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## Media as a Tool of Peace Building & Conflict Transformation: An Analytical Study

### Abstract

Information is considered to be powerful and its insight impact the discourse. Media can act as catalyst in peace building and conflict transformation Newspaper, Television, Radio, Digital platforms, Cinema, can help in peace building, conflict management and its prevention. In case of conflict, media attracts worldwide attention towards that issue or event. It can defuse tensions and acts as a watchdog by keeping an eye on the government, opposition and society.

It is the responsibility of the media to disseminate credible information to the masses, which can help in managing conflicts and promoting democratic principles. The concept of Peace Journalism goes into the causes of the conflict and tries to humanise the victims of the conflict. However, the power of media is limited, as they cannot eradicate armed conflicts completely. Mass media must indulge into ethical and responsible reporting of conflicts to peace and safety in the world.

**Key Words:** Media, Conflict Transformation, Peace Building, Peace Ecology, Ethics

### Introduction

‘Peace’ is not merely an ‘absence of war’ (Creighton and Shaw, 1987). Peace’ a vague concept, but there are many different degrees, dimensions and levels of ‘peace’ (Ehrlich, 1987). Peace needs to be understood within the given social struggles. Societies are dynamic spaces of struggles and critique for improvement versus domination or exploitation. ‘Peace’ unfolds in particular historical, social, political, economic and cultural contexts, ‘peace among people’ – reconciliation (Ehrlich 2013).

Peace and peace building has to be a sustained effort and continuous process not to resolve a conflict but to prevent one from arising out of dynamic social struggles. “Efforts to build and sustain peace are necessary not only once conflict has broken out, but long beforehand through preventing conflict and addressing its root causes. We must work better together across the peace continuum, focusing on all the dimensions of conflict.” (UN Secretary-General António Guterres,

2015). It is high time that to rethink peace building in terms of social transformation and shift gear from conflict resolution to conflict transformation.

### **Public Sphere and Conflict Transformation**

Conflict transformation is an approach which calls to redefine and challenge the conflict divisions by contextualising and relativising the conflict and finally transfer the conflict to other issues. To workout peace as integral part of social struggles public sphere has to be understood along with conflict transformation. “Public Sphere” is the space in which social actors and groups of social actors deliberate about their common affairs (Habermas, 1991). Participation in the Public Sphere of modern and mass societies is (in theory) empowered through media (Fraser, 1990). The generation of new social/ virtual life has arisen where online media like digital platforms, social media and networks contribute in developing social links, even in extreme situations like Covid -19 pandemic.

### **Media and Peace building**

#### **Media**

Several mediums or channels used in an organized fashion to communicate information to groups of people as a service to the public” (Howard, 2002).

#### **Peace building**

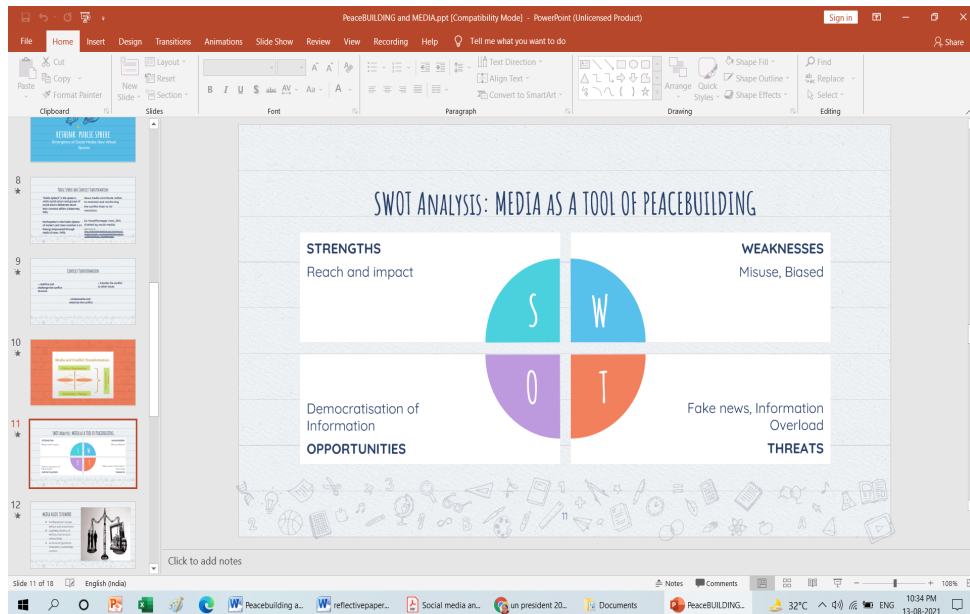
Peace building refers to attempt to encourage development of structural conditions, attitudes, band modes of political behavior that may permit peaceful, stable and ultimately prosperous social and economic development.

“Media have played a destructive role in many conflicts; but media programming can also play a positive role, particularly when integrated into an overarching peace building strategy. Free and independent media can also foster democracy. Media can contribute to peace building through indirect activities (providing non-partisan, balanced information and accountability) and through direct conflict-related programmes.

Interest in the media’s role in peace building is rising. From the nineties, major media interventions in conflict-prone or transitions countries have involved a range of actors: from international organisations and donors to local and specialised media NGOs. Activities range from training to

provision of equipment, media regulation initiatives and supporting individual media. It is useful to distinguish between coverage of conflicts by Western media and coverage by the media in the conflict region itself.” (Spurk, 2002)

Newspaper, Television, Radio, Digital platforms etc. are part of galaxy of media which can work as a magic wand if used wisely in peace building and conflict transformation.



### Swot Analysis: Media as a Tool of Peace building

There are various contrary schools of thought over the optimism or pessimism of media especially the digital media. On the one hand free, independent and pluralistic media provide a platform for debate and different opinions. On the other hand, media can be misused for propaganda purposes, to incite hatred and spread rumours and therefore artificially create tensions. Some celebrate advent of digital media as participatory media which is democratising information and putting a curb on domination of conventional media. Media consumer is not only a passive receiver of information but with social media has also become a strong player as sender of information. The feedback is instant and open, information sharing is virtue of each individual not just media giants. With this all has come a of burden information overload, misinformation, fake information and hate and

politicalised information sharing which is being referred as '*infodemic*'. Thus, some think digital media is dancing havoc as a Frankenstein. News media or digital media is contributing to reinforce the conflict. One such case occurred in the state of Uttar Pradesh's city Muzaffarnagar where communal riots broke out in 2013 which according to official sources was fuelled by social media and fake information. One may love or hate the over bearing social media but certainly cannot ignore it so why not use for conflict transformation. There is a lack of courses, resources on non-violence and peace building in media studies. There is a need to come up with more programs to educate and engage media students on proper usage of media regarding conflict transformation and peace building. It is the need of the hour to resort from violent and destructive ways of handling conflicts to ponder over creative, non-violent and constructive methods to deal with conflict for bringing about positive changes in the society. Therefore, it is significant to practice Nonviolent Communication in contemporary's world. Conflict Transformation and Peace building Studies being an interdisciplinary subject have the potential to create an important context in the media industry. Media can act as a catalyst in the conflict transformation process. As the information is considered as power, it can have a great impact on public discourse. Therefore, there is a dire need to incorporate Nonviolent Communication in Communication and Media Studies. It must be included as a separate discipline within Communication and Media Studies. (Kundu, 2020). Usually, discussions of using the media aim for some general goal to 'promote peace.' Peace itself is not really a product. It is an idea, but does not necessarily suggest automatically some new specific behavior that the public should adopt. The first step in assessing the wisdom of using the media for conflict prevention and peace building in a region is to determine the specific goals of local conflict prevention and peace building. Violence polarizes people (pitting some groups against other groups of people). Peace building seeks to build a bridge between groups of people-de-polarizing people's attitudes and behaviors toward each other.

**Peace Ecology** is one of the ways which can lead us to peace building and conflict transformation (Gomes). Media which has reach and impact on remarkably large population across the globe can be an effective tool for peace building. There is a need to adopt a holistic approach to media interventions. Democratisation of information and media interventions helps to take smoothen the process of political negotiations between policy makers and masses down to grass root levels.

### **Role of Media in peace building**

Information is power and lack of information is poverty. Communication and dialogue can help avoid many wars or clashes and media is the platform to communicate in various ways and reach

out to people far and wide. As Marshal McLuhan said this world is a global village and media helped shorten geographically boundaries. Media can play multifarious roles in conflict transformation and peace building. In case of a crisis or a conflict, the international media can attract worldwide attention. The mass media is a pervasive part of daily life especially in industrialised countries and thus able to shine a light on conflicts anywhere in the world. Since most armed conflicts these days have governmental and not territorial reasons; the parties are often concerned with making sure that the majority of people are on “their” side, which bears a lot of potential for misrepresenting facts and trying to seize control over the distribution of information. For this very reason the intervention of unbiased and free global media is important not only for the world public but also for the people directly affected. The number of conflicts, however, that gets international attention is small; therefore local media is vital in this context.

- Identifying the conflict and its root causes.
- Analysing the conflict.
- Media can act as a peace promoter media events can be used at the beginning of negotiation to build confidence, facilitate negotiations or break diplomatic deadblocks to create a climate conducive to negotiation. Media may help to create bridges among enemies and build confidence needed to open negotiation. Channel of communication between various stakeholders.
- The media interpret events beyond, our understanding and help us make sense of them. Lack of information can, at any stage of a conflict, make people desperate, restless and easy to manipulate. The ability to make informed decisions strengthens societies and fosters economic growth, democratic structures and the positive outlook on the future. Countering the misperceptions.
- Identifying the interest and underlying issues. Third party watchdog provide feedback to public and local problems. Media can bring hidden stories out in to the public.
- Confidence building, consensus building and mutual trust, respect and interdependence.
- Establish the socio economic foundation of long term peace.
- Establish political frame work of long term peace. Media has influence on policymakers, particularly as they think about how to prevent and respond to violent conflict. Media not act as ideological state apparatus in the hands of politicians.

## Conclusion

The media's role in contributing to cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral change on a large scale is unique. Conflict prevention and peace building professionals cause the media in harmony with their other programs – if they know when, why, and how to use the media for the most strategic impact in lessening the polarization between groups. On the other hand, media professionals still have much to learn about why and when their work can contribute to preventing violent conflict and building peace between groups. Media and journalism can be a great assistance in conflict management and peace building. However, the power they have is also limited, as they will never be able to eliminate armed conflicts altogether. The media can be a good tool in a healthy and functioning environment but more is needed than ethical and responsible reporting to ensure lasting peace and safety. The role of the media is twofold: on the one hand, the media report and reflect on pressing issues and can help to question established concepts and ideas. On the other hand, they can be used for propaganda purposes and instead of revealing truths, try to cover things up and by this curtail people's freedom and right to information. Regardless, the potential of the media in conflict and post-conflict situations remains a net positive, and has been sadly underutilized to this point in time.

### **Recommendations or Roadmap for media to further on the path of conflict transformation and peace building:**

- Media needs to rework professional issues ethics and sanctions in digital era.
- Media needs to come up with more tools for debunking misinformation.
- Media needs to draw lines of Information limits so avoid information overload.
- Media needs to address forms of ethnic/communal censorship and also media personnel need to be sensitised over digital spheres of media.
- Media needs establish credibility of digital sources to avoid sharing fake information.
- Media needs to shift gear from conflict definition to conflict transformation tool.
- Media needs understand that peace building should take precedence over economic/political interests, ownership and control.

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