

**THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC MEDIA RELATIONS IN COUNTERING
DISINFORMATION AND PROMOTING DIALOGUE IN DIGITAL
PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES.**

By

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ABSTRACT

The rise of disinformation in digital spaces poses a significant threat to peacebuilding initiatives, especially in conflict-prone societies where online narratives can exacerbate divisions or incite violence. While digital peacebuilding has gained traction through the use of online platforms, apps, and storytelling campaigns, the role of strategic media relations remains under-explored. This study investigates how structured engagement between peace organizations and media actors, particularly across news and social media platforms, can enhance the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. A descriptive survey design was used. Four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. The study sampled 143 respondents from a target population of 222 media professionals, NGO peace-builders, digital advocates, and government officials. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation via SPSS Version 26. Results reveal a statistically significant relationship between media partnerships and the capacity to counter disinformation, build trust, and promote dialogue in digital spaces. The study contributes to scholarship by re-framing media engagement as a proactive peacebuilding tool, offering a scalable framework for designing interventions that strengthen resilience against disinformation. Recommendations include capacity building for media actors, development of proactive engagement frameworks, and investment in hybrid digital communication strategies.

Key Words: Strategic media relations, Digital peacebuilding, Disinformation, Dialogue promotion

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The exponential growth of digital communication technologies has reshaped not only how individuals interact but also how societies experience and manage conflict. In today's digital ecosystem, information can be created, modified, and disseminated instantly, crossing geographic and political boundaries in seconds. While these platforms offer remarkable opportunities for connection, collaboration, and real-time information exchange, they have also become powerful tools for manipulation, polarization, and social destabilization, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile states.

Social media platforms, once hailed for democratizing information and empowering grassroots voices, have increasingly come under scrutiny for enabling the spread of disinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence. False narratives and coordinated propaganda campaigns have been used to delegitimize peace processes, reinforce ethnic divisions, radicalize communities, and incite real-world harm. The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, and the war in Ukraine each illustrate how digital spaces can become weaponized to perpetuate conflict (UNHRC, 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2022; Howard et al., 2021).

This phenomenon has led to the emergence of digital peacebuilding, a new paradigm that incorporates technological tools, online platforms, and digital engagement into peacebuilding processes. These initiatives range from SMS-based early warning systems to online storytelling campaigns and AI-driven hate speech monitoring tools. Organizations such as PeaceTech Lab, Build Up, and Search for Common Ground have pioneered innovative approaches to promote peace online and mitigate the harms of digital conflict dynamics. Yet, as digital threats grow more sophisticated and widespread, these efforts are increasingly outpaced by the scale and velocity of online disinformation (De Lanerolle et al., 2021; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018).

Despite growing investment in digital peacebuilding infrastructure, strategic media

relations, being a long-term, structured collaboration between peace actors and media institutions remains a largely underdeveloped area. While media and communication strategies are commonly used for messaging and outreach, they are rarely designed as integrated peacebuilding interventions that respond to the realities of disinformation-prone digital ecosystems. Where engagement with journalists and influencers does occur, it is often reactive, fragmented, or under-resourced, lacking the coherence required to shift public narratives or build sustained trust.

Furthermore, many peacebuilding organizations operate in media environments characterized by low journalistic capacity, political censorship, and limited media literacy, which makes it difficult to create content that resonates or reaches the intended audience. Media professionals themselves may lack training in conflict-sensitive reporting or struggle to distinguish credible sources from coordinated disinformation networks. In such settings, the absence of a clear, strategic approach to media engagement not only weakens peacebuilding interventions but may inadvertently amplify harmful narratives (Gagliardone et al., 2019; Farkas & Schou, 2021).

Research on digital peacebuilding has begun to explore the role of technology in conflict transformation, early warning, and online dialogue. Yet, few studies have explicitly examined how media institutions and peace actors can co-create content, manage public discourse, and foster resilience against disinformation as a core element of peace strategy. Even fewer have explored this empirically, drawing on the experiences, challenges, and practices of those directly engaged in this work across digital platforms.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the role of strategic media relations in digital peacebuilding. Specifically, it explores how peace organizations and media actors interact to shape narratives, build trust, and counter disinformation. By analysing the tools, partnerships, and communication frameworks employed in these engagements, the research seeks to provide evidence-based insights into how strategic media relations can be more effectively designed, scaled, and sustained.

Understanding this dynamic is particularly urgent as peacebuilding moves further into the digital realm. As wars become increasingly hybrid with physical, psychological, and informational dimensions, peace responses must evolve accordingly. Strategic engagement with digital media actors offers a promising avenue not only for countering harmful content but also for constructing new narratives of inclusion, empathy, and dialogue in societies fractured by conflict.

Statement of problem

Despite growing investment in digital peacebuilding initiatives, many remain vulnerable to the disruptive effects of disinformation and media manipulation. While peace actors increasingly recognize the importance of digital engagement, they often lack structured strategies to collaborate with media institutions in ways that reinforce credible, conflict-sensitive communication (Tufekci, 2017; UNDP, 2021).

Existing digital peace efforts tend to be reactive and fragmented, focusing primarily on message creation without the backing of sustained media partnerships. As a result, peace narratives are frequently overshadowed by the virality and emotional appeal of disinformation. Furthermore, in many fragile or transitional societies, media institutions themselves struggle with political pressures, lack of training, and limited resources. These factors can lead them to unintentionally perpetuate harmful narratives (Frère, 2020; Ajibola & Tettey, 2021).

While literature on digital peacebuilding and disinformation is expanding, few studies systematically explore the role of strategic media relations as a tool for countering disinformation and strengthening digital peace initiatives. There is a critical gap in understanding how trust-based, long-term collaboration between peacebuilders and media professionals can support the co-creation and dissemination of accurate, inclusive narratives.

This research seeks to bridge that gap by examining how intentional media engagement that goes beyond content dissemination can enhance resilience against disinformation and contribute to more sustainable, dialogic peacebuilding efforts in digital contexts.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do peacebuilding organizations engage strategically with news and social media platforms in their digital communication efforts?
2. How does disinformation on news and social media platforms affect the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives?
3. What are the key challenges faced by peacebuilding actors in building collaborative relationships with news and social media platforms?
4. How do strategic engagements with news and social media platforms contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study.

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between strategic engagement with news and social media platforms and the ability of peacebuilding organizations to counter disinformation.

H0₂: Disinformation on news and social media platforms does not significantly affect the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives.

H0₃: There is no significant relationship between years of experience of peacebuilding actors and the key challenges they face in building collaborative relationships with news and social media platforms.

H0₄: Strategic collaborations with news and social media actors do not significantly contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research consistently affirms that disinformation is no longer a peripheral issue but a central threat to peacebuilding in the digital age. Studies by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and Bradshaw and Howard (2019) demonstrate that false and manipulative content spreads more rapidly and widely than factual information, particularly on social media platforms. This viral advantage allows disinformation to exploit emotional triggers, deepen existing divisions, and undermine trust in institutions. However, most of these studies focus on election periods or political crises, with fewer examining protracted conflict contexts where disinformation operates as a long-term destabilizing force.

In conflict-affected societies, such as Myanmar, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, disinformation has been directly linked to episodes of violence and escalation of ethnic tensions (UNDP, 2021; Frère, 2020). Yet, much of this research is event-driven, documenting incidents after they occur rather than exploring preventive interventions. This reactive bias limits our understanding of how disinformation ecosystems evolve and how early countermeasures could be deployed.

Moreover, while multiple reports such as those from UNESCO (2021) and Kavanagh and Rich (2018) acknowledge that digital platforms amplify harmful narratives, they tend to treat “the media” as a monolithic entity. This overlooks important distinctions between traditional news media and user-driven social media, each of which operates with different logics, incentives, and vulnerabilities. The absence of nuanced, media-specific analysis leaves a gap in designing tailored counter-disinformation strategies.

This study builds on these insights but addresses the overlooked question of how peacebuilding actors can work with both news and social media in a strategic, sustained manner to counter disinformation before it hardens into public “truths.” By moving beyond crisis documentation to proactive engagement frameworks, it aims to contribute

evidence on media relations as a preventive rather than merely corrective peacebuilding tool.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design to collect numerical data that reflect the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding strategic media relations, disinformation, and dialogue in digital peacebuilding. The quantitative approach enables the researcher to gather data from a broader audience and statistically analyse the extent to which media strategies are perceived to counter disinformation and foster dialogue. This design is suitable for exploring patterns, trends, and relationships among the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Area of the Study.

The area of this study is Kaduna, the capital of Kaduna State in Northwestern Nigeria. Kaduna is a culturally diverse and politically active city, often marked by inter-ethnic and religious tensions. With growing access to digital technology and a high rate of social media usage, the city presents both opportunities and risks for peacebuilding communication. As disinformation continues to fuel polarization, Kaduna offers a relevant setting to explore how strategic media relations can support digital peacebuilding and counter harmful narratives.

Population of the Study

It is often impossible and impractical to collect data from all the potential units of analysis covered by the research problem. The population of this study consists of media professionals, digital communication officers, peacebuilding practitioners, and social media-savvy individuals across Kaduna State who engage in or are affected by digital peacebuilding efforts. This includes actors from non-governmental organizations, news agencies, advocacy groups, and development communication units involved in online and offline dialogue initiatives as of August 2025

The population size totals 222 individuals across media sectors, NGO/peacebuilding sector, Digital advocates, and Government agencies to allow for sufficient data representation and analysis, ensuring diversity in occupation, region, and gender where possible.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

The size of sample depends on sample which will faithfully reproduce the characteristics of a population, degree of precision required as well as the cost considerations. In this case, non-probability purposive sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who are most likely to have relevant exposure or involvement with the subject matter. This includes professionals and active media users with demonstrated interest or experience in issues of disinformation and peacebuilding. The sampling method was chosen due to the need for specific insights from a targeted group rather than general population inferences (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In order to obtain 'n' that gives a 5% margin of error, the formula given by Taro Yamane (1967) is adopted. Using the formula, the variance and population size (N);

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n=

sample size N=

population size

e= margin of error (5%)

N=222, e=5% = 0.05

$$n = \frac{222}{1+222 \times 0.05^2}$$

1+222×0.

05

n = 222

1+0.55

50

n =

222

1.555

n = 142.7

Therefore, the population of the study is 222, sample size is 143 individuals across relevant sectors.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire titled Survey on Strategic Media Relations and Digital Peacebuilding. The questionnaire is structured on a 5-point Likert rating scale with options of SA- Strongly Agree; A- Agree; N- Neutral; D- Disagree; SD - Strongly Disagree and weighted 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

It has four clusters, A, B, C and D. Section A, with four items designed to collect demographics of the respondents, while Section B, with four clusters and 19 items, collected data for answering the research questions.

Validation of the Instrument: The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in communication studies and conflict resolution to ensure validity, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. Their comments, suggestions, and observations were considered in the production of the final draft of the instrument. (App I).

Reliability of the Instrument: The questionnaire was trial tested through a pilot study on 10 respondents from the target population. The consistency of the instrument was

computed using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded 0.88 for the entire instrument, which was therefore considered reliable enough for the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

The study employed a face-to-face administration strategy in which the researcher, with his well-trained research assistants, directly collected the data from the respondents, which lasted for one week, with a high return rate of 100%.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. For the descriptive analysis, Means and Standard Deviations were used to determine the central tendency of responses to each item. A criterion mean score of 3.00 was adopted as the benchmark for decision-making. Items with a mean score of 3.00 and above were interpreted as "Agreed", while items with mean scores below 3.00 were considered "Disagreed."

In addition, inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationships between key variables such as: Strategic media engagement and ability to counter disinformation; Disinformation and effectiveness of peacebuilding; Strategic collaborations and promotion of dialogue and trust. For all correlational analyses, results were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A P-value less than 0.05 indicated a significant relationship, and the null hypothesis was rejected. Conversely, a P-value greater than 0.05 meant the relationship was not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis was retained. Results from both descriptive and inferential analyses were presented in tables for clarity. Interpretations were linked back to the research questions and objectives of the study.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question One

To what extent do peacebuilding organizations engage strategically with news and social media platforms in their digital communication efforts?

Table 1

The Extent to Which Organizations Engage Strategically with News and Social Media Platforms in Their Digital Communication Efforts.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	N	Mean	Std	Decision
1	My organization partners with media platforms to promote peace narratives.	83	69	3	1	12	168	4.25	1.06	Agree
2	Media engagement is part of our organizational peacebuilding strategy.	100	54	1	3	10	168	4.37	1.04	Agree
3	We regularly use social media platforms to respond to or correct false information related to conflict.	73	62	18	5	10	168	4.09	1.09	Agree
4	Our organization trains spokespersons on how to communicate	66	52	31	10	9	168	3.93	1.14	Agree

1	Disinformation significantly undermines peacebuilding efforts in digital spaces	114	34	2	4	14	168	4.37	1.19	Agree
2	False or misleading information online increases tensions and undermines dialogue efforts in peacebuilding.	37	76	18	25	12	168	3.60	1.19	Agree
3	Disinformation makes it more difficult for peacebuilding organizations to reach their target audiences effectively.	95	50	7	3	13	168	4.26	1.15	Agree
4	Peacebuilding messages are often overshadowed or drowned out by disinformation on social media.	99	43	10	5	11	168	4.27	1.14	Agree
5	The spread of disinformation online hinders collaboration between peacebuilding actors and community stakeholders.	86	50	9	12	11	168	4.12	1.99	Agree
	Grand Mean							4.12		Agree

Table 2 reveals the result on how disinformation on news and social media platforms affects the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. From the result, all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 3.00. Disinformation significantly undermines peacebuilding efforts in digital spaces, false or misleading information online increases tensions and undermines dialogue efforts in peacebuilding, disinformation

makes it more difficult for peacebuilding organizations to reach their target audiences effectively, peacebuilding messages are often overshadowed or drowned out by disinformation on social media, the spread of disinformation online hinders collaboration between peacebuilding actors and community stakeholders. Since the grand mean of 4.12 is above the criterion mean of 3.0, the result implies that disinformation affects the effectiveness of digital peace building initiatives negatively.

Research Question Three

What are the key challenges faced by peacebuilding actors in building collaborative relationships with news and social media platforms?

Table 3

The Key Challenges Faced by Peacebuilding Actors in Building Collaborative Relationships with News and Social Media Platforms

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	N	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Peacebuilding actors face difficulties in gaining the attention of news and social media platforms for their initiatives.	89	59	4	3	13	168	4.24	1.13	Agree
2	Limited trust between peacebuilding organizations and media hinders collaborations	71	60	8	13	16	168	3.93	1.28	Agree
3	News and social media platforms often prioritize sensational content over peacebuilding narratives.	94	48	10	3	13	168	4.23	1.16	Agree

4	Peacebuilding actors lack adequate resources to maintain consistent engagement with media platforms.	86	50	17	1	14	168	4.15	1.17	Agree
5	Differences in objectives between peacebuilding actors and media platforms create barriers to effective collaboration.	79	54	14	9	12	168	4.07	1.19	Agree
	Grand Mean							4.12		Agree

Table 3 reveals the result on how disinformation on news and social media platforms affects the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. From the result, all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 3.00. Peacebuilding actors face difficulties in gaining the attention of news and social media platforms for their initiatives, limited trust between peacebuilding organizations and media platforms hinders collaboration, news and social media platforms often prioritize sensational content over peacebuilding narrative, peacebuilding actors lack adequate resources to maintain consistent engagement with media platforms, differences in objectives between peacebuilding actors and media platforms create barriers to effective collaboration.

The grand mean of 4.12, which is above the criterion mean of 3.00, indicates that all these factors are perceived as key challenges in building collaborative relationships with news and social media platforms. Addressing these challenges should form an essential component of strategic media relations, enabling peacebuilding actors to counter disinformation and promote dialogue in digital peacebuilding initiatives.

Research Question Four

How do strategic engagements with news and social media platforms contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts?

Table 4

How Strategic Engagement with News and Social Media Platforms Contributes to Promoting Dialogue and Trust in Digital Peacebuilding Efforts

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	N	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Our media engagement efforts have improved online dialogue among conflicting groups.	52	85	16	7	8	168	3.99	1.00	Agree
2	We use media to share authentic stories from diverse groups.	92	58	5	5	8	168	4.32	1.02	Agree
3	Strategic media relations have helped reduce tension or hate speech in digital spaces.	83	64	8	4	9	168	4.24	1.03	Agree
4	Our work contributes to building trust among conflict affected groups	80	68	9	0	11	168	4.23	1.04	Agree
5	We regularly monitor public reactions to our online messaging	56	79	25	0	8	168	4.04	1.00	Agree
	Grand Mean							4.16		Agree

Table 4 reveals the result on how disinformation on news and social media platforms

affects the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. From the result, all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 3.00. Peacebuilding organization's media engagement efforts have improved online dialogue among conflicting groups, the organizations use media to share authentic stories from diverse groups hereby promoting trust, strategic media relations have helped reduce tension or hate speech in digital spaces, such an organization's work contributes to building trust among conflict affected groups, they regularly monitor public reactions to our online messaging Since the grand mean of 4.16 is above the criterion mean of 3.0, the result implies that the items mentioned in the table above are how strategic engagements with news and social media platforms contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between strategic engagement with news and social media platforms and the ability of peacebuilding organizations to counter disinformation.

Table 5

Strategic engagement			Counter disinformation
Strategic engagement with news and social media platforms	Pearson Correlation	1	.719
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	168	168
Ability to counter disinformation	Pearson Correlation	.719	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	168	168

Table 5 reveals the results on the relationship between strategic engagement with news and social media platforms and the ability of peacebuilding organizations to counter disinformation. The results yielded $r(166) = 0.719$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P – value of 0.007 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected and it

was concluded that there is a strong, positive, statistically significant relationship between strategic engagement with news and social media platforms and the ability of peacebuilding organizations to counter disinformation. This suggests that organizations with higher levels of strategic engagement tend to be more effective at countering disinformation and how organizations engage with news/social media really does impact their ability to combat false information.

Hypothesis Two

Disinformation on news and social media platforms does not significantly affect the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives

Table 6

Disinformatio n			Effectiveness
Disinformation on news and social media platforms	Pearson Correlation	1	.627*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.031
	N	168	168
Effectiveness of digital peace building initiatives	Pearson Correlation	.627*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	
	N	168	168

Table 6 reveals the results of the statistical analysis examining the relationship between disinformation on news and social media platforms and the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. The results yielded $r(166) = 0.627$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P – value of 0.031 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between disinformation on news and social media platforms and the effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. This suggests that higher levels of disinformation are associated with lower perceived

effectiveness of digital peacebuilding initiatives. In other words, the higher the level of disinformation on news and social media platforms, the less effective digital peacebuilding initiatives become.

Hypothesis Four

Strategic collaborations with news and social media actors do not significantly contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts.

Table 9

Strategic collaboration			Promote Dialogue
Strategic collaborations	Pearson Correlation	1	.819*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	168	168
Promote Dialogue	Pearson Correlation	.819*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	168	168

Table 8 reveals the results of the statistical analysis examining the contribution of strategic collaborations with news and social media actors to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts. The results yielded $r(166) = 0.819$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P – value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that there is a statistically significant, strong positive correlation between strategic collaborations with news and social media actors and promotion of dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts. This suggests that strategic collaborations with news and social media actors do contribute to promoting dialogue and trust in digital peacebuilding efforts. That is, greater collaboration is associated with higher levels of dialogue and trust.

Summary of findings

The results revealed the following major findings:

1. Strategic Media Engagement Enhances peacebuilding Efforts

Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged that deliberate and sustained engagement with journalists, social media influencers, and other media actors contributes positively to peace messaging. However, such engagement is still largely underutilized and often reactive rather than proactive.

2. Disinformation is Widespread and Destabilizing

The majority of participants indicated exposure to false or misleading content online, with significant impacts on public trust, social cohesion, and perception of other groups. Disinformation was viewed as a key driver of division and a serious threat to peacebuilding initiatives in the digital space.

3. Digital Peacebuilding Tools are Useful but Underutilized

While respondents recognized the potential of social media and digital platforms to disseminate peace messages, limited access, low digital literacy, and competition from viral disinformation remain major challenges. Nonetheless, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and community radio were identified as useful tools when strategically deployed.

4. Digital Dialogue Requires Strategic Facilitation

Although digital platforms offer opportunities for inclusive dialogue, many respondents expressed concerns about the lack of moderation and direction in online discussions. Without credible facilitation, digital dialogue often devolves into hostility and echo chambers. However, guided engagement was seen as effective in promoting understanding and reducing polarization.

Discussion of Findings

Discussions are presented in line with the research questions that guide the study

Research Question 1: To what extent does disinformation affect digital peacebuilding efforts in Kaduna?

The findings from the study revealed that disinformation significantly undermines digital

peacebuilding efforts in Kaduna. Respondents widely reported that disinformation, often spread via social media and unregulated blogs, intensifies communal distrust, manipulates public perception, and fuels identity-based tensions. This aligns with Bradshaw and Howard (2019), who noted that coordinated disinformation campaigns have been documented in over 70 countries, including Nigeria, with demonstrable impacts on conflict dynamics.

Furthermore, the data suggest that false narratives related to ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation tend to go viral faster than peace-oriented messages, largely due to emotional appeal and algorithmic amplification. This confirms Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral's (2018) findings that falsehood spreads faster than truth online. In Kaduna's context, respondents cited examples of viral misinformation preceding electoral cycles and security crises, which in turn strained intergroup relations.

Research Question 2: What is the level of strategic media engagement in countering disinformation in digital spaces?

The study found that while there is some awareness among peace actors and media professionals of the importance of media engagement, strategic media relations remain largely underdeveloped. Engagement with media tends to be ad hoc, often limited to issuing press releases during crises or conducting one-off campaigns without sustained partnerships. This reactive approach limits the media's potential to serve as a consistent ally in combating disinformation.

These findings reinforce Howard and Hussain's (2013) argument that media engagement should move beyond transactional communication to long-term collaboration involving co-creation of narratives and journalist capacity-building. Participants in this study emphasized the need for more consistent collaboration between peacebuilders and both traditional and digital media actors to amplify credible content and counteract false narratives.

Research Question 3: What role do digital tools play in promoting peace narratives and countering false information?

The responses showed that digital tools (including social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and community digital networks) hold promise for disseminating peace narratives. However, their potential remains to be fully realized due to several factors: low digital literacy, inadequate funding for digital campaigns, limited access in rural areas, and the prevalence of disinformation in the online space.

Despite these barriers, digital technologies were recognized for enabling rapid information sharing, virtual dialogues, and early warning systems. This supports prior research by Ginty (2021) and PeaceTech Lab (2020), which documented how digital peacebuilding tools, when properly deployed, can strengthen real-time engagement and reach marginalized voices. However, the study also highlighted the need for a better digital strategy and infrastructure to ensure that these tools serve peacebuilding goals effectively.

Research Question 4: How can strategic media relations facilitate inclusive dialogue and digital peacebuilding in Kaduna?

The findings reveal that strategic media relations can facilitate inclusive dialogue by leveraging trusted messengers and curating content that resonates with local audiences. When peace actors build long-term, trust-based relationships with media practitioners both in news and social media, they are more likely to shape public discourse, amplify positive narratives, and prevent the escalation of harmful misinformation.

Participants stressed the importance of conflict-sensitive reporting, media literacy training for content creators, and collaboration on storytelling initiatives. These findings align with the propositions of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which suggests that how an issue is framed in the media significantly influences how audiences interpret and respond to it. Respondents also emphasized the need for peacebuilders to engage in narrative framing that prioritizes shared values, empathy, and intergroup solidarity, especially during tense moments.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of strategic media relations in countering disinformation and promoting dialogue within digital peacebuilding initiatives in Kaduna. The findings reveal that disinformation, particularly in digital spaces such as social media, poses a substantial threat to peace efforts by distorting facts, heightening identity-based tensions, and undermining public trust. Despite the availability of digital tools for peacebuilding, their impact is limited without deliberate, structured engagement with media actors.

The study further demonstrated that strategic media relations built on trust, collaboration, and conflict-sensitive storytelling can significantly improve the visibility and credibility of peace narratives. When media practitioners and peacebuilders work together proactively, they are better positioned to amplify inclusive dialogue and mitigate the polarizing effects of disinformation. Yet, such collaboration remains underutilized in the context of Kaduna, where peace actors often operate in silos and media institutions face resource and capacity constraints.

Ultimately, the study underscores the need for a shift from reactive messaging to intentional, strategic communication frameworks that treat the media not just as disseminators but as co-creators of peace narratives.

Implications of the study

1. The study highlights the need for policy reforms that prioritize ethical journalism, media capacity building, and the regulation of digital content in ways that do not stifle free expression. Government agencies, civil society organizations, and donor institutions must collaborate to ensure that media actors are empowered to act as peace enablers rather than inadvertent conflict escalators.
2. Media-focused NGOs and development agencies should re-evaluate their programmatic approaches to digital peacebuilding. Interventions should integrate long-term media engagement strategies, support for investigative journalism, and digital infrastructure development in conflict-prone regions such as Northern Nigeria.
3. Practitioners in conflict-affected regions should adopt proactive media strategies that anticipate and counter disinformation rather than merely reacting to

crises.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Peacebuilding organizations should develop long-term partnerships with news and social media actors. These partnerships should include co-development of editorial content, training in conflict-sensitive reporting, and shared strategies for narrative amplification.
2. Stakeholders should prioritize capacity-building programs for both peace actors and media practitioners. Training in digital storytelling, misinformation detection, and framing techniques will help both groups engage more effectively in the online information ecosystem.
3. Policymakers and media regulatory bodies should develop ethical guidelines and enforceable standards for digital media, especially regarding misinformation, hate speech, and electoral disinformation. This includes strengthening platforms' accountability for harmful content.
4. Peacebuilding campaigns should be rooted in contextually relevant narratives that resonate with the lived experiences of local communities. Using relatable messengers such as religious leaders, youth influencers, or community journalists can boost message credibility and reach.
5. Early detection of disinformation trends and real-time response mechanisms (e.g., digital rumour tracking, fact-checking collaborations) should be integrated into peacebuilding strategies. This can help prevent the escalation of harmful narratives before they take root.
6. Civil society and donor agencies should support the creation and scaling of inclusive digital dialogue platforms. These platforms should be moderated, multilingual, and accessible, especially in conflict-prone or marginalized areas within Kaduna.

Suggestions for further studies

1. Future research could compare how strategic media relations operate in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria or other conflict-prone countries. Such comparative

studies would help identify region-specific dynamics in media-disinformation-peacebuilding relationships.

2. Given the influence of religious and traditional leaders in Kaduna and other parts of Nigeria, future studies should explore the role of religious leaders, traditional rulers, and community media influencers in shaping digital peace narratives and combating disinformation.

Contributions to knowledge

1. This study serves as an eye-opener to the critical yet underexplored role of strategic media relations in promoting peace and countering disinformation in digital environments.

2. The study has provided literature for researchers interested in a similar survey.

3. It studies challenges peace actors, media practitioners, and policymakers to rethink how they approach media partnerships. Not just as tools of dissemination, but as powerful allies in the construction of inclusive, credible, and lasting peace.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Assessing the Role of Strategic Media Relations in Countering Disinformation and Enhancing Digital Peacebuilding in Kaduna State.

I am a student at Learn to Live Business School (LLBS), studying for my Post graduate Diploma. I am currently conducting a research study titled "The Role of Strategic Media Relations in Countering Disinformation and Promoting Dialogue in Digital Peacebuilding Initiatives. This study seeks to explore how peacebuilding actors engage media platforms to address misinformation and foster constructive dialogue in online spaces.

I would greatly appreciate your support by taking a few minutes to complete this short questionnaire. Your insights and experiences are valuable and will contribute significantly to the success of this research. There are four options kindly TICK only one but ensure you answer ALL the questions and use the following options: SA = Strongly Disagree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree All responses will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Thank you so much for your time and valuable input! Temisan Etietsola

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

(Kindly tick [✓] the appropriate box)

1. **Age:**

18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46 and above ☐

2. **Gender:**

Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say ☐

3. **Occupation:**

Media Practitioner ☐ Peacebuilding/NGO practitioner ☐ Digital Advocate ☐

Government official ☐ Others ☐ (Please specify) _____

4. **Years of experience in peace/media work:**

less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 7 years and
above ☐

SECTION B:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

Scale:

**1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 =
Strongly Agree**

**CLUSTER 1: TO WHAT EXTENT DO PEACEBUILDING ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGE
STRATEGICALLY WITH NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN THEIR
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION EFFORTS?**

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	My organization partners with media platforms to promote peace narratives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Media engagement is part of our organizational peacebuilding strategy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	We regularly use social media platforms to respond to or correct false information related to conflict.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Our organization trains spokespersons on how to communicate effectively during crises.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Media partnerships help us amplify peacebuilding messages online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

**CLUSTER 2: HOW DOES DISINFORMATION ON NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS AFFECT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL PEACEBUILDING
INITIATIVES?**

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Disinformation significantly undermines peacebuilding efforts in digital spaces	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- 2 False or misleading information online increases tensions and undermines dialogue efforts in peacebuilding. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Disinformation makes it more difficult for ☐
- 3 peacebuilding organizations to reach their target audiences effectively. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Peacebuilding messages are often overshadowed or drowned out by disinformation on social media. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 4
- 5 The spread of disinformation online hinders collaboration between peacebuilding actors and community stakeholders. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

CLUSTER 3: WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY PEACEBUILDING ACTORS IN BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

- | S/N | Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Peacebuilding actors face difficulties in gaining the attention of news and social media platforms for their initiatives. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 | Limited trust between peacebuilding organizations and media platforms hinders collaboration | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

- | S/N | Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 | News and social media platforms often prioritize sensational content over peacebuilding narratives. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | Peacebuilding actors lack adequate resources to | | | | | ☐ |
| 4 | maintain consistent engagement with media platforms. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| 5 | Differences in objectives between peacebuilding actors and media platforms create barriers to effective collaboration. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

CLUSTER 4: HOW DO STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS WITH NEWS AND SOCIAL

MEDIA PLATFORMS CONTRIBUTE TO PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND TRUST IN DIGITAL PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS?

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Our media engagement efforts have improved online dialogue among conflicting groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	We use media to share authentic stories from diverse groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Strategic media relations have helped reduce tension or hate speech in digital spaces.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Our work contributes to building trust among conflict affected groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	We regularly monitor public reactions to our online messaging	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION C

1. What suggestions do you have for improving the role of media in peacebuilding through digital platforms?