

Role of Youth in Peacebuilding through New Media: A Case Study of Contemporary Students of Social Sciences, University of Peshawar

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Abstract: *In this paper, the role of youth at Peshawar University in peace building through the use of new media is examined. The primary objective is to explore how students leverage new media platforms to promote peace, gender equality and social justice while also assessing the effectiveness of the platforms. The research focus on social sciences department of Peshawar University utilizing a simple random sampling method to select 65 respondents comprising both male and female students aged 15 to 29. Data was collected via a questionnaire survey with close ended and likert scale questions analyzed using Microsoft Excel and presented in a diagrammatic format. The findings reveal diverse level of engagement and effectiveness in the use of new media for peace building efforts among the students. The key platforms identified are Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter each utilized to varying extents and influencing peace promotion, social justice, advocacy, and the challenging of cultural taboos. The study highlights the active participation of Peshawar university youth in grassroots campaigns and their collaboration with organization and influencers on new media to amplify messages of peace and social justice. The results indicate that while a significant portion of students frequently use new media for peace building and advocacy there are notable variation in their perception of its effectiveness. The research underscores the potential of new media as a powerful tool for youth led peace building initiatives contributing valuable insights into the intersection of youth, media and peace building in an academic context.*

Keywords: *New Media, Gender Inequality, Culture Taboos, Social Justice, Peace building*

Introduction

Creating a culture of peace and a conflict-free atmosphere is necessary, especially for the younger generation. Youth, a product of their communities, particularly those with personal experience of conflict, are important peace-building agents. They have a clear vision of what peace could look like in their communities and countries. The modern world is engulfed with conflict and violence, but people have always moved on. Globally, around 400 million youth, aged 15 to 29, reside in precarious and conflict-affected environments. Media has proven to effectively influence individuals towards specific actions and shape global perspectives, but it can also incite hatred, leading to conflicts. Media can raise awareness about conflict prevention strategies and foster peace-building efforts. New media, in particular, can be used by young individuals to actively engage in peace-building (Pyarali, 2021).

The increasing utilization of new media has turned the world into a global village, with young individuals highly connected to these technologies. According to Livingstone (2005), young people have greater access to new media and consume it more than older individuals (Zaheer, 2018).

The internet and mobile devices have changed the way we interact with the world. In the developing world, technology is growing rapidly, providing opportunities for engagement. These tools allow participation in processes that affect societies globally, giving people a chance to interact with peace-building processes in new ways (Larrauri, 2013).

New media and its tools make staying updated and responding to current events easier. Social networking sites, weblogs, and applications allow people to stay informed. And regardless of age, a lot of folks now consider new media to be their Zen. It's a platform that attracts attention and people have begun to view it as a crucial aspect of their life. For many of them, social media of any kind nearly controls their everyday lives rather than being a part of it (Narula, 2016).

Anstanding (2011) noted, "The teens today are the most connected generation." Davison (1959) added, "The new media technologies are the old media with advanced features."

Pakistan with a population of 225.2 million ranks as the fifth most populous nation globally (One UN Pakistan, 2021). The lives of Pakistani individuals are rapidly being intertwined with new media, particularly due to the widespread access to the internet and the revolutionary advancements in cellular industry. Over the past few years, Pakistan has witnessed an unprecedented surge in internet usage with a significant emphasis on social media networking sites (Groupin.pk, 2011). People of all age groups are now utilizing various gadgets such as mobile phones and tablets all equipped with internet capabilities. The utilization of new media serves a multitude of purposes for individuals, including information gathering, entertainment and most importantly connectivity (Zaheer, 2018).

Due to advancements in the cellular industry and widespread internet access, Pakistan has seen a surge in internet and social media use. In January 2021, Pakistan had 46 million social media users, reflecting a 24% rise from the previous year, constituting 20.6% of the population (Datareportal, 2021).

Empowering young individuals to address community issues and become peace advocates is essential, as extremist groups often target marginalized youth. When youth are given opportunities to participate, they channel their resilience positively and become contributors to peace-building (Youth as peace builders, 2020).

New media has played a crucial role in driving cultural change globally. As technology advances and internet accessibility expands, new media is shaping cultural norms, values, and beliefs. It has empowered individuals to create and share cultural content, fostering new perspectives and creativity. By offering new platforms for diverse voices to be heard and transforming the way people consume and create culture, new media has opened up fresh avenues for cultural expression and comprehension (Salah and Salah, 2023).

In the modern era, social media has become an essential tool for promoting social justice and advocacy. It enables marginalized communities to express their concerns on a global scale, unite communities, raise awareness and promote accountability through citizen journalism and sharing of visual content. The widespread influence and impact of social media can be witnessed through hash tags such as #Blacklivesmatter and #Metoo which have shed light on social justice issues and propelled social change on a global scale (Karki, 2023).

Media plays a key role in shaping gender norms, roles, and stereotypes. Gender norms determine power dynamics, and media shapes these through representations that influence beliefs and attitudes. The evolving media landscape, especially through social media, highlights the importance of understanding media's role in shaping gender aspects (Santonniccolo, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken by Peshawar University youth in the Social Sciences through new media platforms in promoting peace and raising awareness.

2. To explore the extent to which the youth at Peshawar University actively engage with new media channels to challenge cultural taboos, advocate for gender equality, and promote social justice.
3. To identify the primary new media platforms utilized by Peshawar University youth in Social Sciences for peace-building efforts.

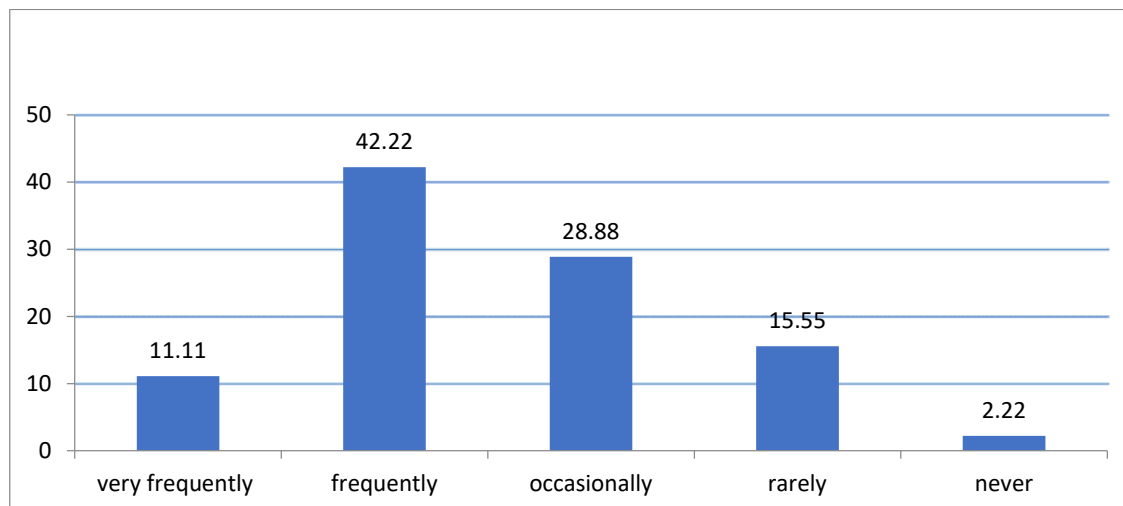
2. The Data and Method

The information for this study was gathered from the social sciences departments of the University of Peshawar, specifically Criminology, Economics, Gender Studies, International Relations, Political Science, Psychology, Regional Studies, Social Anthropology, Sociology, the Institute of Education and Research, the Institution of Peace and Conflict Studies and the Law College. These departments were selected due to their interdisciplinary approach, offering a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural factors that influence peace building efforts. To collect data a simple random sampling technique was employed, ensuring that every participant had an equal chance of being selected resulting in a representative and unbiased sample. A total of 65 students, five from each of the 13 department were chosen, comprising both male and female students aged between 15 and 29. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire survey which inclined close-ended and likert scale questions to gather quantitative data directly from the participant. This allowed for the collection of primary data, providing a unique perspective on how youth utilize new media for promoting peace, gender equality and social justice. The analysis of the collected data was carried out using Excel for diagrammatic representation followed by explanatory note with Microsoft Word used for final modifications. The study was delimited to the social sciences departments of the University of Peshawar and was completed within a three-month timeframe, leading to conclusion and recommendations based on the research findings.

3. Results

This research has compellingly illustrated the engagement of Peshawar University youth with new media platforms in their endeavors to promote peace, raise awareness, advocate for social justice, and challenge cultural taboos. The following figures provide an insightful overview of these findings based on responses from 65 students.

Figure: 3.1 Utilization of new media for promoting peace and raising awareness

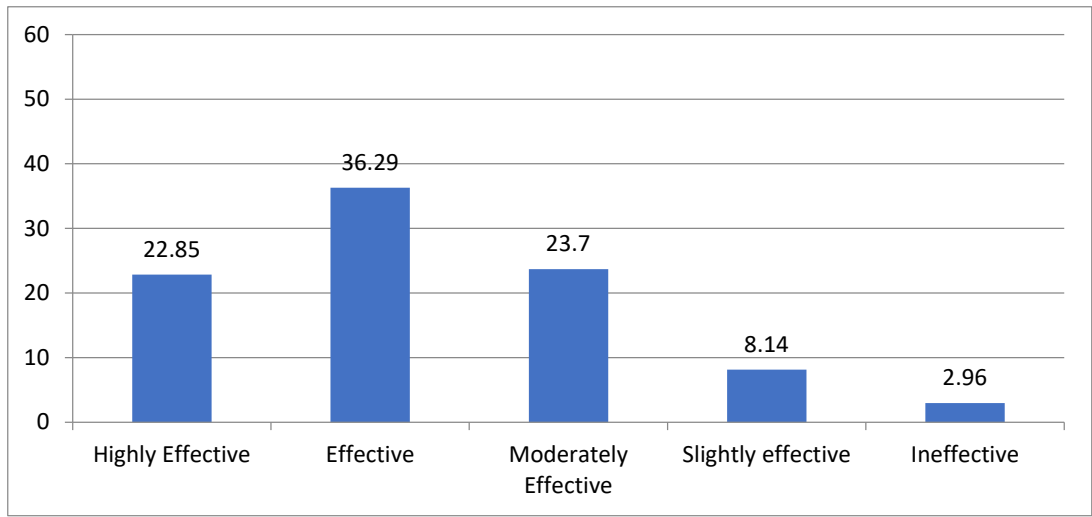


Description

The above chart illustrates the percentage of new media platform utilization by Peshawar university youth since 2020 to promote peace and raise awareness. Out of the 65 respondents 11.11% indicated

that they used new media very frequently for these purposes, 42.22% responded they use it frequently 28.88% stated that they use it occasionally 15.55% mention they use it rarely while 2.22% reported they never used new media for such endeavors

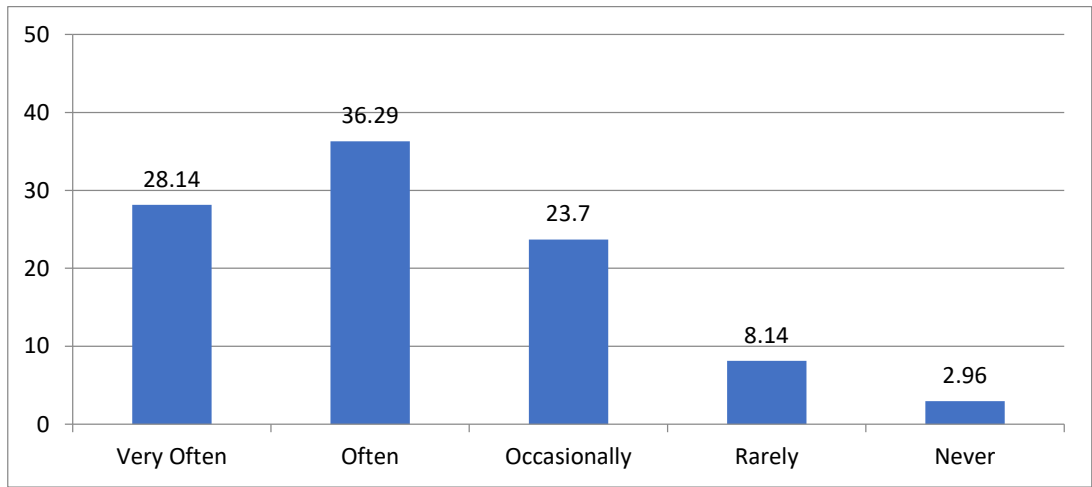
Figure 3.2. Effectiveness of the efforts



Description

The chart above shows the effectiveness of new media and enhancing awareness regarding peace building initiatives. out of the 65 students 22.85% indicated that new media is highly effective in significantly increasing awareness as evidenced by their active involvement in grassroots campaigns and protests addressing social issues on new media platform. Furthermore they perceive new media as highly innovative and creative and further peace building efforts 36.29 percent of students consider new media as effective in raising awareness for peace building initiatives. These students also displayed active participation in grassroots campaigns and protests on new media. Moreover 23.7% of students viewed new media as moderately effective for aforementioned objectives with their participation in grassroots campaigns and innovations being more trade. 8.14% of respondents found new media to be slightly effective while two where is 2.96% deemed it ineffective for the specified purposes.

Figure 3.3. Promoting Social justice through New Media

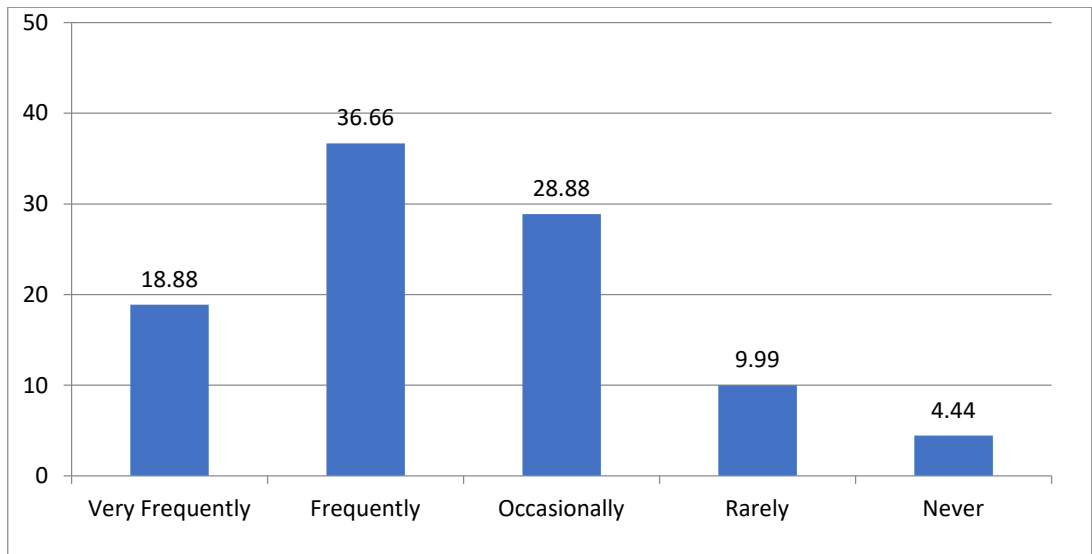


Description

The chart shows that the majority of Peshawar university youth actively engage in promoting social justice through new media platforms specifically 28.14% of the respondents very often use these

platforms and collaborate with organization or influencers to amplify messages of peace and social justice while 36.29% often engage in similar activities. Additionally, 23.7% occasionally use new media for social justice purposes. In contrast a smaller portion 8.14% rarely engage in such activities and only 2.96% never use media for promoting social justice.

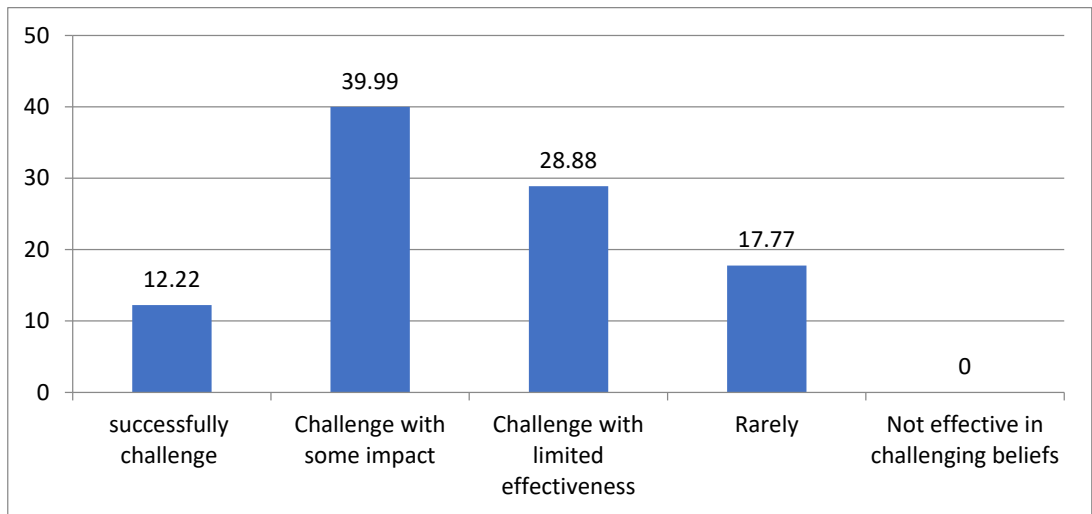
Figure 3.4. Advocating Gender Equality through New Media



Description

The chart illustrates how frequently Students from the Peshawar University advocate for gender equality on new media platform. Out of 65 students 18.88% reported that they very frequently used for new media for this purpose while 36.66% stated that they frequently do so. Additionally 28.88% of the student occasionally uses new media to advocate for gender equality. On the other hand 9.99% of the respondents rarely engage in such advocacy and 4.44% never use new media platform to promote gender equality

Figure 3.5 Challenging cultural taboos through new media

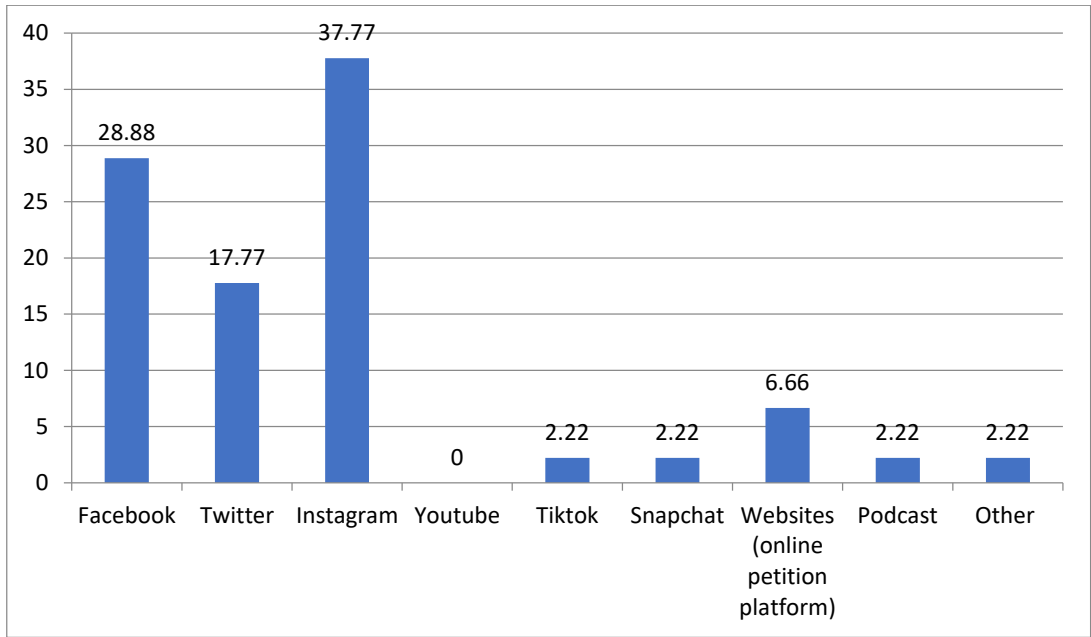


Description

The chart illustrates the effectiveness of Peshawar university youth in using new media to challenge cultural taboos that hinder people for obtaining rights. Among 65 students 12.22% believe that the young youth have successfully challenged these beliefs with innovative methods through new media.

Additionally 36.99% of the students think that their efforts to confront cultural taboos via new media have led some impact meanwhile 28.88% feel that their attempts have been limited effectiveness and 17.77% believe that they rarely challenge such beliefs using new media platforms. Notably 0% of the respondents believe that new beta is not at all effective in challenging cultural beliefs.

Figure 3.6. Top app use for Peace building Efforts



Descriptions

The chart illustrates the predominant new media platform used by Peshawar university youth in social sciences for peace building efforts. Among 65 students 28.88% reported using Face book while 17.77% utilized Twitter for peace building activities. Instagram is the most frequently used platform, with 37.77% of students favoring it. Notably none of the respondents use YouTube for these efforts .a small fraction of students turns to other platforms including Tik Tok 2.22%, Snap chat 2.22% and websites such as online institution 6.66% .additionally 2.22% use podcast and other 2.2 rely on other apps like WhatsApp etc.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study reveal a significant engagement of Peshawar University youth with new media platforms in their efforts to promote peace, advocate for social justice, challenge cultural taboos, and foster gender equality. The results illustrate that a majority of the respondents actively use new media for peace-building and awareness-raising purposes. Specifically, a notable portion of the youth reported frequent and very frequent utilization of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Instagram, in particular, emerged as the most favored platform for these efforts, reflecting a shift towards visual and interactive media that engage wider audiences. The high percentage of students who found new media to be either highly or moderately effective in promoting peace underscores its growing role as a tool for social change.

Additionally, the data indicate that while many students actively participate in grassroots campaigns and protests through these platforms, a significant proportion of respondents also highlighted the role of new media in advocating for gender equality and promoting social justice. This aligns with global trends where new media is increasingly recognized as a powerful mechanism for mobilizing support, challenging societal norms and facilitating dialogue on sensitive issues. However, while the majority of students view new media as effective in fostering peace and raising awareness, there is a smaller but

important segment of the population that perceives its impact as limited or ineffective, suggesting the need for more strategic and structural engagement.

The study also shed light on varying degrees of success in challenging culture taboos through new media. A considerable portion of respondents believe that these platforms have been instrumental in confronting traditional barriers that prevent people from exercising their rights. Nevertheless, the fact that a smaller group sees limited effectiveness in these efforts indicates potential challenges in fully leveraging new media for deeper societal transformation. These challenges could stem from limitation in outreach, cultural resistance or perhaps the digital divide that affects the access and impact of these platforms in certain communities.

Moreover, the data suggests that while social media offers numerous opportunities for youth to promote peace, it also requires effective content creation, strategic dissemination and a commitment to sustained engagement. The students varied responses regarding the impact of new media on peace building efforts highlight the complexity of measuring effectiveness in a digital age, where the result of campaigns can be subtle and long term. The absence of YouTube usage for peace building efforts, despite its widespread popularity also suggest an area of untapped potential for leveraging video content to enhance the reach and impact of peace initiatives.

The discussion of the results reveals that the new media plays a critical role in shaping the peace building efforts of university youth. While there is a clear enthusiasm and engagement from the student of varying degree of perceived effectiveness suggests that there is a room for more targeted approaches to maximize the potential of this platform in promoting peace, advocating for gender equality and challenging cultural norms. Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of continued support for youth engagement in digital activism as well as the need for the training and resources to help them more effectively use these tools for lasting social change.

4.1 Recommendations

To enhance the impact of new media in peace building and advocacy efforts among students, it is crucial to implement a comprehensive strategy that includes training programs to improve digital literacy and skills in the content creation. Sharing successful case study and best practices can inspire students and provide a clear example of effective media use for social justice. Encouraging frequent and consistent engagement with the new media, in collaboration with influencers and organizations, will amplify key messages. Additionally, offering institutional support and workshop on digital tools, alongside peer learning sessions can foster an environment of innovation and creativity integrating new media into the curriculum of social sciences and developing interdisciplinary projects will ensure students can address social issues more effectively. Advocacy for gender equality should also be emphasized through specific programs and online forums, promoting collaboration and idea sharing. Regular feedback system and service can help evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives, while grassroots movement and student led project should receive institutional backing. Recognition programs and mentorship opportunities will further motivate students and partnership with NGO's will provide real world applications for their skills. Finally, a centralized online portal can offer continuous resources, training materials and support to empower students in their new media advocacy efforts.

4.2 Comparative Analysis with Existing Literature

Extensive research has highlighted the role of media in both conflict prevention and peace building. Bratic and Schirch (2007) argued that media, particularly the new platforms like social media, can serve as powerful tool in promoting dialogue and peace by spreading critical information and fostering conversations among conflict effective communities. In Pakistan SFCG's project with (2013), supported by DANIDA, demonstrate the importance of mobilizing youth and using media for peace promotion at the local level, emphasizing collaboration with local leaders and media professionals to ensure that accurate information circulates. Similarly, Mamoon and Fozia (2018) explored how media

can aid in conflict resolution, particularly within Pakistan and advocate for strategies like early warning system and peace journalism while discussing limitations such as privacy concerns. In a more regional context, Hussain (2023) explores media role in peace building in Balochistan utilizing agenda setting and framing theories to express how media shapes public perceptions in conflict areas.

Ali et al (2020) focus on post-conflict swat, exploring the collaboration between media, civil society and the government in promoting peace. While the media has helped a constructive role, challenges such as bias and external pressures were noted, particularly in reporting from conflict zones. On the other hand Hashmi (2020) delves into youth development in Pakistan, underscoring the crucial role young people can play in peace building and national cohesion. His research links youth development to peace by promoting gender sensitive policies and overcoming structural barriers that hinder youth progress.

Karl and Larrauri's (2013) study looks at the transformative impact of technology on peace efforts particularly in the developing world where mobile phones and Internet connectivity provide unprecedented opportunities for youth engagement, local conflict management and community driven peace processes. Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) further develop this by theorizing youth engagement in everyday peace, highlighting how the intersection of local and global factors impacts young people peace building contribution. Lastly, EI Tarabishi and Galal (2023) focus on the role of social media in shaping youth behavior, noting both in positive potential for peace promotion and its possible negative influences, thus underscoring the complexity involved in digital engagement.

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that student at university of Peshawar are effectively leveraging new media as a powerful tool for social advocacy, promoting peace and raising awareness around critical issues such as gender inequality, social injustice and cultural taboos. The finding reveals that these students are not just passive consumers of social media instead, they actively engage in creating and implementing impactful campaigns aimed at fostering social change. Their belief in the significance of their contributions highlights the transformative potential of digital platform in addressing societal challenges. To further support and enhance their advocacy efforts, it is crucial for the university to provide targeted training, resources and opportunities for collaboration with external organization and influencers. By doing so, students can expand their reach and effectiveness, ultimately leading to more profound and sustainable impact on social issues these seeks to address.

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