furthermore, what limits Tavaana's broad-based educational mission is its institutional support from state and corporate powers that ironically promote rather than deflate tensions over citizenship and access in the name of education and civic rights. This, however, does not rule out the fact that some Iranians, mostly of middle-class segment, continue to use Tavaana's educational initiatives to have access to the internet, and in doing so enrich Iran's contentious politics.

Notes

1. For a classic study of civic culture, see Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963 and

G.A. Almond, *Civic Culture Revisited: An Analytic Study*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1980.

2. On social capital, see the classic work of Robert D. Putnam, "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life," in *The American Prospect* 13 (1993), 35–42 and "Bowling Alone: American's Declining Social Capital," in *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995), pp. 65–78.

3. https://tavaana.org/en/content/mission-history-0.

4. The financial support from state, corporation and lobby organizations is a point that will be discussed in the conclusion. Throughout the chapter, I have avoided the term "non-government organization" (NGO), since I do not think Tavaana qualifies as one. I should note that the history of NGOs, in general, is replete with connections and collaboration with state agencies, a point that its discussion goes beyond the scope of the present study.

5. Tavaana's presence in Persian-language social media sites is less prominent, largely because most social media users in Iran are active on sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Google Plus, although there appears to be a shift toward Persian-language sites since 2010.

6. My position here is somewhat akin to Langdon Winner's argument that technological artifacts entail political qualities with varied consequences. See Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109 (1980), 121–136.

7. See Jeffrey Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

8. This book is based on an earlier published article, which is made reference in the previous endnote. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

9. R. D. Putnam, "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life," *The American Prospect* 13, spring, 1993, pp. 35–42.

10. Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into collaborators,* New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

11. For critiques of Putnam's famous study, see Newton, K., "Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 27, 1999, pp. 577–599; P. Norris, "Does Television Erode Social Capital? A Reply to Putnam. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 29, 1996, pp. 474–480.

12. See Pénard, T., Poussing, N. "Internet Use and Social Capital: The Strength of Virtual Ties." *Journal of Economic Issues*, 44 (3), 2010, pp. 569–595.
13. Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Communities: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993.
14. https://tavaana.org/en/content/tavaana-turns-two.
15. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2013.
16. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?" in: Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander, Graham Murdock (eds.), *The Idea of the Public Sphere: A Reader*, Lexington Books: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, 3.

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10

Social Bots for Peace: Combating Automated Control with Automated Civic Engagement?

Samuel Woolley and Mark Kumleben

Introduction

In the lead up to the 2020 US presidential election, a series of suspicious social media accounts made a series of inflammatory political posts across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The content they shared 'focused almost exclusively on racial issues in the US' but sometimes touched upon LGBTQ issues and political content aimed at other US social groups (Ward et al., 2020). Specifically, the accounts worked to engage the Black Lives Matter community. One, @The_black_secret, 'posted a video of a racial incident with the comment "Blacks have a right to defend

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themselves against Racism" that drew more than 5000 reactions and more than 2000 shares'.

The accounts purported to be run by people living around the United States, with location tags in California, Indiana, North Carolina, and several other states. But an in-depth investigation by CNN and Clemson University—with corroboration from Facebook and other social media firms—revealed that the accounts were not, in fact, tweeting from within the United States (Gleicher, 2020). These accounts were based at troll farms in Ghana and Nigeria. Facebook later revealed that these African propaganda firms were supported by 'individuals associated with past activity by the Russian Internet Research Agency' (IRA). The digital content from just 200 accounts created by the Ghanaian trolls 'reached hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people worldwide' (Ward et al., 2020). US Senator Mark Warner, in response to the CNN story, said:

> I've said for years now that it would be foolish to believe there was only the one well-publicized IRA facility in St. Petersburg. This new reporting is a reminder of the continuing threat we face from Russia and its continuing efforts to divide and manipulate us on social media. (Ward et al.)

Warner's comments echo a deep public skepticism that has arisen around the political use of social media. The activities of the African trolls, leveraging novel tactics and technology to sow manipulative information during the 2020 contest, are an evolved version of the types of online behaviors that have caused this skepticism.

Just four years earlier, Warner and other US government officials witnessed broadscale attempts, social and technologically, to 'hack' the 2016 US election (Sanger & Edmondson, 2019). The Russian government, alongside groups including Cambridge Analytica, leveraged platforms like Facebook and Twitter in efforts to alter the flow of information during a pivotal election. Russia's IRA and many of the other players using underhanded tactics to spread information on social media leveraged computational propaganda—they leveraged automated and algorithmically managed tools over social media in attempts to manipulate public opinion (DiResta et al., 2018; Woolley & Howard, 2016).

One of the primary tools used by the Russian IRA, but also by countless other organizations and actors involved in 'information operations' over social media, is the political bot. A bot, simply put, is a piece of automated software used to do an online task people would otherwise have to do. These automated pieces of code are useful at scaling tasks—including sifting through massive troves of data—achieving excavation and analyses that would otherwise take a person or group months or years to finish. The IRA and other computational propagandists most often use socially-oriented bots, which can be built to mimic real people, in efforts to amplify particular content while suppressing others. Some have argued that the use of computation, automation, social media, and other emergent tools for these means and ends amounts to a new form of information warfare (Singer & Brooking, 2018).

But not all bots capable of operating over social media are used to pose as real people in efforts to deceive. Not all social automation online is leveraged by governments hoping to sow polarization and confusion amongst their adversaries. There are also examples of bots being harnessed for all manner of civically beneficial uses. Journalists have used bots to automate various aspects of reporting over Twitter (Lokot & Diakopoulos, 2015), watchdog groups have built social media bots that track and report on politicians' edits to Wikipedia (Ford, Puschmann, & Dubois, 2016), social commentators have created bots to automatically generate critique (Woolley et al., 2016). In these and other, circumstances social bots can also be used as social scaffolding or civic prostheses—deployed as tools for supporting newmaking, political monitoring, or—more broadly—forms of democratic engagement (Hwang, Woolley, & Borel, 2016).

How might bots be used for peace? For peace education? Do the negative political uses of bots overshadow their possible usefulness for diplomacy, mediation, and other modes of avoiding violent conflict? Are the ways in which bots have previously deployed for the purposes of civic engagement useful or transferable to parallel uses of social automation for peace? Because socially-oriented bots are such useful tools for amplifying or augmenting conversations about a given topic, and because more general versions of bots can scale data analysis work, it is very much possible that these automated tools have potential for peace education.

This paper delves into the political uses of social media bots in order to illuminate the ways these tools might be harnessed for the purposes of peace education. First, we explore the panoply of negative political instances of social media bot usage by discussing recent debates and trends in the academic literature on computational propaganda. By doing so, we hope to illuminate paths that those hoping to leverage bots for more democratically beneficial ends should avoid. We do not, for instance, recommend that bots be used to spread 'peace spam'. We do, however, explore this research in the hope that it will educate readers about the various potentials—good, bad, and ugly—of social media bots. Furthermore, this initial section underscores the kinds of challenges faced by people hoping to leverage social media and bots, for peace education.

In the subsequent section, we explore two cases in which social media bots have already been used for purposes related to peace education. We use insights from these cases to then discuss the broader ways in which social media bots might be used for peace education and to argue for the need for more research on beneficial bots. Finally, we conclude with a section reflecting on the possibilities of automation and social media for peace education, tying research on computational propaganda and computational work for the benefit of democracy to the larger goals of peace education in the digital era.

Bots and Computational Propaganda

Social bots, automated programs that emulate human communication and interaction online, have become widespread in recent years (DiResta et al., 2018; Woolley, 2016). Although they have existed online for decades, these automated social actors are now commonly used interactive tools in customer service, journalism, healthcare, and entertainment. On social media, social bots have been used for the purposes of humor, art, commentary, and sports. Since events like the 2016 US presidential election, the 2020 US election, and the 2020 Covid-19 crisis, in which social bots were used over Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms to spread conspiracy and disinformation, they have become

well known for their role in political communication and manipulation campaigns (Badawy, Ferrara, & Lerman, 2018; Ko, 2020; Woolley & Guilbeault, 2017).

Political bots, social bots built explicitly to engage on political topics over social media, are a continued cause for concern during elections, security crises, and disasters (Ferrara, Varol, Davis, Menczer, & Flammini, 2016; Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012; Woolley & Howard, 2016). They are among the core tools of organizations and actors hoping to manipulate public opinion, to alter trending content, to change search results, and promote other forms of digitally prioritized content, during pivotal moments in which people are seeking information to make important decisions about public and private life. Bots are one mechanism used in computational propaganda campaigns, automated and algorithmically driven efforts to alter information flows and impact behavior (Woolley & Howard, 2018).

The use of social bots to manipulate political conversation is now a global phenomenon. A global analysis of state-sponsored computational propaganda and digital disinformation efforts (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019) found that over 70 countries now use automated tactics as part of their online communication strategy. Computational propaganda is among the most significant political consequences of the latest innovations in social media. Social media companies are still working to respond to the problem of political bot usage and other forms of computational propaganda. In 2014, Twitter acknowledged that as many as 23 million active users on its platform were bots (Motti, 2014). With the company's internal attempts to combat these efforts, alongside bot-makers' efforts to launch new automated profiles, these numbers have waxed and waned. The use of political bots on that platform, however, has continued—with Twitter bots playing a role in conversations about contentious events in 2018, 2019, and 2020 (Avaaz & ISD, 2019; Barojan, 2018; Murdock, 2020) We hypothesize that, in years ahead, if a country is caught up in a crisis or highly competitive election, then those in control or vying for control will continue use bots to manipulate public opinion.

As a worldwide phenomenon, computational propaganda has affected politics in every region of the globe. The Oxford Internet Institute has uncovered organized manipulation by parties, governments, and foreign

actors in democracies and authoritarian regimes alike (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Twitter bots were spotted particularly early in Mexico (Alfonso, 2012), earning themselves the nickname 'Penabots' for their tendency to support the presidential campaign of Enrique Pena Nieto. From there, professional bot-masters like Andres Sepulveda spread the practice across Latin America, with Sepulveda alone claiming to have run bot networks targeting conversations during political events in nine countries in the region (Robertson, 2016). Brazilian researchers have found that bots have become a regular fixture on the Brazilian internet, active not only around election times but also around critical political events such as the impeachment of President Rousseff (Arnaudo, 2018).

Eastern Europe has also been hard-hit by computational propaganda, in part due to Russian interest in the unstable region. Ukraine has been targeted by an organized, highly disciplined computational propaganda campaign involving both automated accounts and human trolls (Bugorkova, 2015)—a dangerous threat to a deeply divided country, of a type which should particularly concern peace educators. The Polish online community faces similar difficulties, riven by internal 'troll wars' and attacked from without by Russian computational propaganda (Gorwa, 2017). In Asia, South Korea's elections have been attacked by members of their own intelligence service (Sang-hun, 2013), and China has added computational propaganda to their horde of online propagandists (@DFRLab, 2019). Chinese efforts do not limit themselves to explicitly political issues, but have also included automated propaganda around the COVID-19 pandemic (Bechis, 2020).

Many countries targeted by computational propaganda are of particular concern to peace activists, because of political, ethnic, or religious tensions which could escalate into violence. Computational propaganda is increasingly common in Nigeria (Funke, 2018), South Africa (Zille, 2018), and Kenya (Portland Communications, 2018)—countries with histories of religious, ethnic, or election violence. Peace educators must pay particular attention to those countries at risk of violence, in which computationally amplified disinformation could spark serious incidents such as communal lynchings or election riots.

Political bots, suppress free expression and civic innovation via the demobilization of activist groups and the suffocation of democratic free

speech. With this in mind, political bots and their effects must be better understood for the sake of mediated civic engagement, digital literacy, and democracy.

Bots and Peace Education

Bots are an expansive category of computer programs, and social bots potentially reflect the full variety of our online lives. There is no inherent reason that bots need be deceptive or harmful, and many bot-makers build bots for politically neutral or socially beneficial purposes. These bot-makers themselves come from a wide variety of backgrounds and motivation, far beyond the stereotypical shadowy propagandists or sleazy con-artists. An ethnographic survey of 40 bot-makers found makers from 'a diverse range of professional, demographic, and cultural backgrounds' (Woolley, Shorey, & Howard, 2018, p. 8). Anybody with a message to promote can do so using social bots, but many responsible bot-makers carefully consider the ethical implications of the manner in which they do so. Even relatively simple bots can engage in complex and unpredictable emergent interactions, with potentially negative consequences (Tsvetkova, García-Gavilanes, Floridi, & Yasseri, 2017). Furthermore, activists and researchers alike have responsibilities to the people their bots affect, and must work to develop best practices which will minimize potential harm.

Not all bots need be political. Human beings engage themselves in many fields of activity, from the commercial to the artistic, without explicitly considering politics. Bots may facilitate any of these activities without acting in a problematic manner. Art bots have become relatively common on social media, both as distributors of existing art and creators of new content. Some bots randomly post images from the collections of institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art (Sharma, 2020), or images of a particular genre. In an era of information overload, where museum collections appear limitless and appreciators of art may feel lost in endless catalogs, art bots provide an opportunity for serendipitous discovery. Bots can also create new art, particularly in mediums like poetry. The idea of automated or

computational poetry dates back far before the internet, finding its most well-realized expression in the work of Oulipo members such as Raymond Queneau (Gallix, 2013). Liam Cooke (2014) has built 'Poem.exe', which builds on Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* to automatically generate combinatorial poetry and post the resulting works to Twitter (@ Poem_exe). The N+7 bot (@n7bot) applies an Oulipian technique known as 'N+7' to various texts of public interest, including Donald Trump's tweets. As text and image synthesizers mature technologically, art bots will become an ever more popular channel for the creation and distribution of computational art.

The power of bots to alert or remind social media users is not limited to discovering art. Bots can be used to discover deals, such as the Hundred Zeros bot (@hundredzeros), which works to inform Twitter users of free eBooks for the Amazon Kindle. Many deal-hunting sites use bots to post bargains, and chatbots can even find recommendations tailored to a user's needs and budget (Escribano, 2016). News bots can monitor public data sources and inform followers of events and issues which would otherwise go unnoticed, from Congressional Wikipedia edits to stop-and-frisk incidents (Fader, 2016). The repetitive nature of these bots draws attention to the ongoing nature of the political problems they highlight, and can humanize what would otherwise be sterile statistics. Activists in many countries have created bots to monitor Wikipedia edits from political institutions like Congressional offices, providing an example of the ability of public-interest bots to scale globally (Cox, 2014). Bots can also inform the public of natural disasters (@earthquakesLA) and alert researchers of relevant social media activity to predict disease outbreaks (Scherer, 2014). It would be a mistake to dismiss the ability of bots to spread socially beneficial information—they are just as effective with helpful information as with deceptive content.

Bots are not limited to posting on their own, but may also interact with users proactively and directly. Reddit uses bots extensively to moderate communities and enforces rules automatically—the Reddit automoderator bot alone provides services for over 9500 smaller communities (reddit.com, n.d.), providing services such as minimum reputation requirements, spam removal, and counter-misinformation efforts. Listener bots are another potential source of positive engagement

(Woolley et al., 2018). These bots use hashtags or keywords to find users and engage with them in a targeted manner. Bots can be used to intervene against racist speech online (Munger, 2016), responding to racial slurs to remind users of the offense they cause. Listener bots are not limited to simple responses, such as the pre-formulated messages offered by the 'Drop the I' bot (Hogan, 2018). Rather, they automate a time-consuming step in the communications process—generating initial engagement. Listener bots can be used by activists to find users willing to engage, with a human user 'stepping into' the account once it has successfully communicated with another user, much in the manner of the semi-automated customer service chatbots used by some online companies. Direct, proactive interaction between social bots and users is an emerging field, and one whose ethics merit careful consideration (Krafft, Macy, & Pentland, 2017), but it offers great opportunities to change views and work towards healthier communication online.

Case Study: Build Up's Online Peace Initiatives

Our first case study is the work of Build Up, a non-profit organization devoted to peace innovation. Build Up has explored the use of bots to spread peace messages and engage in anti-polarization outreach, and the lessons of their work are useful for future peace education initiatives. For International Peace Day 2017, in collaboration with International Alert, Build Up launched its #robotsforpeace program to promote Peace Day (Build Up, 2017). Robots for Peace encouraged programmers and non-programmers alike to build their own Twitter bots to 'build a flock of robots' spreading peace messaging around the hashtag #peaceday. The program's website asked users to follow certain automation best practices for ethical reasons, including not posting spam and clearly identifying the account as a bot.

It appears that many users did create bots to spread #peaceday, and some are still active as of 2020, such as @giadapeacebot and @unite4peacebot. Although a laudable initiative, promoting both Peace Day itself and computer literacy among the peace community, Robots for Peace had certain limitations. The project itself was transient—its peacebots.org

website is now only available through online archives, and it appears to have received little traction in news media. Because of the decentralized nature of the project, it was difficult to measure the engagement and to ensure compliance with ethical best practices. For instance, some of the #peaceday bots do not identify themselves as bots, such as @saxby28 and @manutd83725831. Build Up acknowledged that the 'megaphone' approach, where bots simply spread a pro-peace message far and wide, has limitations, noting that 'there is a fine line between amplifying a message so it receives the attention we believe it deserves (as we are trying to do) and manufacturing consensus to a point where it loses credibility' (Laurrari, 2017).

Build Up did not stop, however, with Robots for Peace. Rather, they also developed a more complex and ambitious project called The Commons. This program would develop bots to engage Americans interested in the issue of political polarization, using targeted messages and automated conversations in order to connect interested subjects with a human facilitator (Build Up, 2018). On Twitter, The Commons mapped and targeted both liberal and conservative hashtags, responding to users posting those hashtags with questions about polarization. Those who responded positively were connected to humans. On Twitter, 50% of users who responded positively to a bot were willing to talk to a human, and while the proportion was lower on Facebook (using targeted ads), it was still more effective than other forms of cold approaches. A second run of The Commons systematically evaluated its messages to determine the effectiveness of various approaches, and was able to dial in on messages most likely to achieve positive responses (Build Up, 2019a).

By using a 'funnel of engagement' model, The Commons was able to deploy bots where they were most effective—at the top of the funnel, where the difficulty for peace educators is to cost-effectively contact large numbers of people and to identify which of them are interested in learning about peace issues (Build Up, 2017, p. 35). Bots appear to perform well compared to traditional approaches in raising awareness and gathering interest, but humans are still necessary to properly engage with subjects and move them to action. These humans can be helped by automated approaches, such as the dynamic identification of political hashtags, but both for ethical and practical reasons, should identify themselves as

separate from bot accounts. Build Up found that humans messaging from a separate personal account helped to overcome users' distrust of spam.

Generally, Build Up took care to use bots ethically in this project. They used identifiable bot avatars and did not accidentally spam or harass users. In addition to the ethical necessity of avoiding deception or spam, the use of targeted and light-touch automated messaging helps avoid 'bot fatigue', where users may become frustrated with peace bots or feel that they are being manipulated by peace educators (Laurrari, 2017). On the other side of the coin, though, Build Up also noted that some users respond positively to the novelty of bots, as users who agree with pro-peace positions may be excited to see peace educators using a new tool for good. This novelty will not last forever, particularly as commercial bots become more prevalent, but is a useful advantage for peace educators who intend to deploy bots in the near future.

The examples of Robots for Peace and The Commons should remind us of the importance of ethical considerations. When deploying bots, experimental ethics are not just worthwhile in themselves but will also help to win the trust of those contacted by bots. Bot initiatives should be carefully monitored both for ethics and efficacy, so that their messaging can be tailored towards maximum engagement as The Commons was. Bots are an interesting and innovative way to reach social media users, but to realize their full potential they should be deployed in a full-spectrum approach alongside targeted ads and human facilitators.

Case Study: Botivist

Activists for social causes face many hurdles and pressures in their work. Recruitment of new core activists and friendly volunteers is one major issue—recruitment is time-consuming, it can add financial costs, it's difficult to standardize, it can be tough to evaluate the effectiveness of a message, and public recruiting can even be physically dangerous (Savage, 2016). Bots could, in theory, help with all of these issues, and a group of researchers and activists have trialed that approach with Botivist. Botivist is a system to recruit volunteers over Twitter, using a bot which tags

relevant users and asks for their input. The Botivist team not only developed a working model, but applied it to a specific issue and evaluated different forms of messaging from Botivist (Savage, Monroy-Hernández, & Hollerer, 2016).

Though it can be adapted to many issues, Botivist began by tackling the issue of corruption in Latin America, tweeting in Spanish about the problem. Users who had recently tweeted a corruption-related term were tagged together in a tweet with one of four approaches: direct, gain, loss, and solidarity (all included a call to action, but the latter three included an extra sentence designed to persuade users). Unlike communication from humans, a direct call to action was the most effective, getting responses from 30% of users targeted. This relatively high rate of response, compared to other communication techniques, suggests that Botivist and similar programs may be very productive in helping activists deliver calls for action to potential volunteers.

The creators of Botivist were naturally concerned with the differences from a human approach a bot recruiter would require. Purely direct, rather than persuasive calls to action were most successful, suggesting that users appreciate bots which act like tools for humans, rather than imitating humans themselves. Most negative responses to Botivist used the term 'bot', and this was more common for approaches which included 'humanizing' sentiments alongside the direct call to action (Savage et al., 2016, p. 6). Researchers concluded that users are uncomfortable with bots which act 'too human', and were more likely to ask if the use of bots in activism was appropriate. For ethical reasons, Botivist accounts were clearly identified as bots, but it appears this honesty also has practical benefits in gaining user trust. One aspect of Botivist they also noted was the population of users who responded, as classified by the hashtags they previously tweeted. Users who regularly tweeted activism-related terms were more likely to respond, as well as a small cluster of users interested in online marketing terms. This latter, unexpected aspect tallies with Build Up's findings that some users are excited by the novelty of bots. It also bodes well for the acceptance of peace bots among younger generations who are more accustomed to an internet shaped at every level by online marketing.

Botivist's case implies some important suggestions for peace educators. A deceptive or manipulative approach, even besides ethical concerns, is likely to be rejected by savvy users. With social bots widely considered a problem, peace bots must be designed with ethical considerations at the forefront. However, Botivist shows that simple and transparent bots are still effective—perhaps more so than bots which attempt to act like humans. An account which appears to be a 'bot proxy' (Woolley, Shorey, & Howard, 2018) for human activists will be better received than a bot which pretends to be human itself. Furthermore, bots are most useful when they are targeted at those who are already interested in receiving their message. This makes them suited to delivering calls to action for a population who have existing awareness of social issues, moving further down the funnel of engagement than The Commons did. Furthermore, with the careful data collection and analysis performed by the Botivist team, activists can standardize and A/B test their messaging in a way which is difficult to do with human communicators. Botivist itself may be adaptable to many issues, but the use of bot messaging allows activists to discover the particular communication strategies best suited for their area of focus. It should be heartening to peace educators to see, through the experience of Botivist, that the most ethical strategies for automated activism are also the most effective.

Conclusion: Bots as a Tool for Peacebuilders

Automated systems and artificial intelligences will soon be the foremost drivers of technological progress. Social media and search algorithms already determine the news diet of billions, and propaganda bots show little sign of abating their subversive activity. With this in mind, peacebuilders must consider the potential of automation. The UN is already researching AI for peace (Masood & Waehlisch, 2019), but they cannot go it alone. Bots are a logical way for smaller organizations or individual peace educators to multiply their efforts—they may have 'democratized propaganda' (Woolley & Guilbeault, 2017), but they have also democratized peace education.

However, there are certain questions which advocates of peace bots must answer, and a shotgun approach to building bots may do more harm than good. Initial suggestions for peace bots focused on the possibility of mirroring propaganda bot campaigns, using bots to spread pro-democracy messages (Howard, 2012). However, this was criticized as likely ineffective in comparison to humans (York, 2013), and initiatives like Robots for Peace failed to gain traction. Peacebuilders have explicitly rejected 'replicating a strategy that could also be used to mindlessly share hate or misinformation' (Laurrari, 2017). Happily for peace educators, developing bot technology has now made better approaches possible.

If the 'megaphone' approach, where bots mindlessly boost pro-peace content, is ineffective, a more sophisticated effort must be necessary. Bots are not merely autonomous marketing tools, but can empower human activists to better spread human messages. In the case studies above, bots were most effective when they were used to relieve existing burdens on activists, particularly in raising awareness and initial engagement. Peace educators already know well the issues they face in public communication—those known areas of friction are the obvious place to start, from which further innovation will emerge naturally as peacebuilders become accustomed to using bots.

Rather than simply promoting existing content, peace bots can move interested citizens down the 'funnel of engagement' (Build Up, 2019b) to inspire pro-peace action. Furthermore, this type of bot is ethical by design, as certain critical ethical principles are also necessary for them to be most effective. In the case of Botivist, peace bots benefited from targeting users already interested in activism and from clearly acting like bots rather than imitating humans (Savage et al., 2016). Peace educators should consult ethical best practices like those published by JustPeace Labs (Easterday, 2018) as a matter of principle, but they can also do that with confidence that the public will appreciate their ethical stance and respond positively.

When considering the future of peace bots, there are certain existing trends and foreseeable problems we should take into account. The first is the most foundational of peace work: the importance of context. As the saying goes, all politics is local, and this is particularly true for peace education which aims to convince individuals of the value of peace.

Peacebuilders must be informed about local issues and fluent in local terms if they hope to appropriately target bots and spark conversations. The PeaceTech Lab has built many lexicons of online hate speech terms in various countries (PeaceTech Lab, n.d.), and researchers have suggested using natural language processing to continually detect dangerous speech (Masood & Waehlisch, 2019). Next, there is the importance of targeting the right individuals, to find those who are open to peace education. Considering that members of the online marketing community appear interested in programs like Botivist (Savage et al., 2016), it is likely possible to adapt existing marketing techniques or even to approach marketers for *pro bono* contributions.

Tech companies, too, could get involved, and a silver lining of their ad-targeting surveillance might be its use for peace. Finally, there is the issue of 'bot fatigue' (Laurrari, 2017) and the risk of 'peace spam'. Peace educators should coordinate to make responsible use of our information commons, avoiding unnecessary duplication of messaging. Tech companies, too, could get involved, providing more API access and spam-reducing features to peacebuilders. For instance, as the Botivist team suggested, tech companies could include features to warn bots if a user has recently been contacted by a similar bot. Organizations using bots should also consistently track and evaluate the performance of their messaging, since making communications more efficient will reduce bot spam.

Researchers, too, should take an interest in the relationship between bots and peacebuilding. There are many potentially fruitful avenues for research which would help promote good practices and fight manipulative bots. Plans for further study might incorporate looking into how certain cases of political bot usage in one country may have affected implementation and usage in other countries. Peace organizations would benefit from the lessons learned in other countries, like Botivist in Bolivia. Another project could lie in the building of a prediction model of bot usage in upcoming international elections.

This year there are numerous highly contested international elections scheduled. Several of these are taking place in countries with authoritarian regimes and emerging democracies. It would be interesting to work towards predicting political bot usage in these upcoming elections and determine what potential impact such use has on electoral outcomes.

Data collected could also be used to develop early warning systems, either for bot use itself or for violence fomented by online speech. Compared to other areas of international development, peacebuilding is poorly funded (Vernon, 2017), and researchers can help activists get more bang for their buck by studying the most efficient forms of automated communication. When resources are tight, we should pick the low-hanging fruit first.

Eventually, it may be possible for researchers and peacebuilders together to develop a 'white-label' peace communications bot system, as Botivist hopes to do, which could be easily adapted to local contexts and deployed dynamically based on the needs of peacebuilders. Adversarial peace bots are one possibility, which would seek out and rebut propaganda bots as they post disinformation. So are chatbots which could be summoned by social media users to help support pro-peace arguments. Once we have developed institutional knowledge and established best practices, vast possibilities for peace bots may open up. It is easier to destroy than to build, and propaganda botnets use cruder and cheaper techniques than are necessary for peace education, but that is all the more reason to develop sophisticated, efficient, and ethical peace bot systems.

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