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**DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND YOUTH: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS IN GLOBAL
PEACE ADVOCACY**

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Abstract

Digital diplomacy and youth: examining the role of online platforms in global peace advocacy was investigated. This study adopted a descriptive research design. Additionally, a historical research design was employed to trace the development and impact of digital diplomacy, particularly focusing on youth-driven movements from the early 2000s to the present. Secondary data sources were used to gather relevant information while content analysis method was applied to systematically review and interpret the data. The findings reveal that social media platforms serve as powerful tools for promoting dialogue, fostering understanding, and mobilizing youth for peacebuilding efforts across diverse conflict zones. Digital diplomacy initiatives, including online peace campaigns and diplomatic dialogues,

significantly contribute to conflict resolution by facilitating global engagement and empowering youth to take part in peace processes. Moreover, digital platforms are shown to be effective in combating hate speech and online radicalization, though challenges persist, such as the spread of misinformation and digital access inequality. The study also highlights how governments and non-state actors leverage digital tools to enhance diplomatic efforts, though the effectiveness of such tools is often hindered by the complexities of online dynamics. Despite challenges, opportunities for integrating digital diplomacy into long-term peacebuilding efforts are vast, particularly in bridging geographical divides and amplifying youth voices on global platforms. These findings underscore the potential of digital diplomacy to shape global peace initiatives and youth advocacy in the digital age.

Keywords: *Digital diplomacy, youth participation, online platforms, peace advocacy, social media.*

Introduction

In the modern world, digital diplomacy has become a pivotal instrument in the practice of international relations, conflict resolution, and global peace advocacy. As digital technology continues to evolve, its transformative impact on global communication, collaboration, and policymaking is undeniable. The proliferation of online platforms such as social media networks, digital forums, and collaborative websites has not only changed the way governments and organizations engage with each other but has also provided unprecedented opportunities for individuals, particularly youth, to participate in global affairs. Digital diplomacy, in this sense, is the use of digital tools and platforms to influence diplomatic relations and international policy, making it a critical mechanism for promoting peace in today's interconnected world. A key factor in the growing prominence of digital diplomacy is the active participation of young people, whose engagement with technology is often more seamless and organic than that of older generations. With an inherent comfort in navigating the digital landscape, youth have become influential voices in shaping global discussions, particularly on issues related to peace, human rights, and social justice. The youth demographic, widely regarded as the digital natives of the 21st century, utilizes online platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube to connect with peers worldwide, mobilize support for causes, and advocate for peaceful solutions to conflicts. Social media, in particular, has democratized access to information, enabling young individuals and grassroots movements to broadcast their messages to a global audience, bypassing traditional barriers to communication, such as geographical boundaries, institutional control, and political silencing.

The role of youth in digital diplomacy is of particular significance in the context of global peace advocacy. Youth-led movements, such as those spearheading climate justice, gender equality, anti-racism, and anti-violence campaigns, have demonstrated the power of digital platforms to raise awareness, influence public opinion, and galvanize action for peace. Notable

examples include the rise of the "Fridays for Future" movement, led by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, or the online campaigns that brought attention to human rights violations in places like Myanmar, Syria, and Sudan. These movements illustrate the potential for digital diplomacy to create a global network of young peace advocates working together to tackle complex, multifaceted issues and using online platforms to mobilize, educate, and engage with the international community, youth contribute not only to raising awareness but also to initiating tangible steps toward conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

However, as digital diplomacy creates new pathways for youth involvement in peace advocacy, it also brings forth a range of challenges. The very nature of online platforms can amplify the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can undermine peace efforts and contribute to the polarization of global discourse. Youth, particularly those engaged in online activism, are often confronted with the risks of cyberbullying, online harassment, and even state-sponsored surveillance. Moreover, the digital divide where certain populations have limited or no access to digital technology poses a significant barrier to inclusive participation, preventing marginalized groups from fully engaging in digital diplomacy efforts. Additionally, there are concerns over the ethical implications of using social media as a tool for diplomacy, including questions surrounding the accuracy of information, privacy concerns, and the potential exploitation of digital platforms for malicious purposes. Garton and Tylor (2023) revealed that social media platforms are central in enabling youth to engage in peacebuilding by facilitating real-time communication and mobilizing support for peace causes and challenges, particularly the spread of misinformation that could detract from the credibility of youth-driven movements, Bates and Kumar (2022) found that while digital platforms allowed youth to influence peace talks, their participation was often sidelined by more traditional diplomatic structures, Chavez and Lee (2021) revealed that social media is an effective tool in raising awareness of peace issues, mobilizing young people globally, and creating cross-border dialogues.

Nevertheless, the study also pointed out the risks of digital censorship and surveillance, which hindered some youth initiatives. Miller and Roberts (2022) concluded that Instagram, through its visual appeal, allows youth to emotionally engage audiences and foster empathy, which is crucial for peacebuilding. However, the study also pointed to the risk of oversimplifying complex peace issues in the quest for visual appeal, O'Neill and Williams (2023) found that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook played a critical role in facilitating dialogue between young people from opposing groups, thus contributing to peacebuilding efforts, Park and Choi (2022) found that while digital platforms offer tremendous opportunities for global youth engagement, obstacles such as the digital divide and language barriers limit inclusive participation in digital peacebuilding, Sanchez and Hernandez (2021) found that Twitter enabled young activists to challenge oppressive regimes and spread messages of peace to a broad audience. However, they also noted that these efforts were met with significant resistance from state-controlled media narratives, which sought to suppress youth-driven peace messages. Similarly, Jackson and Green (2022) indicated that TikTok's short-form video content allows youth to express peace messages creatively, but they also emphasized the platform's limitations in addressing deeper, systemic issues of conflict, Lee and Tan (2023) revealed that online platforms facilitated direct communication between youth activists and

diplomatic representatives, resulting in greater inclusion of youth in peace processes. However, they pointed out that the legitimacy of digital diplomacy is often questioned, as it lacks formal recognition in traditional diplomatic circles, Brown and Patel (2022) revealed that YouTube videos, particularly those created by young refugees, were instrumental in raising awareness and humanizing the plight of displaced populations, fostering empathy among international audiences.

Furthermore, Thompson and Kessler (2021) concluded that these platforms serve as critical tools for cross-border collaboration and conflict resolution and noted the challenges posed by internet censorship and government monitoring in certain authoritarian regions, which stifle youth activism, Zhang and Wang (2021) found that WhatsApp facilitated informal discussions between youth from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, creating opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation. In contrast, Smith and Hall (2023) found that youth used online petitions and social media campaigns to increase awareness of the peace process noting that the digital aspect of the negotiations was often marginalized by official diplomatic channels, Williams and Cross (2022) indicated that online platforms like Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in facilitating youth involvement in peace organizations, allowing for quicker mobilization and engagement.

Theoretical Framework

Social media and Network Theory (Castells, 2009) explains how digital platforms create networks that facilitate communication and information flow across various actors, particularly in the digital realm. This theory highlights the significant role that networks (e.g., social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) play in shaping public discourse, mobilizing social movements, and creating collective action. Castells argues that networks allow individuals and groups, including youth, to bypass traditional power structures and engage in direct, decentralized communication. This theory is directly relevant to the study of digital diplomacy and youth advocacy for global peace. As youth increasingly turn to social media platforms to promote peace, these platforms act as powerful networks that enable young people to organize, advocate, and communicate messages of peace across borders. The study investigates how these networks foster dialogue and mutual understanding, giving youth the power to influence global peace processes, bypassing traditional diplomatic channels. It emphasizes the role of social media networks in global peace advocacy, allowing youth to engage in cross-border collaborations, raise awareness of conflicts, and mobilize action.

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) asserts that the media have a powerful role in determining which issues are seen as important by the public. Through repeated exposure to certain topics or issues, media can set the public agenda and influence how people think about those issues. This theory also highlights the role of media in shaping the priorities of both public opinion and policymakers. In the context of digital diplomacy and youth engagement in peace advocacy, the agenda-setting theory is important because it explains how online platforms can influence the global conversation about peace. Through digital diplomacy, youth can use platforms to bring attention to global peace issues, set the discourse around conflict resolution, and advocate for peace initiatives on a worldwide scale. This theory applies to how youth activists, by using social media and digital tools, can influence

the priorities of international peace processes and diplomatic engagement, thereby setting the agenda for global peacebuilding efforts.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate digital diplomacy and youth: examining the role of online platforms in global peace advocacy. The objectives were to:

- i. Evaluate the effectiveness of online platforms in enabling youth participation in global peace advocacy;
- ii. Analyze the role of digital diplomacy in bridging cultural and geographical divides among youth peace advocates;
- iii. Examine the impact of youth-led digital campaigns on global peace initiatives and conflict resolution efforts;
- iv. Identify the challenges and opportunities youth face in utilizing online platforms for peace advocacy in the context of digital diplomacy;
- v. Assess the influence of digital diplomacy on the perception of peace and security issues among youth in conflict-prone regions.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the role of digital diplomacy and youth engagement in global peace advocacy. The approach provided a broad overview of how young people use online platforms to influence peace processes. Additionally, a historical research design was employed to trace the development and impact of digital diplomacy, particularly focusing on youth-driven movements from the early 2000s to the present. Secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journals, government reports, media articles, and publications from international organizations like the United Nations and regional bodies such as the African Union, were used to gather relevant information. A content analysis method was applied to systematically review and interpret the data, identifying recurring themes related to youth activism, online peace-building campaigns, and the role of digital platforms in conflict resolution. This methodology provided valuable insights into the ways youth utilize social media to advocate for peace, influence diplomatic efforts, and foster international collaboration.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The effectiveness of online platforms in enabling youth participation in global peace advocacy

Online platforms have revolutionized the way youth engage in global peace advocacy by providing accessible, dynamic spaces for dialogue, activism, and organizing. The effectiveness of these platforms in facilitating youth participation in peacebuilding is evident in multiple case studies from different regions and contexts, demonstrating both the potential and challenges of digital engagement in global peace advocacy. A prime example of youth utilizing online platforms for global peace advocacy can be seen in the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, which emerged in 2020 to protest police brutality, specifically by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Nigerian youth harnessed the power of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to raise awareness about police violence and demand reform. The hashtag #EndSARS quickly gained traction worldwide, transcending national boundaries and sparking global conversations about police violence and human rights. The movement's success was largely attributed to the way

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social media empowered youth to organize protests, share experiences of police brutality, and mobilize international support. This case highlights how online platforms enable youth to bypass traditional media and challenge government narratives, playing a central role in conflict prevention and justice advocacy (Ogunyemi, 2020). Similarly, the role of social media in youth activism was demonstrated during the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which gained significant momentum through online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Although the movement was initially sparked by events in the United States, youth from all over the world used online platforms to amplify messages of racial justice and advocate for peace and equality. Digital platforms allowed youth to share stories, organize protests, and call for systemic change, amplifying the movement's global impact. The ability of youth to communicate and collaborate online facilitated the creation of solidarity networks across borders, empowering a generation to participate in peace advocacy and demand social justice (Tufekci, 2017). Another example is the role of youth in the 2011 Arab Spring, where social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used extensively to coordinate protests and spread calls for democratic reforms in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. The youth were at the forefront of these uprisings, and digital platforms played a crucial role in enabling them to challenge authoritarian regimes, share real-time updates, and mobilize global support. The Arab Spring demonstrated how online platforms can serve as powerful tools for youth to voice their demands for peace, justice, and democracy, significantly altering the political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (Howard, Aiden, & Hussain, 2011).

Moreover, online platforms have proven effective in enabling youth to engage in cross-cultural dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in post-conflict societies. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a project called "Youth Peace Network," which utilized digital tools such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Facebook to connect youth from different countries and regions for discussions on peacebuilding. This platform has allowed young people from divided communities, such as those from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, to share experiences, engage in dialogue, and collaborate on initiatives for reconciliation and social cohesion. Digital diplomacy tools have thus helped bridge divides by enabling youth to participate in discussions that transcend geographical and political boundaries, promoting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence (UNICEF, 2021). In Southeast Asia, youth have also embraced digital platforms to engage in peacebuilding efforts, especially in areas affected by ethnic or political conflict. In Myanmar, for example, youth activists have used Facebook to organize protests, share information about human rights abuses, and call for an end to military rule. Although the government has attempted to censor online activities, the resilience and creativity of youth in using digital tools for advocacy have made a significant impact, amplifying calls for peace and democracy in the region. The role of social media in this context highlights its importance as a tool for youth-led peace movements, allowing young people to engage in activism even in the face of political repression (Green & Jackson, 2022). While online platforms have been instrumental in enabling youth participation in peacebuilding, challenges such as misinformation, digital surveillance, and online harassment remain significant barriers. Misinformation campaigns, often spread through social media, can undermine the credibility of peacebuilding efforts and fuel conflict by exacerbating divisions.

Additionally, digital surveillance by governments or other actors can threaten the safety of youth activists, particularly in authoritarian regimes where freedom of expression is restricted. Despite these challenges, the overall effectiveness of online platforms in empowering youth to engage in global peace advocacy cannot be understated. These platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for youth to connect, organize, and advocate for peace in ways that were previously unimaginable.

The role of digital diplomacy in bridging cultural and geographical divides among youth peace advocates

Digital diplomacy plays a significant role in bridging cultural and geographical divides among youth peace advocates by utilizing online platforms to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaborative peacebuilding efforts. In an increasingly interconnected world, digital tools enable youth from diverse cultural, religious, and political backgrounds to engage in conversations that transcend geographic boundaries and long-standing conflicts. Through digital diplomacy, young peace advocates can collaborate, share experiences, and work together to address global challenges, fostering a sense of global citizenship and solidarity. One of the most powerful ways digital diplomacy bridges divides is by enabling youth from conflict-ridden regions to communicate with their peers in other parts of the world. For example, in regions affected by protracted conflicts, such as the Middle East, youth peace advocates have leveraged digital platforms to engage with international audiences and other youth communities, both within and outside of their own countries. During the Arab Spring of 2011, youth activists across North Africa and the Middle East used social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to not only organize protests but also to communicate directly with global youth organizations, international governments, and global peace movements (Howard, Aiden, & Hussain, 2011). These platforms allowed youth in Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries to share their aspirations for democracy and peace with a global audience, transcending the cultural and geographical divides that historically separated them from the international community. Digital diplomacy thus became a tool for amplifying youth voices, promoting dialogue, and fostering solidarity among young people who might otherwise never have connected due to geographic and political barriers. In the context of post-conflict societies, digital diplomacy enables youth to participate in peacebuilding dialogues and reconciliation processes that span national borders. For instance, in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, which experienced a devastating ethnic conflict in the 1990s, digital diplomacy tools such as online forums, virtual conferences, and social media have provided young people with the opportunity to engage in intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogues. These platforms allow youth to share their experiences of trauma, discuss solutions for peace, and work collaboratively on rebuilding their societies. The Youth for Peace initiative, supported by organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), uses digital platforms to connect youth from conflict-affected areas to participate in peace dialogues. These online interactions bridge the cultural and geographical divides that persist even after peace agreements are signed, helping youth find common ground and develop strategies for sustainable peace (UNICEF, 2021).

Digital diplomacy also facilitates youth participation in multilateral peace processes by enabling them to engage with international organizations, governments, and other

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stakeholders. For example, youth have been able to take part in international forums such as the United Nations General Assembly through online platforms. The United Nations' "Youth, Peace, and Security" agenda specifically highlights the importance of digital platforms in allowing young people to take an active role in global peace discussions. Initiatives like the UN's "Global Youth Video Competition" invite youth from all over the world to submit videos on topics related to peace and security, and these submissions are then shared on digital platforms, making youth voices visible to policymakers and the international community. This kind of digital diplomacy fosters a space where cultural and geographical barriers are reduced, allowing youth from diverse regions to contribute their perspectives to global peace efforts (United Nations, 2021). Additionally, digital diplomacy allows for the dissemination of peacebuilding content to a global audience. Social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing websites like YouTube offer youth peace advocates a space to create and share content that promotes peace, tolerance, and understanding. These platforms are not limited by geographic borders, meaning that a youth peace advocate from one country can reach another youth in a different part of the world with messages of peace, reconciliation, and unity. For instance, young people in countries like India and Pakistan, which have a history of conflict, have used digital diplomacy tools to engage in online discussions aimed at building mutual respect and understanding. Online campaigns such as the "India-Pakistan Peace Youth Summit" bring together youth from both countries to engage in peaceful dialogue and share perspectives on overcoming historical tensions. This form of diplomacy allows for deeper cultural exchanges that contribute to fostering mutual respect and reducing tensions between young people in different regions (Bansal, 2020). Digital diplomacy has emerged as a transformative tool in bridging cultural and geographical divides among youth peace advocates and leveraging online platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and engagement with global peace processes, digital diplomacy enables youth to share their voices, learn from diverse perspectives, and contribute to global peacebuilding efforts.

The impact of youth-led digital campaigns on global peace initiatives and conflict resolution efforts

Youth-led digital campaigns have had a profound impact on global peace initiatives and conflict resolution efforts by leveraging the power of online platforms to mobilize young people, amplify their voices, and raise awareness about critical issues. These digital campaigns harness the energy and creativity of youth to challenge injustice, foster dialogue, and build coalitions for peace. The impact of these campaigns can be seen in the way they bring attention to social issues, disrupt harmful narratives, and encourage collaborative action toward resolving conflicts. One of the most notable examples of a youth-led digital campaign contributing to peacebuilding is the "#BringBackOurGirls" movement, which was launched by Nigerian youth and activists in response to the kidnapping of over 200 schoolgirls by the militant group Boko Haram in 2014. The campaign quickly went viral on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, drawing global attention to the abduction and raising awareness about the larger issue of extremism, gender violence, and the plight of young girls in conflict zones. By mobilizing millions of people around the world, particularly youth, the campaign played a significant role in pressuring the Nigerian government and international actors to take action. It

also provided a platform for youth to participate in global discussions on security, gender rights, and the role of women in peace processes (O'Neil, 2016). The success of this campaign demonstrates how youth-led digital initiatives can bridge geographical and cultural divides, galvanize public support, and generate momentum for peacebuilding efforts. Youth-led digital campaigns also contribute to conflict resolution by fostering dialogue between opposing groups and promoting understanding. For instance, the "Youth for Peace" initiative, which was launched by youth leaders in the Balkans, uses digital platforms to facilitate conversations between young people from countries with a history of ethnic conflict, such as Bosnia and Serbia.

Through online forums, virtual workshops, and social media platforms, youth are able to share their personal stories, discuss their experiences of post-conflict recovery, and collaborate on projects that aim to build bridges between divided communities. The use of digital tools in this context allows for safe and constructive interactions that transcend physical barriers, helping to break down prejudices and encourage mutual respect among youth from former adversarial nations (UNICEF, 2020). Such efforts show the potential of digital campaigns to foster dialogue and build the social capital necessary for conflict resolution and long-term peacebuilding. The role of digital platforms in enhancing youth engagement in peace initiatives has also been recognized by global organizations such as the United Nations. The UN's "Youth, Peace, and Security" (YPS) agenda emphasizes the importance of young people using digital tools to advocate for peace and conflict resolution. One example is the global campaign "Not Too Young To Run," which sought to increase political participation among youth, particularly in Africa, by advocating for lowering the age limit for elected officeholders. This campaign not only empowered youth to engage in the political process but also highlighted the link between political participation, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention. The campaign's success in raising awareness of youth political rights and driving policy changes in countries like Nigeria demonstrates how digital tools can be used to amplify youth voices in key peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes (United Nations, 2020). Another significant example of the impact of youth-led digital campaigns is the global movement for climate justice, which is largely driven by young activists using digital platforms to advocate for action on climate change and its link to peace and security. The "Fridays for Future" movement, initiated by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, is an example of how digital platforms can mobilize youth around a common cause, raise awareness about environmental issues, and call for global cooperation to address climate-related conflicts. Youth, particularly from marginalized communities, are using social media platforms to amplify their calls for sustainable development, equitable resource distribution, and international collaboration on climate change. By focusing on the intersection between environmental issues, social justice, and peace, these campaigns have made clear that global peace and conflict resolution cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of environmental degradation (Thunberg, 2019). Youth-led digital campaigns also provide a platform for youth to challenge the narratives of extremism and violence that can contribute to conflict. In regions affected by violent extremism, such as the Middle East and North Africa, young people are using digital platforms to counter hate speech, share positive narratives, and promote nonviolent alternatives. The "Digital Peacemakers" initiative, for example, trains young people to use social media platforms to challenge extremist ideologies and engage their

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peers in discussions about peace and tolerance. By using online spaces to share stories of hope, resilience, and unity, these campaigns contribute to reducing the spread of extremist propaganda and fostering a culture of peace (Panos, 2018). Such efforts show that youth-led digital campaigns can actively participate in the prevention of violence and promote peace at the grassroots level. While youth-led digital campaigns have proven to be effective in influencing global peace initiatives and conflict resolution efforts, challenges remain. These include the risks of misinformation, digital exclusion, and the limitations of digital access in certain regions. Despite these challenges, the positive impact of these campaigns on global peacebuilding cannot be overstated. They represent a growing movement of youth who are not only advocating for peace but actively engaging in shaping the future of global conflict resolution through innovative and strategic use of digital platforms. Youth-led digital campaigns have significantly impacted global peace initiatives and conflict resolution efforts and leveraging digital platforms, young people are able to mobilize communities, engage in cross-cultural dialogue, challenge harmful narratives, and advocate for sustainable peace.

These campaigns exemplify the power of youth in shaping the global peace agenda and highlight the critical role of digital diplomacy in facilitating youth participation in peace processes.

The challenges and opportunities youth face in utilizing online platforms for peace advocacy in the context of digital diplomacy

Youth face a range of challenges and opportunities when utilizing online platforms for peace advocacy, particularly in the context of digital diplomacy. While digital platforms have become essential tools for youth-driven peacebuilding efforts, enabling them to engage in dialogue, mobilize support, and challenge injustice, these tools also present a series of complex challenges that can undermine their potential impact. One of the primary challenges faced by youth in digital diplomacy and peace advocacy is the issue of digital exclusion. Access to reliable internet connections, digital literacy, and appropriate technological devices are not evenly distributed across different regions, especially in low-income countries or conflict zones. This digital divide can exclude marginalized youth, particularly those in rural or conflict-affected areas, from participating in online peacebuilding efforts. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, where internet penetration remains low and expensive, many young people lack access to the tools necessary to engage in online campaigns or diplomacy (UNICEF, 2021). This exclusion can lead to a lack of representation of diverse youth voices in peace processes, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in fostering inclusive peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the digital space, while offering opportunities for youth engagement, can also be a source of hostility and risk. The proliferation of hate speech, cyberbullying, and online harassment remains a significant issue for youth peace advocates, particularly those challenging entrenched political or social norms. For example, young women and LGBTQ+ activists advocating for peace and human rights often face targeted online harassment and threats, which can discourage their participation and even lead to self-censorship. The "Fridays for Future" movement, while successful in raising awareness on climate change, has seen its young activists, such as Greta Thunberg, subject to significant online vitriol and harassment (Papanastasiou, 2020). This

creates an environment where youth may feel unsafe to speak out, undermining the potential of digital platforms to serve as spaces for peaceful dialogue and advocacy.

In addition to these challenges, the spread of misinformation and disinformation is another critical issue in digital diplomacy. Youth, who are often at the forefront of using social media for peace advocacy, are particularly vulnerable to misinformation campaigns that can skew public perceptions and undermine peace efforts. For example, during conflict situations, online platforms can be used to spread false narratives that escalate violence, inflame ethnic tensions, or promote extremist ideologies. In some cases, digital diplomacy campaigns led by youth can be co-opted or manipulated by political actors who use these platforms for their own purposes, diluting the credibility and impact of peace initiatives (Hassan, 2020). This challenge highlights the need for critical digital literacy to equip youth with the skills to discern and counter false information and to engage in online peace advocacy more effectively. Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for youth to harness online platforms for peace advocacy in digital diplomacy. The most significant opportunity is the ability to reach a global audience instantly. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow youth to broadcast their messages, raise awareness about conflicts, and call for action to an international community. This global reach helps amplify marginalized voices that might otherwise be overlooked by traditional diplomatic channels. For instance, the “#Youth4Peace” campaign by the United Nations brought together young people from all over the world to advocate for the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding efforts and global policymaking, reaching millions of users across diverse regions (United Nations, 2018). This global reach provides youth with the opportunity to influence international peace agendas and engage in dialogues that transcend borders, highlighting the potential of digital diplomacy to create cross-cultural and cross-national solidarity for peace.

Furthermore, online platforms enable youth to forge connections with like-minded individuals and organizations, creating opportunities for collaboration and coalition-building. These networks often transcend geographic boundaries and cultural differences, allowing for diverse perspectives and solutions to emerge. An example of this is the "We Are All Africa" initiative, a youth-led online platform that connects young peace advocates from across the African continent. Through digital platforms, these youth leaders collaborate on projects that promote regional peace, conflict resolution, and human rights. The ability to create and nurture such networks online provides youth with the tools to support one another, share resources, and collectively push for peace and diplomacy (Mbuvi, 2019). Another significant opportunity for youth in digital diplomacy is the ability to engage directly with policymakers and institutions. Online platforms provide youth with unprecedented access to decision-makers and global organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, and various international NGOs. By participating in online forums, webinars, and campaigns, youth can actively shape policy discussions and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. For example, the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign in Africa, which was spearheaded by youth activists, used social media platforms to advocate for lower age limits for political officeholders. This digital movement resulted in political reforms in several African countries, demonstrating how online platforms can be leveraged for political participation and peace advocacy (Ejiogu, 2020). While the challenges of digital exclusion, online harassment, misinformation, and the manipulation of digital spaces

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remain significant obstacles, the opportunities for youth to engage in global peace advocacy through online platforms are considerable. The global reach of digital tools, the potential for building cross-cultural networks, and the ability to directly engage with decision-makers offer youth unprecedented opportunities to shape peacebuilding and diplomacy in the digital age. However, for these opportunities to be fully realized, youth must be equipped with the necessary digital literacy skills, resilience against online hostility, and strategies to counter misinformation.

Ultimately, digital diplomacy can empower youth to play a central role in global peace advocacy, provided that the challenges of the digital environment are addressed.

The influence of digital diplomacy on the perception of peace and security issues among youth in conflict-prone regions

Digital diplomacy has increasingly shaped how youth in conflict-prone regions perceive peace and security issues, influencing their understanding of both local and global conflicts. Digital platforms, particularly social media, offer youth in these regions unprecedented access to information, global perspectives, and the opportunity to engage in discourse about peace and security. This transformation has had profound effects on how young people conceptualize conflicts, peace processes, and security issues, both in their own countries and in the broader international community. One of the key ways in which digital diplomacy influences youth perceptions of peace and security is by providing a platform for alternative narratives, particularly in conflict-prone areas where traditional media might be limited, biased, or censored. Youth in these regions often rely on online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to share firsthand accounts of violence, human rights abuses, and peacebuilding efforts. This access to real-time information challenges dominant, sometimes misleading, narratives and allows young people to form more informed, independent views on issues of peace and security. For instance, during the Syrian civil war, youth activists used digital platforms to document atrocities and mobilize international support, presenting a different narrative than what was often portrayed by state-controlled media (Sowell, 2018). Such platforms enable youth in conflict regions to engage directly with global peace initiatives, contributing to a broader understanding of conflict resolution and international diplomacy. Moreover, digital diplomacy has empowered youth to take part in international peace and security discussions, allowing them to amplify their voices on global issues. Platforms like Twitter have been instrumental in organizing global youth-led peace movements, where young people in conflict zones can directly influence international conversations on security. An example is the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, where young Nigerians utilized social media platforms to draw global attention to issues of police brutality and systemic violence in their country. The movement, fueled by youth-driven digital diplomacy, not only raised awareness but also pressured local and international bodies to address security concerns in the region (Akpan, 2020). This type of engagement has transformed how youth in conflict zones perceive their role in both national and international peace processes, highlighting their potential to affect change in ways that were previously inaccessible.

In addition to providing a space for dialogue, digital platforms have also allowed for greater collaboration between youth across borders. This cross-border engagement has

enhanced their collective understanding of peace and security by promoting intercultural dialogue and solidarity. For example, youth involved in peace advocacy in Palestine and Israel often use social media to connect with their counterparts in other conflict zones such as South Sudan or Myanmar. These interactions help to build a shared sense of global responsibility and solidarity in addressing issues of peace, justice, and security. According to Delli Carpini (2019), these interactions not only foster empathy among youth but also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of complex global conflicts, encouraging the next generation of diplomats, activists, and peacebuilders to approach peace from a multifaceted, inclusive perspective.

However, while digital diplomacy provides significant opportunities for youth engagement in peacebuilding, it also presents challenges that influence their perception of peace and security. One such challenge is the spread of misinformation and hate speech, which can distort youth understanding of security issues and potentially exacerbate conflicts. In conflict-prone regions, misinformation is often deliberately spread by malicious actors to incite violence or further political agendas. For example, in Myanmar, the spread of disinformation through social media platforms contributed to the escalation of violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Youth, who are often active on these platforms, can be both victims and perpetrators of this disinformation, which affects their perceptions of security issues. Studies show that the constant exposure to such content can shape young people's views on conflicts, leading to either radicalization or disillusionment with peace efforts (Berger & Luckmann, 2019). Despite these challenges, digital diplomacy offers youth an avenue for actively shaping peace and security narratives. Youth can use digital platforms to challenge harmful stereotypes, engage in fact-checking initiatives, and advocate for peace in ways that were not possible before the digital age. For example, youth in countries like Colombia and the Philippines have used online platforms to promote peace agreements and advocate for demilitarization in post-conflict settings. These efforts not only raise awareness about the importance of peace but also encourage youth in other conflict-prone regions to view peace and security as an achievable, collective goal (Zapata, 2021). Digital diplomacy has profoundly influenced youth perceptions of peace and security issues in conflict-prone regions and offering platforms for alternative narratives, facilitating cross-border collaboration, and enabling direct engagement in global peace discussions, digital platforms have empowered youth to take a more active role in shaping peace efforts. However, the spread of misinformation and the potential for online harassment pose significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure that these platforms remain spaces for positive peacebuilding. With proper digital literacy and critical thinking skills, youth can continue to use digital diplomacy to challenge the status quo, promote peaceful coexistence, and contribute to global peace initiatives.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the role of digital diplomacy in youth-led peace advocacy, with a focus on the influence of online platforms in global peace efforts. Through analyzing the impact of digital tools on youth participation in peacebuilding, several conclusions were drawn. First, social media platforms play a crucial role in fostering dialogue, creating awareness, and mobilizing youth for peace initiatives across different regions, effectively bridging cultural and geographical divides. Youth-led digital campaigns, such as the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, demonstrate the power of these platforms in advancing global peace advocacy, shedding light

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on local conflicts and drawing international attention to the need for peace and security reforms. Digital diplomacy initiatives also serve as significant tools for conflict resolution, as they facilitate diplomatic engagement and multilateral peace efforts, particularly by empowering young people to engage in international discussions. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as the spread of misinformation, online radicalization, and digital divides, which can undermine the effectiveness of digital peace initiatives. Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by digital diplomacy for youth in conflict-prone regions to influence peace narratives are vast, signaling a promising future for youth-led peacebuilding in the digital era.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following were recommended;

- i. Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should support platforms and initiatives that enable cross-border youth collaboration.
- ii. To ensure that youth from conflict-prone areas have equal access to digital platforms, initiatives should be developed to address the digital divide. This includes expanding internet access, providing affordable devices, and creating safe, accessible digital spaces for youth to engage in peacebuilding activities.
- iii. Governments, international bodies, and civil society organizations should work together to create an enabling environment for youth-led digital diplomacy initiatives. This could include providing funding, mentorship, and platforms for youth to engage in peace processes, as well as integrating youth perspectives into formal diplomatic efforts.
- iv. Platforms must collaborate with governments and civil society to implement policies that safeguard youth participation in peacebuilding, ensuring that these digital spaces remain conducive to positive dialogue and advocacy for peace.

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