

Communication for Peacebuilding: Media, Dialogue, and Conflict Transformation in Divided Societies

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Abstract

This review examines how communication shapes peacebuilding and conflict transformation in divided societies, with particular attention to media systems, dialogue, framing, digital platforms, inclusive participation, and emerging research priorities. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship from communication, peace and conflict studies, political psychology, journalism, digital media and related fields, the study adopts a critical narrative review approach to synthesize comparative evidence from diverse global settings, including African contexts.

The findings show that communication can either intensify division or support reconciliation depending on how narratives, institutions, technologies and participation are structured. Dialogue is most effective when it recognizes power asymmetries, enables marginalized groups to influence outcomes and sustains engagement beyond symbolic consultation. Media systems contribute to peace when journalistic autonomy, plural sourcing and conflict-sensitive framing broaden public understanding and reduce dehumanizing representations. Conversely, sensationalism, hate speech, exclusionary narratives and algorithmically reinforced echo chambers can deepen polarization. Digital media therefore offer opportunities for civic participation and peacebuilding while creating new risks through misinformation, hostile amplification and unequal access. The review also shows that conflict transformation is strengthened when communication strategies integrate perspective-giving, intergroup contact, narrative reframing, psychosocial sensitivity and credible institutional communication.

The study concludes that peace communication should be treated as an institutional and relational practice rather than a messaging function. It recommends sustained inclusive dialogue, stronger community and independent media, improved digital literacy, transparent platform accountability, conflict-sensitive communication standards and wider participation by women, youth and marginalized communities. Future research should prioritize longitudinal, cross-cultural and multilingual approaches, trustworthy artificial intelligence, algorithmic accountability and locally grounded evaluation frameworks that measure trust, participation, narrative change and nonviolent relations.

Keywords: Peace communication; Peacebuilding; Conflict transformation; Media framing; Digital polarization; Inclusive dialogue

1. Introduction

1.1 Communication in Contemporary Divided Societies

Contemporary divided societies are characterised not merely by visible political disagreement but by durable fractures in identity, trust, memory, socioeconomic position and access to public voice. Communication operates within these fractures as both an arena of contestation and a potential mechanism for transforming relationships. In Nigeria, economic strain and changing social expectations have been shown to reshape interpersonal roles and psychosocial relations, illustrating how structural pressures can alter the meanings through which individuals interpret themselves and others (Ezeani & Sabboh, 2021). Such conditions matter for peacebuilding because communication is never detached from the social environments in which grievances, belonging and exclusion are experienced. For this reason, peace communication must attend simultaneously to inequalities, symbolic boundaries, historical memories and the relational conditions under which messages are received.

Divisions are also sustained through everyday processes of social approval, status comparison and behavioural conformity. Evidence from Nigerian undergraduates shows that peer approval seeking, socioeconomic status and locus of control are associated with behavioural outcomes, reinforcing the significance of social context in shaping individual responses (Sabboh & Ojo, 2023). In conflict-prone settings, these dynamics can become politically consequential when messages about ethnicity, religion, region or ideology are validated by influential networks and repeated through institutions or media. Communication therefore functions not simply as transmission, but as a process through which social norms acquire legitimacy.

This normative power is particularly evident in mass-mediated conflict. Research on Rwanda demonstrates that radio programming designed around reconciliation altered perceptions of social norms and behaviours relating to trust, cooperation, dissent and trauma, even where personal beliefs changed less markedly (Paluck, 2009). Conversely, evidence from the Rwandan genocide shows that propaganda broadcasts increased participation in violence, demonstrating how media can amplify destructive coordination as well as hostile interpretation (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014). These contrasting findings underscore the dual capacity of communication systems to escalate antagonism or widen the social space for coexistence.

The institutional character of journalism is equally important. Nigerian media scholarship has highlighted the relevance of peace- and conflict-sensitive journalism to societies confronting insurgency, communal violence and historically embedded divisions (Peterson et al., 2023). In post-conflict Northern Ireland, community actors have similarly perceived news media as capable of sustaining conflict legacies when reporting practices reproduce adversarial frames rather than support reconciliation-oriented public discussion (Rice & Taylor, 2020). Media institutions thus participate in defining which grievances become visible, whose perspectives are

treated as legitimate, and whether political difference is narrated as an existential threat or a negotiable disagreement.

Digital communication has further complicated these relationships by weakening traditional gatekeeping while expanding opportunities for mobilisation, dialogue and counter-speech. Experimental evidence indicates that exposure to opposing political views on social media can, under some conditions, intensify rather than reduce political polarisation (Bail et al., 2018). Yet digital platforms can also enable peacebuilding agency, as demonstrated by youth-led efforts in Muslim Mindanao that used social media to counter hate speech and advance peace-oriented participation (Ragandang, 2020). Similarly, research on Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian engagement through Facebook shows how online spaces can support solidarity, sustained engagement and peace mobilisation across ethnopolitical boundaries (Ron, Suleiman&Maoz, 2020). Communication in divided societies is therefore best understood as a contested social infrastructure whose consequences depend on institutional norms, technological architectures, power relations and the quality of interaction they enable.

1.2 Peacebuilding Challenges and Communication Imperatives

Peacebuilding in divided societies is constrained by more than overt violence; it is also undermined by mistrust, exclusion, psychosocial insecurity, weak institutions and communication environments that normalise hostility. Where communities interpret political, ethnic or social differences through antagonistic narratives, communication can deepen suspicion rather than facilitate coexistence. Nigerian evidence linking psychosocial conditions with moral disengagement illustrates how individuals may cognitively distance themselves from the consequences of harmful conduct, a process with implications for environments in which violence becomes socially rationalised (Sabboh, 2021). Related findings on juvenile delinquency further demonstrate that peer influence, socioeconomic pressures and self-esteem interact with behavioural outcomes, reinforcing the importance of addressing relational and structural conditions alongside public messaging (Balogun &Sabboh, 2021). Evidence concerning child abuse similarly highlights how adverse psychosocial and family environments can sustain harmful behaviour, suggesting that peace communication must remain sensitive to vulnerability, socialisation and unequal power relations (Sabboh& Yusuf, 2021).

The central communication imperative is therefore to create credible spaces in which conflicting groups can encounter difference without reproducing domination, humiliation or exclusion. Dialogue is most effective when it is structured around listening, reciprocal recognition and sustained engagement rather than symbolic consultation; international peacebuilding experience shows that such processes can support coexistence and conflict management (Feller & Ryan, 2012). African experience also demonstrates that dialogue may fail when parties merely repeat established positions or refuse meaningful listening. Analysis of Zimbabwean political dialogue distinguishes consensual engagement from “deaf” and echo dialogues, underscoring the

importance of trust, responsiveness, and communicative exchange for sustainable peacebuilding (Mandikwaza, 2024). Communication strategies must therefore connect psychosocial understanding with inclusive dialogue, institutional credibility and conflict-sensitive public discourse.

1.3 Review Scope, Objectives, and Significance

This review examines the role of communication in peacebuilding across societies marked by political polarization, ethnic fragmentation, religious tension, historical grievance, social exclusion, and contested public narratives. Its scope extends beyond conventional media effects to consider communication as a relational, institutional, and technological process through which conflict is interpreted, identities are negotiated, grievances are articulated, and possibilities for coexistence are either constrained or expanded. Particular attention is given to the interaction among journalism, mediated narratives, structured dialogue, digital platforms, and conflict transformation.

The review has three objectives. First, it seeks to clarify how communication practices influence the escalation, persistence, or transformation of social conflict. Second, it evaluates the contribution of media institutions, dialogue processes, and participatory communication to trust-building, reconciliation, inclusion, and nonviolent engagement. Third, it considers how digital environments reshape peacebuilding opportunities and risks through expanded access, rapid information circulation, misinformation, online hostility, and networked civic participation. Across these dimensions, the review emphasizes the importance of context, power asymmetries, institutional legitimacy, and communicative ethics.

The significance of this review lies in its integrated treatment of media, dialogue, and conflict transformation as mutually reinforcing components of peacebuilding rather than isolated fields of intervention. By synthesizing these domains, the discussion provides a framework for understanding why communication outcomes differ across divided societies and why technically effective messaging may fail where trust, participation, or legitimacy remain weak. The review is intended to support scholars, peace practitioners, media professionals, civil society actors, and policymakers in designing communication approaches that are context-sensitive, inclusive, ethically grounded, and responsive to the structural conditions that sustain division.

2. Communication Foundations for Peacebuilding

2.1 Peace Communication and Conflict Transformation

Peace communication is best understood as a transformative practice rather than a narrow exercise in message transmission. In divided societies, conflict is sustained not only by material inequalities and institutional failures, but also by narratives, symbols, memories and communicative routines that define who belongs, whose grievances are credible and which forms of action appear legitimate. Accordingly, communication for peace seeks to reshape the relational environment in which conflict is interpreted, enabling actors to move from adversarial positioning toward recognition, participation and nonviolent problem-solving. Hoffmann (2014) argues that communication for peace requires an integrated framework capable of linking media, information and interpersonal processes to wider peacebuilding objectives.

This orientation places social change at the centre of conflict transformation. Communication becomes consequential when affected communities can articulate experience, contest exclusion and participate in constructing alternatives to violence rather than merely receiving externally designed messages. Fernández Viso (2014) situates peace communication within communication for social change, emphasizing participatory processes that connect local agency with broader transformations in power, development and social relations. Such participation is especially important where conflict has weakened trust and narrowed opportunities for meaningful civic engagement.

Conflict transformation also differs from approaches concerned principally with terminating disputes. Elicitive perspectives treat parties themselves as important resources for generating less violent relationships and understand communication as embedded within the conflict system rather than external to it (Suetzl, 2016). This emphasis on agency is reinforced by transformative dialogue, which prioritizes participants' own interpretations of conflict and seeks to change destructive patterns of interaction into more constructive relationships (Cleven & Saul, 2021). Intergroup dialogue similarly creates structured spaces in which adversarial groups can encounter competing experiences and explore negotiated forms of coexistence; Israeli–Palestinian initiatives demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations of combining public negotiation with sustained facilitated dialogue (Dessel & Ali, 2012).

Peace communication must also operate through institutions and media systems. Community media can create locally grounded spaces in which conflict narratives are produced, negotiated and challenged, although their contribution depends on who participates, how narratives are framed and the political conditions surrounding communication (Levesque & Onguny, 2024). Consequently, media interventions should not be assumed to generate peace automatically; their legitimacy depends on inclusiveness, credibility and responsiveness to local conflict dynamics.

The psychosocial dimension is equally significant. Nigerian evidence connecting parenting environments with effortful control and mental-health outcomes illustrates how relational settings shape emotional regulation and individual responses to social pressure (Oyarekua&Sabboh, 2021). Related work on self-esteem among Nigerian adolescents and youths underscores the importance of contextually appropriate measures of self-perception, a consideration relevant to peacebuilding approaches concerned with dignity, identity and social recognition (Sabboh, 2022). At the institutional level, African scholarship on SADC highlights the importance of ethical leadership for policy implementation, reinforcing the broader principle that communication cannot compensate for weak governance or untrustworthy institutions (Enaifoghe, Dlamini&Agwuna, 2020). For practitioners, this requires sustained listening, linguistic and cultural sensitivity, attention to unequal communicative power, and mechanisms through which marginalized constituencies can influence both the framing of problems and the design of peacebuilding responses. Peace communication and conflict transformation are therefore interdependent processes in which dialogue, media practice, psychosocial sensitivity, civic participation and institutional integrity collectively shape whether communication reproduces division or opens credible pathways toward transformed relationships.

2.2 Dialogue, Deliberation, and Social Reconciliation

Dialogue and deliberation are central to social reconciliation because they create structured opportunities for groups divided by identity, memory and unequal power to encounter competing experiences without reducing disagreement to adversarial bargaining. In deeply divided settings, dialogue is most productive when it moves beyond symbolic contact and enables participants to articulate grievances, question inherited narratives and recognise the legitimacy of others' experiences. Comparative work on intergroup dialogue shows that sustained, facilitated encounters can support peace by improving communication and creating relational space for joint problem-solving (Broome & Hatay, 2006).

Deliberative processes add a further requirement: participants must not only speak but also listen, justify claims and remain open to revising positions. Evidence from Northern Ireland indicates that citizens from opposing communal blocs can deliberate constructively even where distrust and historical violence are deeply embedded (Luskin et al., 2014). Likewise, deliberation among unequal groups can promote reconciliation when institutional design makes participation meaningful and links face-to-face engagement to wider social processes (Dembinska&Montambeault, 2015).

Social reconciliation, however, cannot be assumed to follow automatically from contact. Israeli–Palestinian experience demonstrates that encounter models vary substantially in their capacity to address asymmetry, identity and contested narratives, making facilitation design crucial (Maoz, 2011). South African evidence similarly shows that reconciliation is strengthened when acknowledgement of historical truth is accompanied by interracial contact, tolerance and

acceptance rather than treated as a purely symbolic exercise (Gibson, 2004). At the micro-social level, Nigerian research associating parental involvement with decision-making among adolescents also illustrates the broader value of meaningful participation in processes affecting individuals' choices (Ezeani et al., 2023).

For peacebuilding practice, dialogue should therefore be inclusive, sufficiently protected from coercion, attentive to unequal voice, and connected to institutions capable of translating deliberation into visible social change. Without these conditions, dialogue may reproduce hierarchy rather than transform relationships.

Table 1. Dialogue and Deliberation Pathways to Reconciliation

Peacebuilding process	Core communicative mechanism	Primary reconciliation function	Key implementation requirement
Intergroup dialogue	Reciprocal listening and encounter	Humanises opposing groups	Sustained and facilitated engagement
Public deliberation	Reason-giving and reflection	Builds legitimate common ground	Equitable speaking opportunities
Narrative exchange	Sharing lived experiences	Challenges hostile collective narratives	Recognition of competing memories
Truth-oriented dialogue	Acknowledgement of past harms	Supports recognition and tolerance	Credible historical engagement
Participatory dialogue	Inclusion in decision-making	Strengthens agency and ownership	Meaningful influence over outcomes
Institutional dialogue	Linking discussion to action	Converts engagement into social change	Responsive and trusted institutions

2.3 Media Systems and Peacebuilding Processes

Media systems are not passive channels through which conflict information travels; they are institutional environments that shape visibility, legitimacy, interpretation, and peaceful engagement. In divided societies, ownership structures, professional norms, regulatory pressures, technological access, and audience segmentation can determine whether reporting widens fractures or supports conflict transformation. Nigerian evidence from the Ife–Modakeke context shows that community radio can facilitate awareness of alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms and encourage nonviolent approaches to communal tensions (Emovwodo et al., 2024). Across Africa, broadcast organisations contribute to conflict resolution through news, public education, and current-affairs programming, although political control, resource constraints, and capacity can limit effectiveness (Danso et al., 2024).

The peacebuilding value of media also depends on how conflict is framed. Cross-national audience research demonstrates that peace-journalism treatments can elicit different emotional and cognitive responses from conventional conflict reporting, particularly when stories foreground human experience and nonviolent possibilities (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2016). Yet institutional obstacles remain. Studies of Sri Lanka and Nepal identify ownership patterns, censorship, inadequate training, and polarized media cultures as barriers to peace-journalism practice (Selvarajah, 2021). In Colombia, journalists' role perceptions similarly reveal tensions between informational neutrality and an explicitly peace-oriented professional stance during contested transitions (Prager & Hameleers, 2021).

Media access itself is a peacebuilding condition. Nigerian research demonstrates that mobile-network coverage remains uneven beyond major urban centres, illustrating how infrastructural inequalities can constrain participation in digital services and public communication (Alaka, Ajayi & Bolaji, 2022). Effective media-based peacebuilding therefore requires plural institutions, professional autonomy, inclusive connectivity, and sustained conflict-sensitive editorial practices.

Table 2. Media-System Pathways in Peacebuilding

Media-system dimension	Peacebuilding contribution	Principal risk	Required safeguard
Community radio	Local dialogue and dispute resolution	Narrow reach or elite capture	Community participation
Broadcast journalism	Public education and de-escalation	Political interference	Editorial independence
Conflict framing	Humanises actors and alternatives	Polarising narratives	Conflict-sensitive reporting
Journalist roles	Shapes interpretation of peace processes	Advocacy-neutrality tensions	Ethical professional standards
Digital infrastructure	Expands communicative participation	Unequal connectivity	Inclusive network access
Media governance	Protects plural public discourse	Ownership concentration	Transparent regulation

3. Media Framing and Conflict Narratives

Media framing is central to conflict communication because journalism does more than describe events; it selects salient issues, identifies causes, attributes responsibility, legitimizes particular actors, and shapes perceptions of possible remedies. Framing consequently influences whether violence is interpreted as inevitable, justified, preventable, or amenable to dialogue and

negotiation (Entman, 1993). In divided societies, repeated frames can reinforce collective stereotypes, reproduce antagonistic identities, simplify historical grievances, and narrow public understandings of alternative pathways to peace.

Evidence from Nigeria indicates that social media and peer pressure correlate with aggressive behaviour among adolescents, demonstrating how mediated and interpersonal communication environments can interact with behavioural dispositions (Sabboh& Alausa, 2021). In Kenya, newspaper commentary following the 2007 electoral violence prominently employed conflict and responsibility frames, illustrating how journalistic narratives may continue structuring political antagonism after immediate violence declines (Ileri, 2013). Comparable evidence from Asian conflicts shows that conventional reporting frequently privileges elite sources, visible violence, dichotomous identities, and immediate events over underlying causes and peaceful alternatives (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

These patterns are shaped not only by individual journalistic choices but also by institutional routines and structural constraints. Professional norms, sourcing practices, deadlines, political pressures, and newsroom conventions can favour war-oriented reporting and constrain peace-journalism approaches (Lee, 2010). Comparative analysis further demonstrates that the same media organizations may frame domestic and international conflicts differently, reflecting the influence of national identity, political context, and perceived proximity to conflict (Lee, Maslog& Kim, 2006). Importantly, framing also affects audiences: experimental research shows that war- and peace-journalism narratives can generate distinguishable emotional and physiological responses (Lynch, McGoldrick & Heathers, 2015). Peace-oriented media practice therefore requires contextual reporting, diverse sourcing, careful language, attention to structural causes, and sustained scrutiny of narratives that normalize hostility while obscuring nonviolent possibilities.

4. Dialogue and Inclusive Peacebuilding Processes

Inclusive peacebuilding requires more than the formal presence of diverse actors; it depends on whether marginalized groups can influence agendas, articulate lived experiences, and shape decisions affecting post-conflict social order. Dialogue becomes transformative when participation is meaningful, power asymmetries are acknowledged, and institutions create channels through which community perspectives can inform negotiated outcomes. Comparative evidence indicates that the inclusion of civil-society actors in peace settlements is associated with more durable peace, particularly where legitimacy depends on constituencies beyond armed elites (Nilsson, 2012).

Gender inclusion is equally consequential. Research on peace negotiations shows that women's direct participation is associated with more durable agreements and stronger implementation, partly because women delegates often connect formal negotiations with civil-society networks

and social priorities (Krause et al., 2018). In Nigeria, women remain underrepresented in formal peace and policy processes despite their demonstrated capacity for mediation, community mobilization, and reconciliation, making institutional access a central requirement for inclusive peacebuilding (Akingbade & Odebiyi, 2021). Ghanaian evidence further cautions that “inclusion” can remain superficial when generational hierarchies limit younger women’s participation in grassroots peacebuilding (Paalo, 2022).

Communication is therefore fundamental to inclusion. Participatory communication approaches emphasize citizen engagement, local knowledge, and bottom-up dialogue as mechanisms for rebuilding trust and strengthening post-conflict governance (Baú, 2016). Inclusion also benefits from coordinated expertise: although situated in emergency healthcare, evidence on multidisciplinary collaboration demonstrates how complex outcomes improve when actors with differentiated knowledge work through structured communication and shared decision-making (Ohunyon, Ayinde & Ojukwu, 2023). Likewise, South African research on female entrepreneurial intention highlights social barriers affecting women’s participation in mainstream economic life, underscoring the importance of equitable opportunity structures (Iwu et al., 2024).

Inclusive peacebuilding processes should consequently combine representative dialogue with mechanisms for influence, accountability, feedback, and local ownership. Participation must extend beyond consultation toward co-design, agenda-setting, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring that women, youth, minorities, displaced populations, community leaders, and civil-society organizations become meaningful contributors to peace rather than symbolic participants.

5. Digital Media, Polarization, and Peace

Digital media have transformed conflict communication by reducing barriers to publication, accelerating information flows, and allowing political narratives to circulate beyond institutional gatekeepers. These affordances can widen civic participation, but they also permit misinformation, hate speech, and identity-based mobilization to move across networked publics. Social media therefore alters conflict by changing the strategic environment in which political actors, movements, and audiences interact (Zeitsoff, 2017).

Polarization is intensified when users cluster around ideologically homogeneous networks. Comparative evidence shows that homophily and selective information diffusion can generate echo chambers in which shared narratives are reinforced and competing perspectives become less visible (Cinelli et al., 2021). Political context nevertheless remains decisive: evidence from the Arab Spring demonstrates that digital mobilization cannot be understood independently of offline political conditions, protest dynamics, and institutional constraints (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheaffer, 2013).

African cases reveal consequential intersections between digital communication and social division. In Nigeria, analysis of Twitter discourse identified substantial hate content organized around political, ethnic, and religious cleavages, demonstrating how online expression can reproduce societal polarization (Udanor& Anyanwu, 2019). Ethiopian research similarly found that identity-driven hate speech on Facebook and YouTube reflected and intensified ethnic, religious, and political tensions during political reform (Chekola et al., 2023).

Peace-oriented digital communication requires more than counter-messaging. It requires governance structures that establish accountability, monitoring, transparency, and institutional responsibility; Nigerian research on IT governance illustrates the value of structured control frameworks for digital accountability and regulatory compliance (Fadero et al., 2018). Secure information architectures are important where peacebuilding actors exchange sensitive data. Attribute-based encryption demonstrates how differentiated access controls can protect shared digital information while preserving authorized participation (Shittu & Nabil, 2023).

6. Communication Strategies for Conflict Transformation

Communication strategies for conflict transformation must address the relational, narrative, psychological, and institutional dimensions through which conflict is reproduced. Effective practice therefore moves beyond information dissemination toward communication that enables recognition, voice, perspective exchange and sustained interaction across social boundaries. Experimental evidence shows that perspective-giving can improve intergroup attitudes, particularly when members of less powerful groups experience genuine opportunities to be heard (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). This makes attentive listening, reciprocal acknowledgement, and protected speaking spaces central components of transformative communication.

Dialogue should also be designed for enduring disagreement rather than premature consensus. Agonistic dialogue emphasizes sustained relational engagement through which former adversaries can encounter big differences without denying historical grievances or political contestation (Maddison, 2015). At a broader level, intergroup contact is associated with reduced prejudice across diverse settings, particularly where interaction is structured around cooperation, relatively equal status and supportive social norms (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Communication interventions should consequently combine interpersonal encounter with institutional safeguards that prevent participation from reproducing existing asymmetries.

Narrative transformation provides another strategic pathway. Interethnic conflict is frequently maintained through competing collective stories about victimhood, responsibility and historical entitlement; carefully designed narrative interventions can identify points of convergence and reduce antagonistic attitudes without erasing legitimate difference (Garagozov& Gadirova, 2019). Media can scale such interventions, although contextual adaptation remains essential. Evidence from Burundi demonstrates that theory-driven radio programming can strengthen

several attitudes associated with nonviolence and positive intergroup relations, while also producing uneven effects across outcomes (Bilali, Vollhardt & Rarick, 2016).

Conflict-sensitive communication must additionally recognize psychosocial vulnerability. Nigerian evidence linking hopelessness and perceived stress with suicidal ideation among university students illustrates how distress can shape cognition and behavioural risk, supporting communication approaches that avoid humiliation, threat escalation and stigmatization (Yusuf & Sabboh, 2021). Related Nigerian research connecting stress, hopelessness and self-esteem with attitudes toward suicide further underscores the importance of dignity-sensitive engagement when communities experience cumulative adversity (Sabbah, 2023). Crisis experience in South Africa similarly shows that complex emergencies demand coordinated institutional responses, credible public information and adaptive governance (Ikwegbue et al., 2021).

7. Future Peace Communication Research Priorities

Future peace communication research should move beyond evaluating isolated messages toward examining the socio-technical systems through which peace, conflict and public legitimacy are produced. A priority is the development of critical frameworks capable of assessing how digital platforms, data practices and communication technologies interact with local power relations. Digital peacebuilding scholarship cautions against assuming that technological tools are inherently emancipatory and instead calls for reflexive analysis of the claims, agendas and effects embedded in technological interventions (Hirblinger et al., 2023).

Research should also investigate how emerging technologies reshape imagination, mediation and participation in peace processes. Digital tools may enable actors to visualize alternative futures and experiment with new forms of engagement, but their effects depend on context, access and institutional design (Hirblinger, 2023). This agenda requires stronger comparative research across linguistic, cultural and political settings. Nigerian scholarship on peace journalism demonstrates the continuing need to examine how journalistic practices can either reinforce division or cultivate social harmony in plural societies (Okocha & James, 2022). Ghanaian evidence on Twitter activism similarly shows that digital discourse can mobilize citizens, construct collective identities and translate online narratives into offline action (Nartey & Yu, 2023).

A further priority concerns misinformation, especially the mechanisms through which conflict perceptions increase willingness to believe and circulate false claims about adversaries. Experimental research demonstrates that perceived intergroup conflict can heighten receptivity to misinformation, indicating the need for longitudinal, cross-cultural and platform-sensitive studies of corrective communication (Mazepus et al., 2023). Methodologically, future work should combine computational analysis, ethnography, experiments, network analysis and participatory approaches to capture both large-scale patterns and lived experience.

The institutional adoption of advanced communication technologies also requires closer examination. Research on employee readiness shows that technological implementation depends on capability development, psychological acceptance and adaptive organizational processes, principles relevant to peacebuilding institutions introducing AI-enabled communication systems (Akhigbe, Falemi& Akin-Oluyomi, 2024). Studies of cyber-physical resilience further highlight the importance of secure, adaptive infrastructures when digital systems become operationally critical (Shittu et al., 2024). Likewise, AI-enabled digital twins illustrate the potential of real-time data integration, predictive analytics and explainability for complex decision environments (Shittu & Shittu, 2024). Peace communication research should therefore investigate trustworthy AI, algorithmic accountability, cybersecurity, multilingual inclusion, digital inequality and community governance, while developing transparent evaluation frameworks that measure not only reach or engagement, but changes in trust, dialogue quality, narrative transformation, participation and sustained nonviolent relations across diverse and historically divided social contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined how communication functions within peacebuilding by tracing the roles of media systems, dialogue, framing, digital platforms, inclusive participation and conflict-transformative strategies across divided societies. The review demonstrated that communication is not a neutral conduit but a constitutive force that can either reproduce antagonism or create conditions for recognition, trust, participation and nonviolent social change. Its objectives were met by integrating theoretical, empirical and comparative evidence showing how communication practices shape conflict narratives, institutional legitimacy, intergroup relations and prospects for reconciliation.

The findings indicate that dialogue is most effective when participation is meaningful, power asymmetries are acknowledged, and marginalized groups can influence outcomes. Media systems similarly contribute to peace when journalistic autonomy, plural sourcing and conflict-sensitive framing reduce dehumanization and widen public understanding of underlying grievances. Conversely, sensationalism, exclusionary narratives, hate speech and algorithmically reinforced polarization can intensify division. Digital media therefore represent both a democratic opportunity and a conflict risk, requiring governance approaches that preserve civic expression while limiting harmful amplification. The review further established that conflict transformation depends on combining perspective-giving, narrative reframing, intergroup contact, psychosocial sensitivity and credible institutional communication rather than relying on isolated messaging interventions.

Accordingly, peacebuilding practice should institutionalize sustained dialogue, strengthen community and independent media, expand women's and youth participation, invest in digital literacy, and embed conflict-sensitive communication within public institutions. Policymakers

and practitioners should also establish transparent mechanisms for platform accountability, misinformation response and inclusive digital access. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and cross-cultural designs, multilingual analysis, trustworthy artificial intelligence, algorithmic accountability and locally grounded evaluation frameworks capable of measuring changes in trust, dialogue quality, participation and nonviolent relationships. Such approaches should privilege local knowledge, sustained learning and measurable community ownership. Ultimately, communication contributes most effectively to peace when it is participatory, context-sensitive, ethically governed and linked to institutions capable of translating dialogue into durable social and political transformation.

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