Media and Communication Strategies for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing focus on the function of media and communication tactics in fostering conflict prevention and resolution. Recognized as a potential tool for promoting discourse, trust-building, and understanding between groups in conflict, the media helps to bring people together. The development of media diversity and pluralism is a crucial component of successful media and communication strategies for conflict avoidance and resolution. According to research, independent media sources give a forum for different viewpoints to be aired, fostering trust and encouraging community engagement. Furthermore, digital media platforms have opened up new channels for communication and information exchange, but they also need to be carefully regulated to stop the spread of hate speech and fake information. Another crucial element of media and communication strategies for conflict prevention and resolution is conversation and the promotion of intercultural understanding. Media outlets can contribute to the building of bridges and the promotion of understanding by providing chances for members of other communities to interact and share their viewpoints. In areas afflicted by conflict, encouraging accountability and openness is also crucial. Independent media outlets may be crucial in holding governments and other stakeholders responsible for their activities and in exposing corruption and violations of human rights. Media and communication techniques can help foster good governance by fostering accountability and openness. Analyzing three case studies in Albania, including the "Media for Diversity and Dialogue" project, BIRN Albania investigative journalism outlet, and the use of social media and citizen journalism during the 2015 protests, this paper concludes that media and communication strategies prioritizing media pluralism and diversity, intercultural dialogue, accountability, and transparency can effectively contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. However, the use of digital media platforms presents new opportunities for effective communication strategies, but also requires careful regulation to mitigate the spread of hate speech and misinformation.

Keywords: *Media, Communication, Conflict prevention, Conflict resolution, Diversity*

1. Introduction

In the 1970s, a concept known as peace journalism emerged in the field of journalism. Johan Galtung proposed a genuine approach for media agencies and journalists, emphasizing the constructive reporting of news, the promotion of peace, understanding, and conflict resolution.[1] The media's challenge to prioritize peace-oriented aspects during conflicts is exemplified by the recent wider geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine, along with internal conflicts like the 2015 protests by citizens in Albania. The predominant focus on violence, sensationalism, and marginalized

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1 Galtung J (2006) Peace journalism as an ethical challenge. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition* 1(2): 1–5.

perspectives on potential solutions presents an evident challenge. Consequently, journalists tend to construct a narrative that frames the conflict as a battle between good and evil, deviating from the core principles of professional journalism that aim to provide balanced and factual information. Amos (2007) examines diverse instances and illustrations from various conflict regions and acknowledges the significance of responsible journalism, impartial coverage, and precise information in facilitating dialogue, promoting understanding, and aiding conflict resolution initiatives.[2] In this context, the adherence of journalists to the principles of peace journalism during conflict reporting holds great significance. The following table presents a condensed overview of these principles, drawing upon Galtung's (2006) framework, which aims to elicit positive changes, encourage active engagement in constructive efforts, and cultivate empathy and comprehension among audiences.

Tab. 1: Key Principles of Peace Journalism (Galtung 2006)

Principles	Prerequisites
Balance	→ Focusing on the root causes, historical context, and multiple perspectives involved.
Cooperation	→ Focusing on dialogue, negotiation, nonviolent alternatives, peace initiatives, and peacebuilders.
Context	→ Emphasizing the historical, cultural, and social context. Offer analysis and contextual knowledge to enhance a holistic grasp of the current matters.
Humanization	→ Promoting a humanizing approach towards individuals entangled in conflicts, encompassing both victims and perpetrators, and discouraging dehumanizing depictions that fuel hostility and bias.
Solutions-oriented	→ Delving into and present possible resolutions to conflicts, showcasing peacebuilding endeavors, effective mediation, and the prospects of reconciliation.

The influence exerted by the media is intimately connected to the concept of public information and the shaping of perceptions through the conveyed information. The manner in which the media presents a potential conflict holds substantial sway over the public's perception of that conflict. Hanitzsch and Hoxha (2014) have identified two overarching categories of influences on news production: generic influences and conflict-related influences. These classifications serve to categorize and understand the various factors that impact how news is produced. "Generic influences are applicable to all types of journalism, regardless of beat or medium, whereas conflict-related influences specifically pertain to news coverage of conflicts." Furthermore, in alignment with existing literature on the multifaceted nature of news influences, they distinguish between three primary levels of influences based on their origin: the societal/community level, the organizational level, and the individual level.[3]

Taking into consideration the core principles of peace journalism and the examination of both generic and conflict-related influences on the media, this study aims to examine and propose effective media and communication approaches that can contribute to preventing and resolving conflicts in Albania. The study aims to explore the role of media in shaping public opinion, promoting dialogue, and fostering understanding among diverse groups within the Albanian society. By analyzing three case studies in Albania, the study seeks to identify successful strategies and best practices that can be applied in other conflict-prone regions or contexts. Ultimately, the goal is to provide insights and recommendations for leveraging media and communication as tools for conflict prevention and resolution in Albania and beyond. The paper will focus on two primary research questions:

1. What are the current media and communication strategies implemented in Albania to prevent and resolve conflicts, and who are the key stakeholders involved in the media sector?
2. How can media and communication strategies in Albania be enhanced and expanded to maximize their impact in preventing and resolving conflicts?

2. Literature Review

The significance of media and communication tactics in preventing and resolving conflicts is gaining greater recognition. An expanding body of research investigates the role of communication and media in fostering peace and promoting understanding, exploring diverse strategies that can be employed to achieve these objectives. According to Noelle-

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[2] *Amos, D. (2007). The Role of Journalism in Conflict Resolution: A Literature Review. Center for International Media Assistance.*

[3] *Hanitzsch T, Hoxha A (2014) News production: Theory and conceptual framework: Generic and conflict influences on the news production process. INFOCORE Working Paper 2014/01. Available at: www.infocore.eu/results/working-papers (accessed 30 April 2023).*

Neumann's spiral of silence theory (1993), media has the potential to impact public perception and shape how majority and minority opinions are perceived. By offering a platform for a range of voices and promoting open dialogue, the media can contribute to the development of an environment that nurtures understanding and facilitates the expression of diverse viewpoints.[4] Tajfel and Turner (1979) offer further perspectives on the influential role of media in conflict resolution, emphasizing that individuals' identities are influenced by their social group affiliations, which can either fuel or resolve conflicts. Media holds the power to shape social identities through narrative construction, emphasizing shared experiences, and fostering empathy. By presenting a multitude of perspectives and humanizing all parties involved, media can play a crucial role in resolving conflicts by bridging social divisions and cultivating a sense of collective identity.[5] While Kim and Dennis's study (2003) does not directly delve into conflict resolution, it offers valuable insights into the way's media can influence individuals' attitudes, social integration, and cultural adaptation.[6] These factors hold relevance in the context of conflict resolution, where media can be utilized to enhance understanding, facilitate dialogue, and cultivate positive relationships among conflicting parties. For instance, the study highlights that media consumption, particularly through television and the internet, is associated with social integration and engagement with the host society. Similarly, in the realm of conflict resolution, media can play a role in fostering social integration by providing platforms for dialogue, encouraging interactions between conflicting parties, and forging connections among diverse communities. Such interactions have the potential to build bridges, mitigate animosity, and contribute to the resolution of conflicts.

An important key theme in the body of research is the importance of promoting media pluralism and diversity. A number of studies have highlighted the role that independent media outlets can play in promoting dialogue, providing access to information, and building trust among diverse communities. An illustrative instance is provided by Gunaratne's (2017) study on media and conflict resolution, which sheds light on how independent media outlets, including digital platforms, can facilitate dialogue by creating forums for diverse voices, presenting alternative narratives, highlighting solutions, and offering impartial coverage. The study underscores the significance of independent media outlets in delivering unbiased, precise, and varied reporting on conflicts, thereby fostering dialogue, comprehension, and reconciliation among conflicting parties.[7] Christensen and Jansson (2013) strengthen this notion by emphasizing that independent media outlets have a vital role in offering platforms for dialogue. They achieve this by redirecting attention from conflicts and problems towards potential solutions and opportunities.[8]

Gilboa (2009) studied the role of media in conflicts, particularly focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His work explores how media can both exacerbate and alleviate conflicts, the influence of media framing on conflict perception, the use of strategic communication in diplomacy, and the impact of media on peace processes.[9] Gilboa's research sheds light on the complex relationship between media and conflict resolution and how different media frames can either perpetuate or challenge conflict dynamics.

Digital media platforms have emerged as a prominent theme in the literature on conflict prevention and resolution. The advent of social media and other digital platforms has created new opportunities for information sharing and dialogue. However, these platforms also present novel challenges in terms of regulating the spread of hate speech and misinformation. Sambuli and Wong (2016) caution about the potential of digital tools and platforms to facilitate early warning systems, community engagement, and communication channels for conflict resolution initiatives.[10] On the other hand, Castells (2012) assesses the transformative potential of digital networks in fostering activism, facilitating dialogue, and driving social change.[11]

Several studies have emphasized the importance of media and communication strategies in promoting accountability and transparency in conflict-affected regions. These strategies involve using media platforms to expose corruption and human rights violations, as well as holding governments and other entities accountable for their actions.

[4] Noelle-Neumann, E. (1993). The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion-Our Social Skin (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

[5] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

[6] Kim, J., & Dennis, E. E. (2003). An Integrated Model of Media Use and Acculturation into the Host Society. Communication Theory, 13(2), 147-177.

[7] Gunaratne, S. A. (2017). Journalistic Role Performance: Exploring the Impact of Independent Journalism in Conflict Reporting. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 94(2), 521-541.

[8] Christensen, C., & Jansson, A. (2013). Constructive News: A New Approach to Journalism. Nordicom Review, 34(2), 3-15.

[9] Gilboa E., (2009) Media and Conflict Resolution, The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution, Edited by Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk, William Zartman. London.

[10] Sambuli, N., & Wong, C. (2016). ICTs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, and Crisis Response: An Analysis of Stakeholder Needs, Current Tools, and Practices. Internews.

[11] Castells, M. (2012). Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. Polity Press.

For example, Ogan and Willnat (2019) conducted a study on the role of media in promoting transparency and accountability in Africa, revealing that independent media outlets played a significant role in uncovering corruption and advocating for good governance.

In general, the literature indicates that media and communication strategies have a crucial role to play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts worldwide. By advocating for media pluralism and diversity, harnessing new technologies, fostering dialogue, and emphasizing accountability and transparency, it becomes more feasible to cultivate trust and understanding among diverse communities, thus promoting peaceful coexistence.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study involves analyzing three case studies in Albania to explore how the media can act as a representative of society and advocate for conflict resolution through objective and unbiased communication. The relevance of these cases lies in their ability to provide insights and practical examples for studying media and communication strategies in the context of conflict prevention and resolution. By examining these cases a deeper understanding of how media can contribute to promoting peace, dialogue, and resolution during times of conflict can be gained.

The first case study focuses on the "Media for Diversity and Dialogue" project initiated in Albania following the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. It showcases the potential of community radio stations in facilitating intercultural dialogue and understanding. It demonstrates how media platforms can be utilized to bridge divides and foster communication among diverse ethnic groups, thereby contributing to conflict prevention.

The second case study examines the prominent role of BIRN Albania, an investigative journalism outlet established in 2006, in combatting corruption and misconduct within the Albanian government and public institutions. It highlights the role of media in exposing corruption and malfeasance within government institutions. By uncovering and publicizing instances of corruption, media outlets like BIRN Albania can act as a catalyst for accountability, transparency, and conflict resolution, ultimately working towards a more just and stable society.

The third case study delves into the 2015 protests in Albania, often referred to as the "Anti-Government Protests." Underscores the influence of social media and citizen journalism in shaping public discourse and mobilizing collective action. Understanding the dynamics of how media platforms were utilized during these protests can provide valuable insights into the potential of media in promoting peaceful resolutions, addressing grievances, and facilitating dialogue between different stakeholders.

4. Results and Discussions

The Committee to Protect Journalists' statement on press attacks in 2001 in Macedonia sheds light on the difficulties and risks faced by journalists during the conflict, the role of media polarization in exacerbating tensions, and the erosion of journalistic ethics and independence. The statement provides several key insights and potential influences on the media and the general population. First, the fighting between the Macedonian government and ethnic Albanian rebels seeking increased civil liberties pushed the country towards the brink of civil war. Second, the role of unprofessional reporting and hate speech were both ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian journalists engaged in unprofessional reporting and hate speech, which played a central role in radicalizing their respective communities and polarizing the political atmosphere. Third, prior to the outbreak of fighting, a scandal known as the "Macedonian Watergate" emerged, involving the illegal wiretapping of top government officials, including journalists. This incident affected journalists' use of phones for work-related conversations. Forth, proposed legislation on public information drew criticism from local journalists and international press freedom groups for its requirements of government accreditation, inadequate access to official information, and standards for ethical journalism. Fifth, journalists faced harassment, equipment confiscation, and physical assaults during the conflict. Both government forces and ethnic Albanian rebels targeted and impeded their work. Sixth, Macedonian authorities censored certain Western news organizations, including discontinuing the airing of BBC news bulletins in Macedonian and Albanian languages. Seventh, Ethnic Albanian publications were specifically targeted, including the confiscation of an international edition of Fakti due to an article urging ethnic Albanian émigrés to join the "rebels". Eighth, the conflict led to media polarization along ethnic lines, with Albanian propaganda on one side and government-aligned media on the other. Independent media outlets also succumbed to pressure and started supporting the government. Ninth, journalists faced violent attacks, including beatings and assaults by protesters, resulting in injuries and, in some cases, the loss of life. Lastly, the conflict had a detrimental impact on journalistic

professionalism and impartiality, with media spaces becoming polarized and divided along ethnic lines.

Fig. 1: Committee to Protect Journalists Statement on Press Attacks in 2001-Macedonia (Facsimile)
Source: UNHCR https://www.refworld.org/docid/47c56630c.html

Within this context, and particularly during the peak of the significant crisis between the two primary ethnic groups in Macedonia, the launch of the "Media for Diversity and Dialogue" project introduced a new-fangled communication perspective and served as a catalyst for reevaluating and reshaping the intercommunity human relations affected by the conflict. Radio can be considered as the most appropriate mean of communication during this period for several reasons including accessibility, cultural sensitivity, community engagement potential, trustworthiness, bridge-building capabilities, and its role in conflict prevention through dialogue and understanding. Seib (2012) shares a strong consensus regarding the potential of radio as an effective tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.[12] Community radio stations, established as part of the project, empower local communities by providing them with a platform to express their concerns, share their experiences, and participate in the dialogue. It encourages community engagement, ownership, and active participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. Radio has traditionally enjoyed a level of trust and credibility among audiences. By utilizing community radio stations was aimed to build trust between different ethnic groups and foster dialogue based on reliable and objective information, countering misinformation and propaganda that might contribute to further polarization. Additional research, like the study conducted by Berger and Stremlau (2005), has further affirmed the distinct influence of radio in reaching diverse audiences, promoting dialogue, and playing a constructive role in fostering reconciliation.[13] The project recognized the potential of radio as a medium to bridge divides between ethnic groups and facilitate communication among them. By featuring programs that highlight common interests, shared values, and cultural exchange, community radio stations can play a crucial role in breaking down stereotypes, promoting empathy, and building relationships. Servaes (2013) added the potential of radio as a participatory and inclusive medium that can amplify marginalized voices, promote dialogue, and facilitate peacebuilding processes.[14]

Investigative reporting, as demonstrated in the study conducted by Githaiga and Yusuf (2018), serves as a compelling instance of how the media can act as a vital tool in preventing or resolving conflicts. Specifically, by uncovering corruption cases, the media plays a significant role in addressing grievances, promoting accountability, and
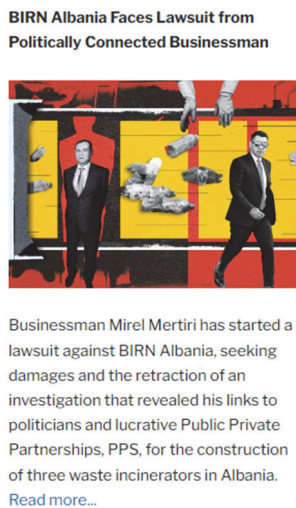
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[12] *Seib, P. (Ed.). (2012). Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century. Palgrave Macmillan.*

[13] *Berger, G., & Stremlau, N. (Eds.). (2005). Radio and Peacebuilding in Africa: The Impact and Challenges of Radio in Creating Peace. UN University Press.*

[14] *Servaes, J. (Ed.). (2013). Communication for Development and Social Change. Sage Publications.*

ultimately contributing to conflict prevention and resolution.[15] BIRN Albania's investigations have had a significant impact on Albanian society, helping to increase public scrutiny and pressure for reform. Its reporting has led to the resignation or dismissal of several public officials implicated in corruption, and has contributed to the passage of new laws and regulations aimed at increasing transparency and accountability in government. In this context, it sets an example of investigative journalism, emphasizing the importance of media integrity, professionalism, and adherence to ethical standards. By conducting in-depth investigations and producing high-quality reporting, BIRN Albania has contributed to raising the overall standards of journalism in the country, fostering a more responsible and accountable media landscape. BIRN Albania's recent investigation shed light on the pervasive issue of corruption and its detrimental impact on Albanian society. However, it is important to note that investigative journalists in Albania face significant challenges, including the potential for legal harassment aimed at silencing critical voices. In the article titled "BIRN Albania Faces Lawsuit from Politically Connected Businessman" reports on a legal challenge faced by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) in Albania. The lawsuit is filed by a businessman with political connections, alleging defamation and seeking significant financial compensation.[16]

Fig. 2: Media Coverage of Lawsuits against BIRN Albania for their Investigative Work

BIRN Albania Faces Lawsuit from Politically Connected Businessman

Businessman Mirel Mertiri has started a lawsuit against BIRN Albania, seeking damages and the retraction of an investigation that revealed his links to politicians and lucrative Public Private Partnerships, PPS, for the construction of three waste incinerators in Albania.
Read more...

Source: https://birn.eu.com/news-and-events/birn-albania-faces-lawsuit-from-politically-connected-businessman/

Gjykata rrëzon pretendimet e Mirel Mërtirit kundër BIRN Albania

Biznesmeni i incineratorëve, aktualisht në kërkim nga SPAK, kërkoi 300 mijë lekë dëmshpërblim me pretendimin se një shkrim i BIRN ku u ekspozuan lidhjet e tij politike i pati cenuar dinjitetin. Gjyqtarja Anila Karanxha hodhi poshtë padinë të premten dhe i ngarkoi Mërtirit kostot gjyqësore.

Nga Gjergj Erebara — 15.12 | 24/02/2023   Në Artikull kryesor Lajme, Lajme Kohe leximi: 2 minuta

Source: https://www.reporter.al/2023/02/24/gjykata-rrezon-pretendimet-e-mirel-mertirit-kunder-birn-albania/

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[15] *Githaiga, G., & Yusuf, A. (2018). Investigative Journalism and Peacebuilding: Lessons from the Kenyan Media. Media, War & Conflict, 11(3), 341-358.*

[16] *https://birn.eu.com/news-and-events/birn-albania-faces-lawsuit-from-politically-connected-businessman/. Published December 3, 2020. Accessed 24.04.2023.*

Scholars like Howard et al., (2011), [17] Zeng et al., (2019)[18] discuss that while media platforms alone may not resolve conflicts, they can play a significant role in raising awareness, facilitating dialogue, documenting violations, and garnering support for peaceful resolutions. By amplifying voices, providing alternative perspectives, and promoting transparency, media, including social media and citizen journalism, can contribute to conflict resolution processes. During the 2015 protests in Albania, social media and citizen journalism played a crucial role in shaping the narrative and disseminating information. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were utilized to spread news updates, photos, and videos, allowing information to quickly reach a wider audience and raise awareness about the protests. Additionally, social media facilitated the organization of demonstrations by providing dedicated event pages and groups where activists could invite people, share updates, and mobilize larger crowds. This helped ensure a unified voice among the participants. Citizen journalists took advantage of social media platforms to provide real-time reporting on the ground developments. Using platforms like Twitter, they shared live updates, photos, and videos, granting both local and international audiences' immediate access to unfolding events. Social media also served as an alternative news source, particularly when traditional media outlets faced government restrictions or bias. By sharing unfiltered information and opinions, protesters could counterbalance the official narrative and directly highlight their grievances to a broader audience.

Furthermore, social media played a crucial role in building solidarity among different groups and individuals supporting the protests. Hashtags and trending topics on platforms like Twitter fostered a sense of unity, allowing protesters to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations locally and globally. Social media platforms were also utilized to document instances of police brutality, violence, and human rights violations during the protests. Citizens captured videos and images on their smartphones, sharing them on various platforms to preserve evidence of misconduct and share it with a wider audience. The use of social media during the 2015 protests in Albania garnered international attention and support. Images, videos, and firsthand accounts shared on these platforms reached global audiences, increasing awareness and fostering solidarity from international communities and organizations.

5. Conclusions

Effective media and communication strategies play a crucial role in mitigating conflicts. They can contribute to conflict prevention by fostering dialogue, promoting understanding, and addressing the root causes of conflicts. In the context of Albania, where conflict resolution is essential, media and communication strategies can potentially facilitate peacebuilding efforts. Case studies examining media and communication strategies in conflict prevention and resolution in Albania provided specific insights into the effectiveness of different approaches. These studies highlighted the impact of media platforms, such as social media and citizen journalism, as well as traditional media outlets in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, facilitating dialogue, and building solidarity. Final observations can be summarized:

1. The first case study, focused on "Media for Diversity and Dialogue," suggested that media platforms and communication strategies that promote diversity and facilitate dialogue can contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. By providing inclusive spaces for different voices and perspectives, such initiatives can foster understanding, reduce tensions, and build bridges between diverse communities.
2. The second case study that explored the prominent role of BIRN Albania, indicated that independent and investigative journalism organizations can play a significant role in conflict prevention and resolution. Through their rigorous reporting, these organizations can expose corruption, human rights abuses, and other underlying issues that contribute to conflicts. By bringing these issues to light, they can generate public awareness, hold individuals and institutions accountable, and promote transparency.
3. The third case study examined the 2015 protests in Albania, highlighting the power of citizen journalism and social media in shaping the narrative, mobilizing people, and disseminating information. These platforms can amplify the voices of protesters, document human rights violations, and challenge official narratives. By providing alternative sources of information and facilitating communication among different groups, citizen journalism and social media can contribute to conflict resolution efforts.

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[17] *Howard, P. N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M. M., Mari, W., & Mazaid, M. (2011). Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring? Project on Information Technology & Political Islam.*
[18] *Zeng, F., Lin, J., & Zheng, Z. (2019). Social Media, Public Opinion, and Global Conflict Resolution: Evidence from the Chinese Anti-Japanese Protests. International Journal of Conflict Management, 30(1), 112-133.*

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