SOCIAL MEDIA & PEACEBUILDING

Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Monitor, engage, and be transparent; these have always been the keys to success in the digital space.

- Dallas Lawrence, Levick Strategic Communications

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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Contents

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BOOK REVIEW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A **MAN** OF **PEACE** IN **ACTION**

Remembering Dr Jacob Thomas, IAS (Rtd.)

T he *Pax Lumina* family mourns the passing away of Dr Jacob Thomas, IAS (Rtd.), our former Editor and a close collaborator in the mission of peace and reconciliation. His untimely demise last month has left a deep void in our hearts and in the life of this magazine.

For well over five years, since its inception, Dr Jacob Thomas guided *Pax Lumina* with a rare blend of intellectual depth, moral courage, and compassionate leadership. A man of integrity and conviction, he was known for his unwavering commitment to justice and truth—values that shaped every editorial decision he made. Under his stewardship, *Pax Lumina* found its distinctive voice as a publication rooted in the Jesuit vision of faith that does justice and promotes peace among peoples.

Dr Jacob distinguished himself as a noble and exemplary public servant in the Indian Administrative Service. During his illustrious career, he remained deeply committed to public welfare, integrity in governance, and the dignity of the marginalised. His administrative acumen was guided by a moral compass that consistently pointed towards justice and compassion.

Beyond his administrative achievements, Dr Jacob was a scholar and educator who believed that peace must be both lived and learned. As Academic Director of the Peace Studies Programme, jointly organised by LIPI-Kochi and XLRI-Jamshedpur, he worked tirelessly to make peacebuilding an interdisciplinary and practical endeavour—one that spoke to the conscience of both students and society. Peace for him was never an abstract concept; it was an active commitment—a call to engage, to dialogue, and to build bridges in a fragmented world.

Dr Jacob Thomas will be remembered not only for his intellect and accomplishments but for his humanity—for being, in the truest sense, a man of peace in action. Those who worked with him will remember his calm presence, his moral courage, and his ability to translate ideals into action. His friendship, insight, and quiet strength will continue to inspire *Pax Lumina* in the years to come.

This issue of *Pax Lumina* turns its focus to one of the most pressing themes of our time: **Social Media and Peacebuilding.**

Social media has emerged as one of the most powerful communication tools of the twenty-first century, shaping public opinion and connecting people across boundaries of geography, culture, and identity. It has become deeply woven into the fabric of daily life, creating a shared digital space where marginalised voices find expression, micro-entrepreneurs thrive, students learn, and diasporas remain connected across continents.

Yet, this same medium has come under intense scrutiny for its darker side. The very platforms that empower individuals also amplify misinformation, outrage, and anger. The viral nature of hashtags, boycotts, and leaderless protests often reveals how easily truth can be distorted and how swiftly mob behaviour can override dialogue and accountability.

Pax Lumina seeks to examine this paradox of power and peril with both clarity and imagination. Contributors from diverse contexts and disciplines critically engage with social media as a double-edged sword—probing its capacity to divide and its potential to unite. How might these platforms be re-imagined as catalysts for public good, social harmony, and peacebuilding? What creative strategies could harness their vast reach to nurture empathy, inclusion, and civic participation—fostering a culture of responsible digital citizenship?

We hope the insights, research, and reflections shared by policymakers, educators, media professionals, youth leaders, government agencies, and political thinkers in these pages will help us envision a digital public sphere where peace and dialogue are not only cherished ideals but active practices.

As we dedicate this issue to the memory of Dr Jacob Thomas, IAS, former Editor of *Pax Lumina,* we recall his conviction that true communication must always serve truth, justice, and human dignity. May his legacy continue to inspire us in this shared mission.

Binoy Pichalakkattu
Managing Editor
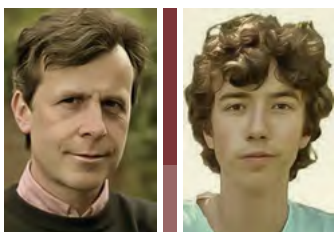
Miguel Farias / Carl António W. Farias
miguel.farias@wolfson.ox.ac.uk / carlantoniowiechfarias@gmail.com

THE **PSYCHOLOGY** OF **SOCIAL MEDIA**
FALLING SKY OR A **ROAD** TO **POSITIVE SOCIAL BONDING?**

Davi Kopenawa, chief of the Yanomami

Credit: REUTERS

Let's begin with a clear hypothesis: social media can be a catalyst for peace and social justice. **Like any other medium—such as a book—social media has the potential to spread constructive, life-affirming values. It can bring people together and help create a sense of community. Gathering evidence for this is not too difficult.**

When I received the kind invitation to write this piece, I phoned my 19-year-old son, who is far savvier about social media than I am. We talked for a while, and what you are reading is the outcome of that conversation.

Let's begin with a clear hypothesis: social media can be a catalyst for peace and social justice. Like any other medium—such as a book—social media has the potential to spread constructive, life-affirming values. It can bring people together and help create a sense of community. Gathering evidence for this is not too difficult.

Take, for example, the Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa, whose tribe had no contact with non-indigenous people until he was a teenager. As a child, he grew up without computers, books, telephones, or social media. When he began to meet 'white' people, Kopenawa quickly realised that those who lived in a literate world—depending on written words for almost everything—were often poor listeners. They paid more attention to what they read than to what they heard.
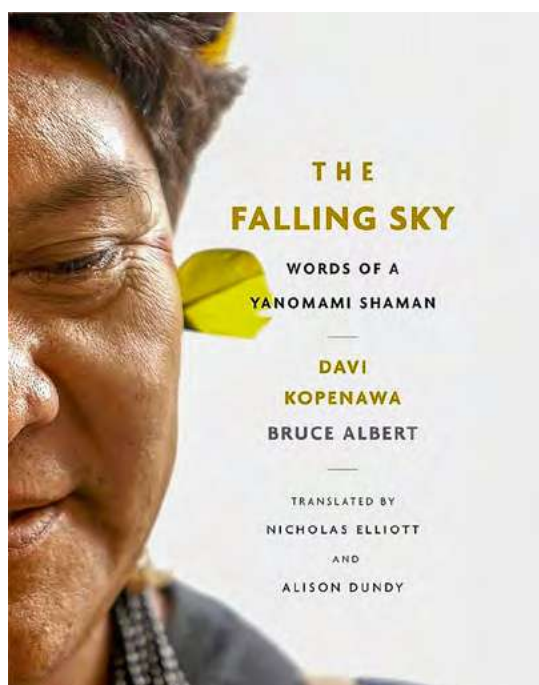
Hence, if you want to share a message, you can't just speak. This is particularly true today, when our attention spans have become severely impaired by social media flashing across our smartphones. You need to write.

Kopenawa's book *The Falling Sky* has become a celebrated example of reversed anthropology. Instead of a Westerner visiting an indigenous culture and writing about it, here we have an indigenous man writing about Western culture from his own perspective.

This was followed by two films co-written by him, photography exhibitions at major art centres—such as the Barbican in London, featuring the work of Claudia Andujar—and a constant stream of social media messages. His story has also appeared in major newspapers, particularly during periods when Yanomami lands were invaded by thousands of illegal gold miners.

When the film *The Falling Sky* premiered at the 2024 Cannes Festival, Kopenawa was surrounded by dozens of young people—many of whom read Instagram posts more often than books—eager to learn about the Yanomami worldview.

Yet, unlike other social media content that often fuels frustration and despair about governments' failure to stop climate change, the Yanomami message carries a different tone. **It expresses a worldview grounded in what might be called eco-ethical knowledge—a deep sense of relationality between humans and other species.**

How does this work from a psychological perspective? What mechanisms explain how social media has helped spread Kopenawa's message about indigenous knowledge?

What we see here is a phenomenon long described by social scientists, including the French sociologist Émile Durkheim: the emergence of social bonding and the development of a shared identity. Much of the social media content linked to *The Falling Sky* is timely and focused on the climate change crisis. The "falling sky" itself is an apocalyptic warning from Yanomami mythology—foretelling what will happen if humans greedily exploit nature's resources without maintaining its equilibrium.

Yet, unlike other social media content that often fuels frustration and despair about governments' failure to stop climate change, the Yanomami message carries a different tone. It expresses a worldview grounded in what might be called eco-ethical knowledge—a deep sense of relationality between humans and other species.

Because non-human beings are seen as having their own human-like agency, and even their own culture, the Yanomami believe it is essential to communicate and negotiate the use of space and resources with all others—not just with animals, but also with fish, insects, trees, and spirits.

This example of a positive and constructive use of social media—spreading the Yanomami's eco-ethical message—is, of course, one of resistance against deforestation and the predatory behaviour of some of the world's largest farming companies.

If the Yanomami's social media presence continues to grow, it may evolve into what the social psychologist Serge Moscovici termed a "minority influence": a small movement that, through consistency and commitment, can eventually shift the beliefs and behaviours of the majority.

Let us hope so—and that the sky will not fall on us.

*Miguel Farias is a Professor of Psychology, University of Oxford, England &
Carl António W. Farias is pursuing International Studies, University of Leiden, the Netherlands.*

Vinod Narayan
penpositive@gmail.com

SOCIAL MEDIA
PEACE OR DISCORD?

In this state of *enshittification*, neither the platforms nor the people and businesses using them think about the long-term consequences for society or individuals. **Everyone is caught in a race for relevance—a race dictated entirely by algorithms. Both individuals and businesses are helpless.**

When I first started using social media, it was liberating. Connecting with friends, finding people I had lost touch with, and being introduced to new ones—it was exhilarating. I even connected with people I once thought of as celebrities.

It felt as though the whole world was at your beck and call, ready to connect. It was like I was part of one big family. This was in the mid-2000s, and I have been using social media ever since, shifting between platforms as they evolved—and they have changed a lot.

Over the last five years, however, I have started to feel that these platforms might be doing more harm than good to our society. Then, came the question: can I simply blame the platforms? The answer, I realised, is no. It is not just them. We, too, have responsibilities.

These platforms did not create anything entirely new. They merely gave digital shape to what already existed—behaviours we once kept in check because they were not considered good conduct in real life.

Don't get me wrong, I have gained a lot from social media. I have been able to build a following and carve out a space to express myself. Yes, I am at the mercy of the algorithms, but at least they give me a platform to speak.

Recently, I came across a new term: *enshittification*. It describes the decay of digital platforms—a process where the quality of a service declines as the platform seeks to extract more value from its users and business customers. It typically happens in three stages.

In the first stage, the platform positions itself as being on our side, attracting users by talking about privacy and freedom. In the second stage, businesses are given access to the space. By then, even if we dislike the change, we stay because our friends and family are there—and because of FOMO (the fear of missing out).

Stage three is when the platform begins to exploit both users and businesses. Users no longer see content from people they follow; their feeds are no longer under their control. Businesses must spend heavily on advertising, while their return on investment keeps shrinking. This, unfortunately, is where most major platforms are today.

In this state of *enshittification,* neither the platforms nor the people and businesses using them think about the long-term consequences for society or individuals. Everyone is caught in a race for relevance—a race dictated entirely by algorithms. Both individuals and businesses are helpless.

Businesses can buy relevance by spending more on ads. Individuals, on the other hand, must create content that provokes strong reactions—hate, anger, sadness, or even a false sense of collective action. This leads to content that is short-lived, yet socially disruptive.

Another type of content thrives by skirting the edges of acceptable behaviour. It does not break the rules outright, but gets close enough to make people talk. Such content often feels bold or righteous, but in truth, it tends to "other", accuse, and judge. It's the content that causes a stir.

This is our reality. And now, the question arises: can we use social media for peace and well-being when the odds are against us? I believe we can, and I remain hopeful. My recommendations focus on what individuals can do.

As individuals, we should limit our content consumption. Consume only *pulled* content, not *pushed* content. If you want to watch something, search for it and then watch it. Refrain from endlessly browsing social media just to see what's happening. I know that's difficult—so perhaps set aside a fixed time each day for it. That way, we don't become algorithmic content dumping grounds.

Be intentional with your pulled content. Choose channels that are fair, balanced, and genuinely beneficial to society. They may not have millions of viewers, but they might be quietly working to make the world a better place. We have to seek them out.

I also recommend consuming more audio podcasts than video or social media. Podcasts are often more thoughtful and less visually manipulative.

Another important step is to *create* content. It could be in the form of writing, podcasts, or videos. Personally, I prefer podcasts—they're easy to produce and help build a loyal audience. People can listen while multitasking, and podcast audiences often include those who can make real change in the world.

Many people reading this may never have thought of themselves as content creators. But I say this to teachers, professionals, and thinkers: we need more ordinary citizens creating content rooted in what they know. Educational content is a great place to start. Pick your area of expertise and explain it.

As individuals, we should limit our content consumption. Consume only *pulled* content, not *pushed* content. If you want to watch something, search for it and then watch it. **Refrain from endlessly browsing social media just to see what's happening. I know that's difficult—so perhaps set aside a fixed time each day for it. That way, we don't become algorithmic content dumping grounds.**

If you are a content creator, always reflect on the impact of what you post. To be honest, I deleted a video I uploaded just yesterday. It was meant to be funny—and it was—but people started using it to attack someone else.

That video reached far more people than my usual posts because it had the potential to pit one person against another. I could have kept it up—it was getting four times my usual viewership—but I chose to take it down. It felt like the right decision for the world I want to live in.

We will all make mistakes. The best we can do is to remain open and willing to correct ourselves. Peace does not arrive on its own; it must be a conscious effort by people from all walks of life.

The platforms will always try to bring out the worst in us because that's what drives profit. We must stand our ground and act differently.

Perhaps it's time we start a conversation about what constitutes good content—for individuals and for society. If we can collectively define what *good* content means, it might become easier for everyone to create and recognise it.

At present, "good" content is simply the kind that goes viral—and that's the real problem. If we begin to value and produce meaningful content instead, even the algorithms will have no choice but to change.

Vinod Narayan is a technology-industry professional from the San Francisco Bay Area (Silicon Valley), California. He is a blogger, pod-caster, video-creator, poet, translator and content-creator.

Maura Mast
mmast@fordham.edu

ALONE TOGETHER

THE **PARADOX** OF **CONNECTION** IN THE **DIGITAL AGE**

Social media holds great potential for good. Students in high school and university use it to create online study groups, deepen their learning through YouTube videos, raise funds for special causes, build portfolios for careers, connect with others across the world, and share creative work. **Faculty and staff too make use of these communication platforms— to share information with students and to integrate learning apps into their teaching.**

This paradoxical phrase, coined in 2011 by MIT sociologist Sherry Turkle, describes the impact that technology—especially in the form of online networks—has on humans. It aptly captures the consequences of social media usage among young people. They are together—with others as they ride the bus, sit in a classroom, or stand at a snack bar. Yet, they are alone—isolated as they text, check updates, or generate content.

They may be constantly connected through WhatsApp, Instagram, and X, but many no longer know how to have conversations *IRL* (that is, in real life). Instead, they direct-message the person sitting next to them, start and end relationships via text, and fall prey to the addictive, algorithmic nature of apps.

Social media holds great potential for good. Students in high school and university use it to create online study groups, deepen their learning through YouTube videos, raise funds for special causes, build portfolios for careers, connect with others across the world, and share creative work. Faculty and staff, too, make use of these communication platforms—to share information with students and to integrate learning apps into their teaching.

However, social media also carries much potential for harm, particularly in its *illusion of community*. Human beings are inherently

relational, and relationships are especially vital for young people at this critical stage of social development.

Social media entices them with the promise of belonging. The Covid-19 pandemic—a formative event for this generation—only reinforced its role as a means of connection. Yet, despite its potential, social media can never substitute for genuine human interaction.

Let me describe three ways in which social media traps young people into being "alone together." Many apps are deliberately engineered to be addictive. Our brains respond positively to the quick bursts of interaction these platforms provide—the next TikTok, the Instagram like, the streak on Snapchat.

Young people, whose brains are still developing, are particularly vulnerable. The tech companies, after all, are in the business of making money; addiction is part of the recipe for profit. These apps may simulate community, but real togetherness cannot emerge from a string of emojis or a stream of Instagram reels.

Some apps, by their very design, encourage risky or destructive behaviour. Take Snapchat, for instance—one of the most popular platforms among teenagers. Its defining feature is that messages disappear shortly after being viewed. This may seem harmless, yet it often leads to unsafe practices such as sending explicit photos or impulsive messages. Moreover, interactions are reduced to brief, fleeting exchanges rather than meaningful communication.

Another app, called *Fizz*, is "hyperlocal", restricted to certain spaces such as secondary schools or university campuses. Posts are anonymous, and the company invites users to "find your community and join the conversation." But community cannot be built through anonymity.

In reality, such spaces often become breeding grounds for cyberbullying, sexism, and harassment—destroying rather than nurturing community. An increasing number of people now turn to AI models such as ChatGPT or Google Gemini to have "conversations". Young people, in particular, use chatbots because they often *do* feel alone.
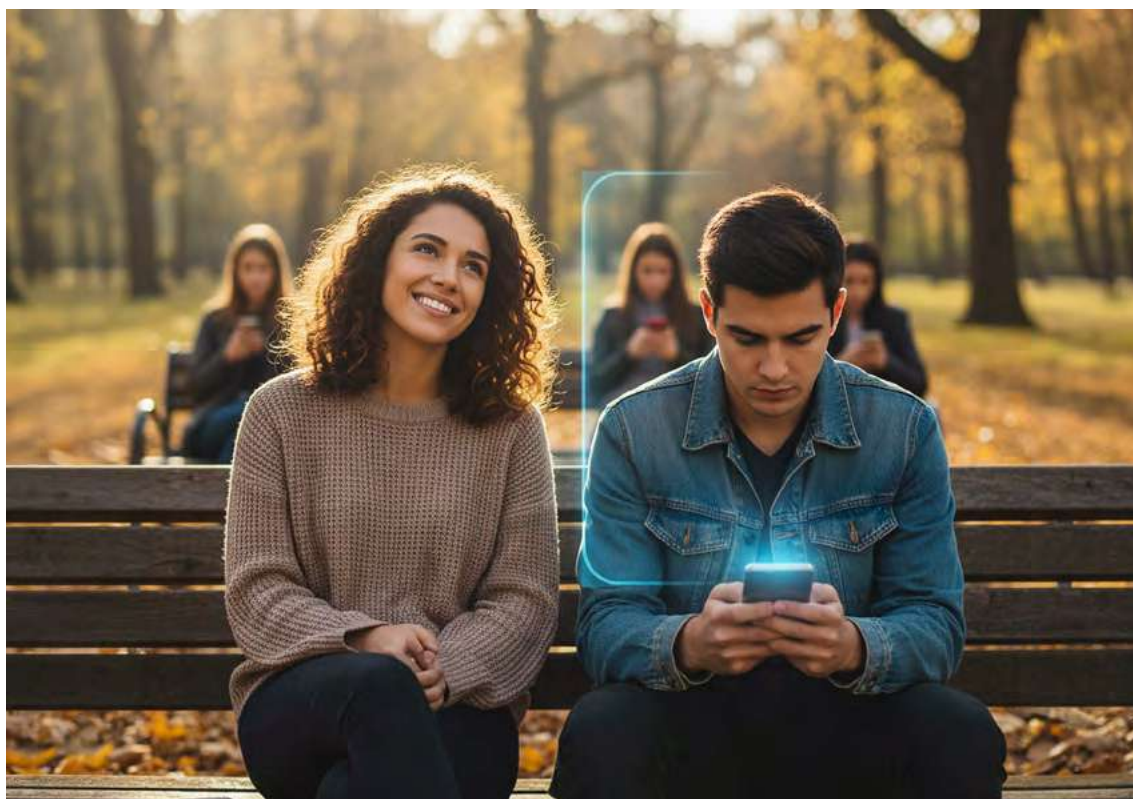
Young people, whose brains are still developing, are particularly vulnerable. The tech companies, after all, are in the business of making money; addiction is part of the recipe for profit. **These apps may simulate community, but real togetherness cannot emerge from a string of emojis or a stream of Instagram reels.**

Chatbots are emotionally safe and provide instant, on-demand responses. In some cases, individuals prefer confiding in an AI rather than seeking counselling or therapy. These tools can appear to offer friendship, companionship, or even relationship—but they do not provide the authentic human connection that truly sustains us.

In his 2019 message for the World Day of Social Communications, entitled *"We are members of one another,"* Pope Francis—the first "social media pope"—praised the internet's potential to bring people together and foster community. Echoing his emphasis on a "culture of encounter," the Pope reminded us that any online community, like any real community, must be grounded in respect, dialogue, and mutual listening.

One meaningful way to encourage reflection on our digital engagement is through a "Social Media Examen", adapted from the Ignatian Examen. The websites *TheJesuitPost.org* and *Jesuits.org* provide useful guides, inviting us to consider how we encounter others online, how our actions bring us closer to or distance us from others, and how we might use social media to reverence God's people and creation.

Unlike a Snapchat message, social media is not going to disappear. As parents, educators, and leaders, we carry the responsibility of guiding young people towards meaningful human contact—supporting them through both the joys and the disappointments of real relationships, online and offline.

Instead of being "alone together," let us help them to be truly *together* in the fullest human sense—grounded in empathy, presence, and genuine connection.

Maura Mast is a Professor of Mathematics at Fordham University, New York.

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Alejandra Delgado Chávez | Mauricio Burbano Alarcón
madelgadoc@puce.edu.ec / hburbano755@puce.edu.ec

CARING NETWORKS

UNIVERSITY SOLIDARITY AND **PEACEBUILDING** FROM **PUCE**

The experience gained in those years allowed PUCE to institutionalise solidarity as a central axis of its mission, coordinating efforts through the Office for Community Engagement and the Office of Identity and Mission. **Together, they structured an organised network for emergency response with defined protocols, operational phases, and inter-institutional alliances. Humanitarian aid thus ceased to be a reactive gesture and became a field of learning and social action, where academic knowledge, civic commitment, and interdisciplinary collaboration converge.**

When Networks Become Community

Since 2020, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE) has faced, along with the nation, multiple crises — a global pandemic, natural disasters, and episodes of social unrest.

In these challenging circumstances, a spontaneous mobilisation emerged — first through student-led solidarity campaigns and later as a coordinated institutional effort — giving rise to the *"Solidaridad PUCE"* project. Over time, this initiative evolved into a comprehensive university network that integrates academic, logistical, and emotional capacities to support communities affected by emergencies and vulnerability.

In 2024, the project acquired a new dimension, seeking to build a network that brings together members of the university community and civil society actors.

This initiative is grounded in the Ignatian perspective of discernment leading to service, and in the vision of integral ecology proposed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (2015), according to which care for humanity and care for the environment are inseparable expressions of a shared ethical responsibility.

From Emergency to Response Network

The project was born amid the health and social crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the fragility of protection systems underscored the need for an organised response from higher education.

Through campaigns led by students, faculty, and administrative staff, PUCE consolidated a network of care that transcended charity to strengthen community resilience.

This spirit of solidarity had already been evident during the national protests of 2019 and 2022, when the university served as a space of shelter and humanitarian assistance amid social unrest.

The experience gained in those years allowed PUCE to institutionalise solidarity as a central axis of its mission, coordinating efforts through the Office for Community Engagement and the Office of Identity and Mission. Together, they structured an organised network for emergency response with defined protocols, operational phases, and inter-institutional alliances. Humanitarian aid thus ceased to be a reactive gesture and became a field of learning and social action, where academic knowledge, civic commitment, and interdisciplinary collaboration converge.

Rooted in its Catholic and Ignatian identity, PUCE understands that responding to crisis is not an exception but an extension of its educational and pastoral mission.

Social Reach and Humanitarian Impact

The University Network for Emergency and Disaster Response *(Red de Respuesta Universitaria ante Emergencias y Catástrofes* – RRUEC) – *Solidaridad PUCE* – is organised around three complementary phases: preparation, immediate response, and recovery or follow-up.

This structure enables both technical planning and agile action in critical situations, integrating multidisciplinary teams of students, faculty, and professionals from various fields of knowledge.

Through volunteer work, donations, and community collaboration, the network mobilised aid valued at more than USD 14,945, carrying out twelve major interventions between August 2024 and May 2025. In doing so, it reached 2,905 people in vulnerable conditions.

The impact of the RRUEC represents a sustained humanitarian presence in territories historically marginalised or affected by crisis. **Its interventions extended to indigenous Amazonian communities, rural families in the highlands, urban peripheries of Quito, survivors of gender-based violence, and populations affected by environmental disasters.**

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Each intervention combined logistics, psychosocial support, and communication — strengthening community resilience and demonstrating that universities, when combining knowledge, ethics, and solidarity, can become key humanitarian actors.

The Digital Dimension of Solidarity

Within the project, digital social networks became spaces of coordination and community resonance.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter), alongside institutional channels like *Conexión PUCE* (https://conexion.puce.edu.ec/) and national media outlets, operated as reciprocal nodes of communication where information turned into collective action.

Every shared post, testimony, and photo of aid deliveries activated new chains of support, multiplying civic engagement and extending the reach of the project.

Digital networks amplified humanitarian action, linking individuals and territories under a shared ethical purpose. What began online materialised in tangible acts of presence, revealing how empathy can traverse virtual spaces to generate real-world impact.

In this sense, the digital realm became a bridge between emotion and action — between visibility and concrete engagement in the field.

These networks enabled the construction of trust and community bonds, showing that the university is not an isolated institution but a living network that listens, responds, and allows itself to be moved by human suffering.

Against the backdrop of polarisation and algorithmic fragmentation, *Solidaridad PUCE* proposes an alternative model — a network of peace, where algorithms of care replace algorithms of confrontation.

Networks for Peace

The experience of *Solidaridad PUCE / RRUEC* demonstrates that networks — both human and technological — can serve as seeds of social reconciliation when guided by care, cooperation, and justice.

In contrast to the noise of division and excess information, these networks embody a different language: one of active listening, shared responsibility, and collective hope.

Solidarity, in this context, goes beyond the act of giving; it defines a way of inhabiting networks through the ethics of encounter. Every message, repost, and in-person action expands the reach of the common good.

When care circulates through networks, it becomes an active form of peace education, transforming technology into a medium for human connection.

Thus, networks emerge as pedagogical spaces of empathy and transformation, where the university demonstrates that peace is built collectively — through every cooperative act.

Dr (c) Alejandra Delgado Chávez is a sociologist and research professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador. Her work focuses on youth, gender, and community processes, integrating teaching, research, and social action aimed at peacebuilding and integral ecology.

Dr Mauricio Burbano Alarcón, S.J. is Director of Identity and Mission at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE) and Deputy Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service – Ecuador.

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Prabhat Namdharani
b25031@astra.xlri.ac.in

BEYOND THE GRADE SHEET

SOCIAL MEDIA'S PARADOX OF PEACE AND DISCORD

All institutions — and particularly universities — are the birthplaces of either global peace or discord, depending on how their students are raised. It is a direct shift in the next generation's values, not just as a digital or abstract theory, but as a lived human experience.

My own postgraduate journey at XLRI is no different. It provides me with an excellent ecosystem and the opportunity to observe it in a meaningful way. Life here is intense, and yet it is a shared experience. We all endure the same sleepless nights before exams, running on caffeine and prayers, hoping for a better grade.

Despite our hectic schedules, we still find joy in daily events. Whether it's clashing with other sections during *Section Wars* or speaking our minds at *Talk It Out,* celebrating Diwali with friends or having all our committees come together for a fun night — every moment builds a sense of peace and mutual positivity among us.

This positive energy has, over the past few decades, given rise to a term we've all come to know as the "XL Mafia." The phrase is more than just two words; it represents the strength and power of the collective we.

We have *gyaan* sessions together. We have faced tough times together. We have celebrated and cherished wonderful memories together. We have been each other's friends, interviewers, CV checkers, cheerleaders, and critics. The list is endless — and it will continue to grow as time passes.

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However, this often collides with a deafening truth: in the midst of all this camaraderie, the outcomes remain deeply individualistic — whether in grades or final placements. This, too, is the central paradox of social media, only on a global scale.

Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and TikTok have become our shared classrooms. We all inhabit the same digital spaces, live similar lives, and take part in the same online events. Yet, the way these platforms are designed emphasises individual, competitive outcomes.

Who has more likes? Who has more shares? How many comments did you get, and what's your reach? These have become the digital equivalents of our exam grades. The algorithm ensures that the overall game remains a zero-sum one — pitting users against each other while we all compete for the same finite resource: attention.

This often also means that the content we see or create may not always serve the best interests of humanity, but rather our own individual growth. And therein lies the discord that arises from social media.

Making people feel lonely—more alone than ever before—is an outcome of prolonged discord on these platforms. They say social media has connected everyone, but that is a question we need to ask ourselves sincerely.

Make no mistake, the positives of these platforms are significant as well. They maximise reach on issues that need to be addressed, ensuring that proper methods to improve, grow, and understand the world better gain traction.

Social media has helped many people in places that may otherwise be disconnected from the rest of the world. It also provides everyone with a fair and equal ground to stand on and create from, thereby promoting more peaceful forms of protest and bringing important issues to light.

If we are to talk about how social media can act as a catalyst for more peace and less discord in the world, there are quite a few ways—and we shall look at a few from here on.

When speaking specifically about the scaling of public good, the most straightforward way that social media can make a difference is by turning a single action into a mass movement. For every good deed that is done, we can transform that individual intent into a collective impact.

We can observe this very clearly. After any calamity in the world, social media often serves as one of the fastest ways to coordinate aid, spread safety information, track missing people, and raise funds for those affected.

Every person in that network becomes a node to further the cause of those in need. A single trusted post can reach thousands, potentially changing a life-or-death situation—and, in doing so, reducing pain and suffering in the world.

We can also forge a shared journey, allowing everyone to resonate in the effort to save our world from global warming and other common issues. By transforming the world into a digital room, we can ensure that we spread more positivity than the negativity that circulates out there.

In doing so, we create a space where more and more positive experiences echo, helping people connect with one another and ensuring that no one is left behind as we move forward in these times. This is one of the most powerful ways in which social media can promote peace.

Envisioning a future where social media serves as one of the primary facilitators of peace would be the ideal scenario—something we should all strive for, both individually and collectively.

Prabhat Namdharani is a BM student at XLRI- Jamshedpur.

Chinyere Cecilia Ibezim
cecilia.chinyere@hekima.ac.ke

CAN SOCIAL MEDIA BECOME A FORCE FOR HARMONY AND PEACEBUILDING IN NIGERIA AND KENYA?

N igeria's online public sphere is remarkably vibrant. Movements such as #EndSARS and #BringBackOurGirls have demonstrated how digital platforms can build political momentum, connect activists, and transform grievances into national conversations. **However, the country has also faced significant state pushback and tension with social media platform**s.

S ocial media in Africa is often described as a double-edged sword. It has amplified citizens' voices, enabled rapid civic mobilisation, and opened new channels for civic education and conflict-sensitive reporting. At the same time, it has accelerated the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and polarising narratives that can incite violence.

Reimagining social platforms as instruments of peace demands coordinated changes across technology design, policy, media ecosystems, and community practices. This article draws lessons from Nigeria and Kenya, highlights broader continental patterns, and proposes practical, evidence-based steps to reposition social media as a force for public good and social harmony.

What the Evidence Says? Risks and Promise

Across sub-Saharan Africa, research and practitioner reports reveal two recurrent patterns.

Firstly, social media's affordances—instant sharing, viral amplification, closed groups, and encrypted channels—make it a powerful vehicle for rumours, coordinated disinformation, and ethnically charged messages that can inflame tensions.

Secondly, the same tools are also used for constructive ends: crowd-sourced early warnings, community mobilisation for peace, fact-checking networks, and constituency building for accountability and reconciliation.

Ultimately, platforms do not act on their own; people do. Technology shapes incentives, but social actors determine outcomes.

Nigeria: Digital Civic Energy and Digital Risks

Nigeria's online public sphere is remarkably vibrant. Movements such as #EndSARS and #BringBackOurGirls have demonstrated how digital platforms can build political momentum, connect activists, and transform grievances into national conversations. However, the country has also faced significant state pushback and tension with social media platforms.

The 2021 suspension of Twitter, along with increased regulatory pressure on broadcasters, exposed the fragility of Nigeria's online civic space and the dangers of heavy-handed responses to digital mobilisation.

Moreover, WhatsApp and Facebook groups have become potent conduits for misinformation, particularly during public health crises and episodes of communal unrest. In such moments, rumours spread far more quickly than fact-checks can follow. These patterns underline that using social media for peace in Nigeria demands a balance — protecting legitimate civic expression while curbing information-related harms.

From these Experiences, Several Practical Lessons Emerge

• Invest in locally rooted media and information literacy programmes that teach citizens to verify forwarded messages, read metadata, and identify manipulative content. — *United Nations University*

• Strengthen partnerships among platforms, civil society organisations, fact-checkers, and community leaders to swiftly flag and counter incendiary material, especially in local languages. — *Mercy Corps*

• Avoid broad platform bans that merely drive discussions underground. Instead, design targeted interventions — such as notice-and-takedown mechanisms for violent incitement, contextual labelling, and de-amplification — supported by transparent legal safeguards.

Kenya: Coordination, Coalitions and Digital Peace Piolts

Kenya's recent experience reveals both the perils and the promise of digital peacebuilding. Ahead of national elections, platforms such as

Kenya's recent experience reveals both the perils and the promise of digital peacebuilding. **Ahead of national elections, platforms such as TikTok and WhatsApp became conduits for targeted disinformation and ethnically charged narratives.**

TikTok and WhatsApp became conduits for targeted disinformation and ethnically charged narratives.

Yet, Kenya has also emerged as a pioneer in countering this harm. A coalition of local NGOs, universities, and international partners launched several digital peacebuilding initiatives—among them university-based "Maskani" projects that used WhatsApp and Facebook for dialogue and monitoring.

The United Nations and UNESCO have documented how coordinated efforts combined community-level engagement with platform cooperation to curb harmful content. Together, these initiatives offer a model that blends grassroots dialogue spaces and offline gatherings with online moderation, public education, and rapid response mechanisms.

Kenya's Key Lessons Include

• Build trusted, multilingual digital coalitions that bring together universities, civil society organisations, media councils, and youth networks to detect and neutralise inflammatory narratives. Employ community moderators and local language expertise to capture nuance and context that automated systems often miss.

• Pair online counter-narratives with offline conflict-resolution efforts in identified hotspot areas.

Africa-wide Pattern and Shared Opportunities

When we turn our gaze to the continent, several recurring themes emerge.

First, platform business models that reward engagement often, albeit unintentionally, promote sensational or polarising content. Second, linguistic and cultural diversity creates significant moderation gaps. Third, encrypted and closed channels—such as WhatsApp groups—make timely intervention difficult.

Finally, strong civil-society ecosystems, when supported, can serve as powerful amplifiers of peace messaging.

International organisations and research bodies increasingly note that disinformation is not simply a technical issue, but a challenge of governance and societal resilience.

Key Pan-African Opportunities

• Develop interoperable early-warning systems that integrate anonymised, privacy-protected social-listening data with ground-level reports from trusted community representatives.

• Invest in media and information literacy (MIL) programmes across the continent, targeting schools and community centres. Strengthening MIL helps curb the spread of

misleading content and fosters responsible civic engagement. *(Source: United Nations University)*

• Support localisation of content moderation by recruiting, training, and safeguarding local moderators who possess a nuanced understanding of regional dialects, idioms, and cultural sensitivities.

Reimagining Platforms: Design and Governance Levers

To redirect online incentives from outrage to the public good, platforms, regulators, and civil society must rethink structural design. The following measures can help achieve this:

1. De-amplify incendiary content:

Algorithms should prioritise constructive and authoritative information during moments of crisis—such as verified health updates or police advisories—while limiting the spread of unverified claims.

2. Introduce friction and verification nudges:

Simple user-level prompts, such as "This message was forwarded many times. Are you sure?", can reduce impulsive resharing and curb misinformation.

3. Use contextual labels and local fact-checks:

Posts flagged as misleading should carry prominent contextual tags and links to local-language fact-checks, helping users assess reliability.

4. Establish trusted-flagging pathways:

Verified channels must be created for community leaders, emergency services, and fact-checkers to request swift review of harmful content.

5. Ensure transparent local policy:

Platforms should publish region-specific enforcement reports and consult independent local advisory boards to improve accountability.

6. Support distributed moderation:

Civil-society moderators and regional content-review centres should receive funding and fair labour protections to strengthen oversight.

These technical and governance reforms must be anchored in accountability. Platforms should be assessed not by the number of takedowns they report, but by how effectively they reduce offline harms arising from online content.

Concrete Policy Recommendations for Governments and Civil Society Organizations

Creating safer digital spaces in Nigeria, Kenya, and across Africa is both practical and achievable. **This requires reforming platforms through transparent policies, investing in local languages and media literacy, and building cross-sector coalitions to detect early warning signs and enable rapid response.**

For Governments

Enact precise and proportionate laws that criminalise only direct incitement to violence, while safeguarding legitimate expression. Prioritise investment in media and information literacy (MIL) and support independent fact-checking initiatives. Avoid sweeping platform bans that restrict civic space and public discourse.

For Platforms

Work collaboratively with local actors to design effective interventions. Invest in linguistic capacity to support content moderation in local languages. Publish regular transparency reports and provide open APIs for independent research, ensuring strict data privacy safeguards.

For Civil Society Organisations and Media

Strengthen local coalitions—such as Kenya's university-led initiatives—that link online monitoring with community-based mediation. Train journalists in conflict-sensitive digital reporting, and launch rapid counter-narrative campaigns before misinformation hardens into belief.

For Funders and International Agencies

Finance large-scale MIL programmes and support local community moderators. Fund interoperable early-warning and response systems that combine social listening tools with grassroots reporting and mediation efforts.

A Practical Pilot: What A National ``Digital Peace Lab could do

A feasible and cost-effective pilot for countries such as Nigeria or Kenya could be a "Digital Peace Lab" built around the following components:

• A real-time dashboard that brings together anonymised social-listening data, local incident reports, and verified fact-check feeds.

• A rapid-response team comprising civil society communicators, linguistically competent moderators, and conflict mediators who coordinate counter-narratives and organise timely offline interventions.

• A public media-literacy campaign reaching schools, radio stations, and community centres, designed for hotspot regions and tailored to local languages.

• An evaluation framework that measures not only outreach, but also shifts in the speed of rumour circulation and the frequency of offline incidents.

Pilots such as Maskani in Kenya demonstrate that such models are both practical and adaptable across different contexts.

Conclusion from "either/or'' to "both/and''

The question is not whether social media will be peaceable or discordant — it will be both. The real challenge for societies lies in deciding whether to surrender the space to harmful design choices and malicious actors, or to guide these platforms towards the public good.

Creating safer digital spaces in Nigeria, Kenya, and across Africa is both practical and achievable. This requires reforming platforms through transparent policies, investing in local languages and media literacy, and building cross-sector coalitions to detect early warning signs and enable rapid response.

Most importantly, interventions must be judged by their real-world impact. With these foundations in place, social media can evolve from amplifying division to fostering social harmony and lasting peace.

Chinyere Cecilia Ibezim persuing M. A. in Peace Studies & International Relations at Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

■

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Sali Augustine
saliaugustine12@gmail.com

SOCIAL MEDIA IN
JAPAN
LIFELINE AND
LIFE-THREATENING

Social media has undeniably played a crucial role in fostering solidarity and civic engagement in Japan. During natural disasters—such as the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011—Twitter and LINE served as lifelines for real-time communication, enabling rescue coordination and providing emotional support. **These platforms helped mobilise volunteers and donations, demonstrating their immense potential for humanitarian action.**

According to *World Population Review* data, Japan ranks second in the world for the number of Twitter/X users in 2025. Around *75.8 million of its roughly* 125 million people use these platforms. India stands third with 27.3 million users, while the United States remains at the top with 111.3 million.

In contemporary Japan, social media has become an indispensable part of everyday life, influencing communication, culture, and politics. Platforms such as LINE, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok dominate the digital landscape. As of early 2025, Japan had 97 million social media users, representing 78.6% of the population. LINE alone accounts for 97 million monthly active users, making it the most widely used platform in the country.

Social media has undeniably played a crucial role in fostering solidarity and civic engagement in Japan. During natural disasters—such as the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011—Twitter and LINE served as lifelines for real-time communication, enabling rescue coordination and providing emotional support. These platforms helped mobilise volunteers and donations, demonstrating their immense potential for humanitarian action.

Moreover, social media has amplified voices advocating for social justice and environmental

sustainability. Campaigns like #KuToo, which protested against mandatory high heels for women in workplaces, gained traction through Twitter and sparked a national debate on gender equality. Similarly, climate activism among Japanese youth has found expression on Instagram and TikTok, linking local movements to global initiatives.

While social media plays a major role in what Naim Moisés calls the '3 Ps'—Populism, Polarisation, and Post-truth—as well as Protectionism, which supports divisions among people and nations, it also acts as a catalyst for social change. This is particularly relevant in light of recent youth movements and political uprisings in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Bridget Pooley, in a 2015 study by Georgetown University's Centre for Social Impact Communication, examined the problem of *slacktivism*. Slacktivists are often seen as individuals who engage in social issues only through online activity. The common belief is that their involvement ends with the "like" and "share" buttons. However, Pooley's study found otherwise.

According to the research, slacktivists are twice as likely to volunteer their time (30% vs. 15%) and participate in local events. They are four times as likely to encourage others to contact political representatives (22% vs. 5%) and five

times as likely to recruit others for petitions (20% vs. 4%). Furthermore, they are equally as likely as non-social media advocates to donate money to such causes (41%).

In this context, it is noteworthy that since the revision to the Public Offices Election Act in 2013—which allowed election campaigning via the Internet—the influence of social media on Japanese elections has continued to grow. Experts estimate that as many as 30% of voters rely solely on online information when deciding how to vote. This trend offers optimism for potential changes within Japan's traditionally rigid political system.

Despite these positive aspects, social media in Japan is not immune to the darker sides of digital culture. Online anonymity—common on platforms such as 5channel and certain Twitter communities—has often led to cyberbullying and hate speech. High-profile cases of harassment have resulted in tragic outcomes, most notably the death of professional wrestler Hana Kimura in 2020, which sparked national conversations about online abuse.

Cyberbullying remains a serious concern. Schools reported over 23,900 cases of cyberbullying in FY2022, while overall bullying incidents reached a record 769,022 in FY2024, including 1,405 serious cases. The tragic suicide of Hana Kimura prompted Japan's Diet to revise criminal

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law in 2022, introducing tougher penalties: *imprisonment with labour or a jail term without labour for up to one year,* and *a fine of up to 300,000 yen.* Experts suggest that while allowing for harsher punishment, the revised law aims primarily to deter psychological abuse.

Misinformation and algorithm-driven echo chambers further exacerbate the post-truth environment. False claims about vaccines circulated widely across Japanese social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, influencing public attitudes and fuelling conspiracy theories.

Studies show that vaccine hesitancy in Japan reached 11.3% in 2021, with young women particularly vulnerable to misinformation spread through social platforms. Such disinformation reinforces ideological divides on issues such as immigration, constitutional reform, and nuclear energy policy.

In Japan, social media embodies a paradox: it is both a bridge and a barrier. It connects communities, amplifies marginalised voices, and mobilises aid during crises, yet it also fosters division, misinformation, and harmful behaviour.

The challenge lies in cultivating a digital ecosystem that reflects Japan's cultural value of harmony (wa) while embracing global standards of accountability and inclusivity. Ultimately, whether social media becomes a tool for peace or discord in Japan depends on collective efforts—by individuals, institutions,

and platforms—to prioritise empathy, truth, and social responsibility.

In this regard, education plays a pivotal role. Education should not be confined to the transmission of knowledge and skills; it must also serve as a means of fostering inner ethical transformation in individuals and guiding society towards sustainability and harmony.

As Johan Galtung (1969) noted, the idea of peace does not simply mean the absence of war. It refers to a state in which individuals build harmonious relationships with others and coexist through shared ethical values. While digital platforms provide opportunities for dialogue and community-building, they also raise pressing concerns about polarisation, misinformation, and social fragmentation.

True moral progress demands not only institutional reform but also deep-seated ethical development within individuals.

Sali Augustine is the Chancellor of Sophia School Corporation which operates Sophia University and related educational institutions, Tokyo, Japan.

Lia Beltrami
lia.gbeltrami@gmail.com

REIMAGINING DIGITAL PLATFORMS AS CATALYSTS FOR HARMONY AND THE COMMON GOOD

W e must learn to read social media messages with depth, to engage with them critically, and to convince one another that we share common good intentions and constructive messages. In doing so, we can help circulate and amplify valuable content.

M uch has been said about the role of social media in generating social discord, creating echo chambers, sowing division, and fuelling disruptive media campaigns. All of this is true and proven.

We can almost touch the role of social media within conflicts: it has now become a weapon capable of subjugating entire populations—a norm rather than an exception, and a source of widespread suffering.

On the other hand, social media can also be an extraordinary tool for building social harmony, paving new paths towards peace, and stimulating public attention and goodwill. Consider the remarkable realisation of the long-sought peace agreement sketched out in early autumn, now poised to be signed at the international policy level.

Reclaiming Digital Spaces for the Common Good

First and foremost, we need people genuinely interested in building the common good to occupy digital spaces. We must make room to transmit the values we believe in. To achieve this, we must ensure that serious and committed individuals—not only those who use social media as a form of distraction or escape—find their rightful place online.

We must learn to read social media messages with depth, to engage with them critically, and to convince one another that we share common good intentions and constructive messages. In doing so, we can help circulate and amplify valuable content.

Building Networks at the Periphery

It is both necessary and fundamental to create networks at the periphery, starting with our project inspired by Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio. We must build networks among people engaged in diverse locations around the world who are striving to construct social harmony—networks at the periphery, indeed.

We need these networks to form spaces that are neither too large nor too small, but of a meaningful, human scale. We must overcome the current tendency towards petty envy and instead keep the common good before us, even within social spaces.

In an increasingly isolated world, where many spend much of their time alone before screens, we can create spaces that are truly important—spaces that move us beyond loneliness through small, concrete actions that build social harmony. To do this, we must learn to value these spaces; we cannot afford to ignore them.

The Importance of Training and Communication Skills

Today, numerous courses exist for social media training, and even within Christian contexts, it is crucial to be well prepared in order to engage effectively with the communication languages of the world.

We must encourage the development of new modes of expression and open ourselves authentically to a world in continuous change—because this truly matters.

What About Video Content?

When it comes to video content, which opens another chapter, there is an abundance of material we can offer—videos created with dedication and great effort.

For various platforms and the social issues we advocate, we produce documentaries designed for wide distribution on social media, focusing on ecological justice, social justice, and the harmony of peoples.

Some titles available on mainstream platforms include:

- *In-Visibles* – on women's resilience and justice
- *Guardians of the Rainforest* – on ecological justice
- *Ivan of the Sea* – on physical and social harmony
- *Let Me See the Night* – on persecuted minorities
- *A Burst of Song* – on violence against women and social justice
- *Wells of Hope* – on human trafficking
- *COMPLEXion* – on the devastation caused by the skin-lightening industry
- *Tears & Dreams* – on girls' trafficking and drug abuse
- *Teardrops in the Ocean* – on boys' trafficking and peace-building

The COMPLEXion Film and Campaign as an Example

Spreading reliable information on social media and documenting it helps ensure that truth reaches wider audiences. A strong example of this is the making of the documentary COMPLEXion and the accompanying social campaign.

*COMPLEX*ion begins its journey in India and Bangladesh, where discrimination based on skin colour has profound socio-economic implications, intensified by decades of pressure from the skin-lightening industry. Nina Davuluri—activist and the first Miss America of South Asian origin—leads this journey, gathering testimonies and raising awareness.

Upon her return, she launched a campaign that contributed to major changes in June 2020. "Fair & Lovely", the widely criticised brand, ceased to exist—along with other products promoting skin discrimination.

The film was shot and distributed during the pandemic. Its powerful imagery carried a resonant message across social networks, sparking a major campaign urging cosmetics companies to remove the word "fair" from product names. This campaign reached millions, leading to tangible changes in the ethical frameworks of major corporations, including L'Oréal's ethical commissioning board.

These are only a few examples that illustrate how social media can drive genuine transformation.

Mobilising for Climate Justice

At present, we are engaged in a major campaign called *COP in the Favela*. While a large climate conference takes place in Belém, another gathering unfolds in the favela of Marcos Moura, led by the youth of Instituto Afro Aurora Dance.

From there, we launch a movement for the ecological conversion of the favela—organising *Laudato Si'* events, ecological awareness activities, waste clean-ups, and the planting of fruit trees. Through a great ecological dance, young people will send world leaders a message of peace, reconciliation, ecological justice, and social justice.

We are thus building a social campaign that unites the real projects of young people committed to ecological and social change—creating, in essence, a favela of peace.

Ecological justice and social justice grow together from our "countries of dance", along paths of ecological awareness, through the harvest of relationships, and among those at the very heart of the earth.

All of this is being shared through social media, carrying a clear and heartfelt message to the leaders of our world.

This is a shining example of how social networks can connect the periphery to the centre, giving voice to those who once struggled to make themselves heard.

Lia Beltrami is a Filmmaker, Author and Art-director from Italy.

RAJDEEP SARDESAI / Pax Lumina

CONVERSATION
WITH
RAJDEEP
SARDESAI

JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The positive aspect is that the rise of digital media provides more alternative sources of information. You no longer have to rely solely on mainstream or legacy media. **There are now numerous news websites and YouTube channels offering different perspectives. This has helped in the democratisation of media, allowing more diverse voices to be heard.**

Rajdeep Sardesai, one of India's leading journalists and political commentators, shares his insightful views with Pax Lumina on the evolving landscape of journalism, the shifting balance between print and digital media, and the vital role of a free press in sustaining democracy and fostering peace.

1 Rajdeep ji, thank you for your time. To begin, could you highlight one or two of the most significant challenges you've faced in your professional journey?

As a reporter, my biggest challenges were covering the 1992–93 Mumbai riots and blasts. Mumbai is a city very dear to me; I was raised there.

To watch a city like that get scarred by violence was not easy to come to terms with. Reporting on it and ensuring that we got the story right was a huge challenge. Those were the most difficult moments I've experienced in my 37 years in journalism.

The other defining moment was the 2002 Gujarat riots. Ahmedabad is another city with which I'm deeply connected — I was born there, and my grandparents lived there.

To once again witness the scale and nature of that violence was extremely difficult to process. So, I would say the most significant challenges were reporting on riots in real time.

The first instance, in 1992–93, was in the pre-television age when I was with *The Times of India*. But in Gujarat in 2002, everything unfolded under the relentless gaze of the camera.

2 In the current political climate, do you believe it is still possible for the media to maintain objectivity and impartiality?

I think a large section of the mainstream media finds it very difficult to maintain objectivity — quite simply because, like it or not, they are under pressure from the government to toe the official line.

Their business model is so dependent on government advertising and access that they are unable to take on those in power aggressively.

That said, it doesn't mean there is no media that raises questions. For instance, during COVID, *Dainik Bhaskar* did a fantastic series on

the deaths that had taken place — including the haunting images of bodies floating in the Ganga — exposing the grim reality.

So, there are isolated examples where sections of the mainstream media do take on the government. But, frankly, they are all too few.

I believe our primary task is to speak truth to power. Unfortunately, large sections of the media today are unable to do that. Look at how the recent arrest of Sonam Wangchuk has been portrayed in some outlets — as if he's already some sort of criminal or anti-national, when his only "crime" may be that he dared to question the government.

3 India's press freedom rankings have been in decline. In your view, what are the fundamental reasons for this trend?

The fundamental reasons are a growing climate of fear and intolerance. Those in power — both at the Centre and in the States — do not like to face criticism.

They now use the police and enforcement agencies to spread fear among journalists, sending a clear message: if you don't toe the line, we will act against you.

This combination of fear and intolerance is compounded by the business model of media organisations, which makes them financially dependent on the government.

Furthermore, we must also look at the ownership patterns of the media. I often use the term "billionaire media." For an Adani or an Ambani, media is just a tiny part of their vast, multi-billion-dollar empires.

I don't believe they have acquired these channels to promote journalism; they have done so to gain influence. In such a situation, how can one expect a truly free media?

4 We are in a transition from print to digital media. Do you believe this shift is having a positive or negative effect on the industry?

It is both positive and negative.

The positive aspect is that the rise of digital media provides more alternative sources of information. You no longer have to rely solely on mainstream or legacy media. There are now numerous news websites and YouTube channels offering different perspectives. This has helped in the *democratisation* of media, allowing more diverse voices to be heard.

The negative part, however, is that even digital media often seeks sensationalism. Content that takes an extreme position is more likely to go viral than moderate, balanced reporting. This puts pressure on that ecosystem to do or say something sensational.

So, while technology is an enabler, it is also a disruptor.

5 What was the motivation behind your book trilogy on the Indian elections — *2014: The Election that Changed India, 2019: How Modi Won India,* and now the book on the 2024 elections?

The aim of the trilogy was to reflect upon the changes taking place around us.

The rise of the BJP has been the dominant political feature of our times. In two of the last three elections, they won an absolute majority. I wanted to explore how that happened — what went on behind the scenes, and the nature of the politics we are now confronted with.

It has been a dramatic period of change, moving from what I call the *Nehruvian* age to the age of Hindutva politics. I felt it was important to document that dramatic shift at the centre of Indian politics.

The world today is facing a profound crisis of morality. India—the land of Gandhi—is unable to speak out as effectively as it should when such wars take place. **Domestically, the weak and vulnerable— be they tribals, Dalits, or minorities—continue to face the heavy hand of state power.**

6 **You were charged with sedition for reporting on the 2021 Farmers' Republic Day parade. What is your perspective on that event now, and do you believe State pressure compels the media to self-censor?**

Look, I made a mistake. During a live telecast, I went by what the relatives of a person who had died told me. It was live, and I accept that mistake.

However, it was not an act of sedition. To charge me with sedition for that was an attempt to create a chilling effect across the media. Apart from intimidating me, it was designed to put pressure on my organisation and get the media to toe the line.

You cannot charge a journalist with sedition for what is an honest mistake. There was no *mala fide* intention. It simply shows how State power and laws can be used — and misused — to target journalists.

Journalism was meant to stand with the victims, not the oppressors—whether it is Hamas, responsible for a terrible terror attack, or the Israelis, who have, I believe, committed terrible acts of violence against civilian populations.

We see this mirrored in Russia and Ukraine, and in parts of Africa. Concepts such as non-violence, compassion, and community seem to have vanished. We thought humanity had moved past this after the Second World War, yet we are witnessing its revival.

The world today is facing a profound crisis of morality. India—the land of Gandhi—is unable to speak out as effectively as it should when such wars take place. Domestically, the weak and vulnerable—be they tribals, Dalits, or minorities—continue to face the heavy hand of State power.

If the world no longer operates with a moral compass, how can journalists be expected to have one? When I see journalists themselves inciting hatred on television shows, I find myself asking: *Where have we come?*

7 How do you foresee Indian politics evolving, perhaps shaping the content of a potential book on the 2029 election?

I haven't even thought of 2029, but I do worry about the future of Indian politics for a variety of reasons.

First, the rise of money power. Indian elections have become so expensive that they almost *incentivise* corruption, driven by a largely cash-based economy.

Second, the growing tide of divisive and communal politics, where identities such as Hindu, Muslim, or Christian are brought to the forefront more brazenly than ever before. This dog-whistling and spreading of hate in the name of religion is deeply worrying.

Finally, there is an increasing tendency to build personality-driven politics within a parliamentary system. People often don't even know their MLA, yet they vote in the name of a single leader. This, in my view, encourages an authoritarian streak that is dangerous for the future of democracy. I genuinely worry about the future of Indian democracy.

8 In an era marked by global competition and democratic backsliding, do you believe the concept of a global morality remains relevant?

That's a very good question. I'm not sure there are any norms or codes of behaviour left anywhere.
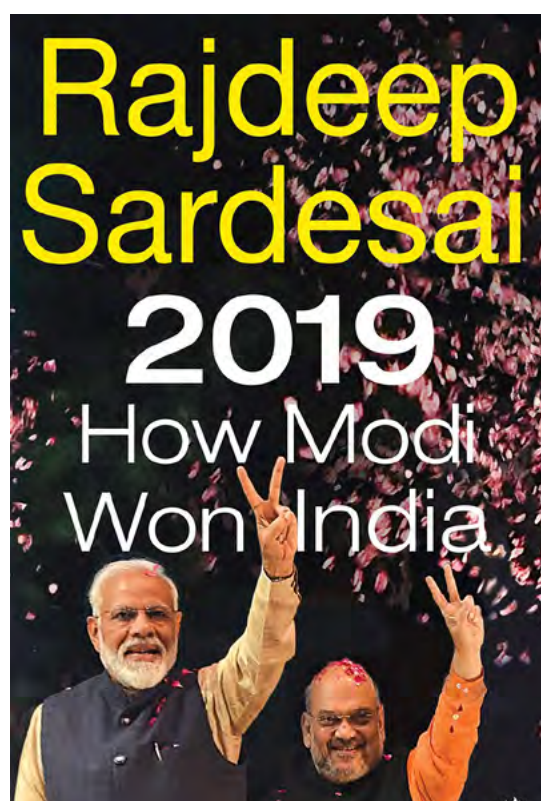
Consider the killing of journalists in Gaza, with no remorse from the Israeli side. It feels as though we've lost our moral compass and accepted that might is right. Those in power use and abuse it to silence contrarian and dissenting voices.

> When people ask me what "-ism" I believe in, I say I believe in *journalism.* I'm not ideologically driven to any extreme. **The one thing I am absolutely clear about is that religious bigotry is unacceptable. I have great faith in the diversity of this country. If there's any driving factor for me today, it is the Constitution.**

9   On a more personal note, what inspired you to become a journalist?

To be honest, I would be lying if I said I joined journalism to serve humanity. I became a journalist because I was a news hound.

From the time I was ten or twelve, I remember being excited when Indira Gandhi lost the 1977 election. I took the newspaper to school to share the news with everyone. I was always deeply interested in general knowledge and reading newspapers. My passion for news began there—and it has never left me.

When people ask me what "-ism" I believe in, I say I believe in *journalism.* I'm not ideologically driven to any extreme. The one thing I am absolutely clear about is that religious bigotry is unacceptable. I have great faith in the diversity of this country. If there's any driving factor for me today, it is the Constitution.

10   *Pax Lumnia* works to promote peace and reconciliation. In your view, what is essential for promoting peace in these contemporary times?

That is vital work. The most important thing we need to promote is the reduction of inequalities.

Peace can hopefully lead to harmony, and one day, to equal opportunity. But the great challenge of our times—across the world—is how to reduce the inequalities that are built into our social systems. That, to me, is the challenge we must confront.

11   Rajdeep ji, I know you have a hectic schedule. Thank you so much for answering our questions. I wish you and your team the very best.

Thank you. My apologies for not being able to do this earlier.

Esteban Baus-Carrera
ebaus@puce.edu.ec

COMCIENCIA-PUCE

USING THE FOUR UNIVERSAL APOSTOLIC PREFERENCES TO REIMAGINE DIGITAL NETWORKS
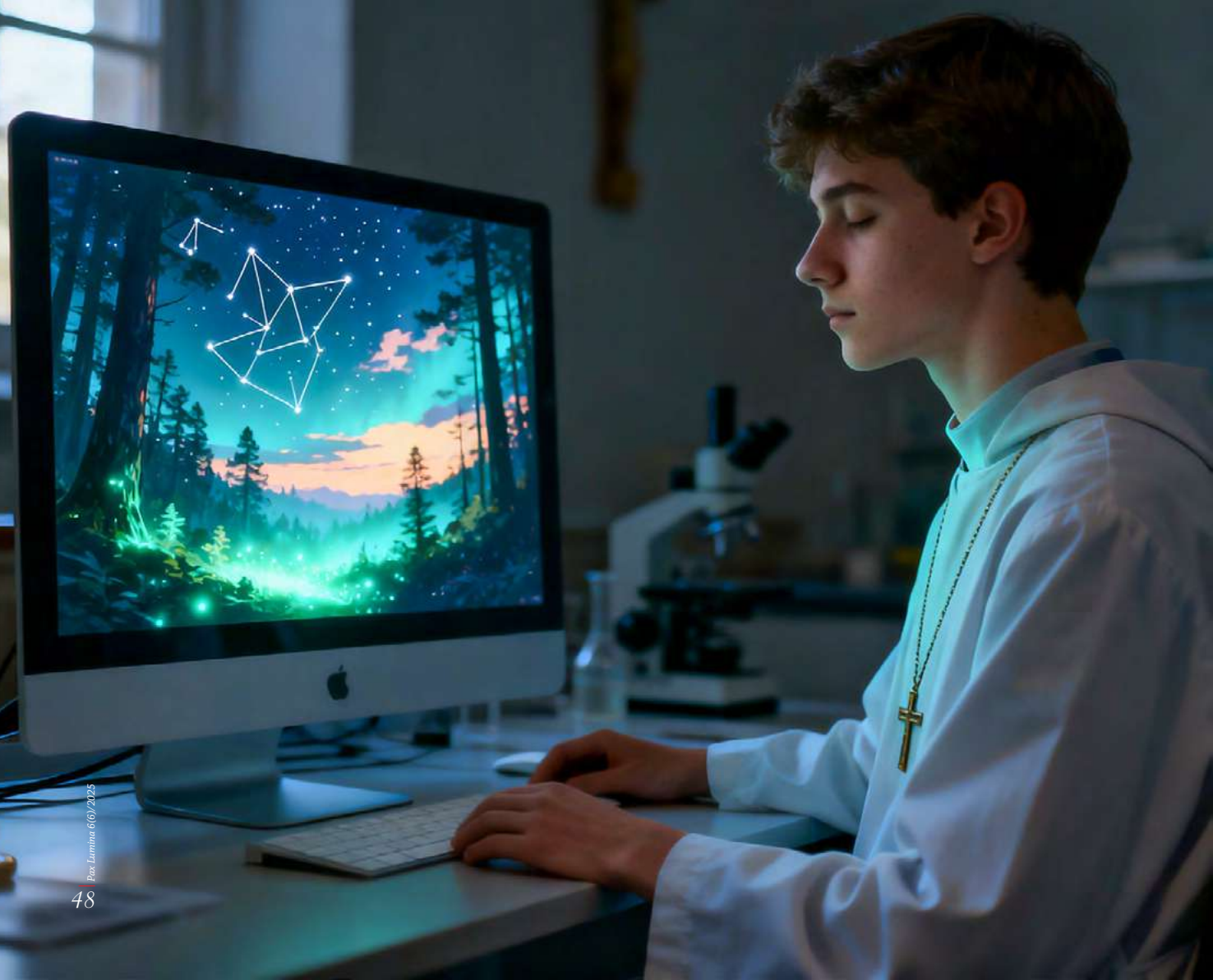
R ooted in the Jesuit spirit of service, Comciencia unites communication, community, and science under a shared purpose — **to make knowledge accessible to all, to nurture empathy, and to foster a culture of peace.**

Introduction: Belief in the Digital Agora

In a world fractured by misinformation and hostility, it has become a moral duty to view social media as a space for meeting, reflection, and hope. At the *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador* (PUCE), this vision has taken shape through Comciencia-PUCE, a scientific communication laboratory that transforms digital networks into spaces of learning and delight.

Rooted in the Jesuit spirit of service, Comciencia unites communication, community, and science under a shared purpose — to make knowledge accessible to all, to nurture empathy, and to foster a culture of peace.

Its work demonstrates how the Four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) — showing the way to God through discernment, walking with the excluded, accompanying the young towards a hopeful future, and caring for our Common Home — can be lived out meaningfully in the digital realm.

1. Leading the Way to God through Discernment and the Quest for Meaning

For Comciencia, communication is far more than the mere exchange of information — it is a way of understanding.

Between 2022 and 2024, Comciencia collaborated with *FES-ILDIS* and PUCE's Faculty of Economics to transform academic research into short videos for TikTok and Instagram. **These addressed issues such as menstrual poverty, unpaid care work, gender discrimination in labour markets, and adolescent pregnancy as a source of inequality.**

Each video, podcast, infographic, or story invites audiences to contemplate creation, human dignity, and the wellbeing of our planet through the combined lenses of science and art.

The laboratory grew from decades of biological research at PUCE.

This scientific foundation inspired creative works such as *El Sapari* (2005), the award-winning documentary *La Conquista Verde* (2006), and the photographic exhibitions *Yasuní en Imágenes* (2014) and *La Vida en el Ceibo* (2016).

These projects revealed that scientific observation can itself be a form of meditation — a contemporary version of the *Spiritual Exercises,* where curiosity becomes prayer and knowledge turns into gratitude.

Comciencia extends this contemplative vision into the digital sphere. Through social media,

it encourages people to view the world not as a resource to exploit but as a revelation to be understood. In doing so, it offers freedom from the constant noise of online life and embodies the first Apostolic Preference — helping people to find God in all things, even within pixels and algorithms.

2. Walking with the Excluded: Talking as a Way to Make Peace and Get Justice

The second Apostolic Preference, *"walking with the excluded in a mission of reconciliation and justice,"* guides Comciencia's mission to amplify the voices of those too often silenced. The lab uses social media to translate research on inequality, gender violence, and environmental degradation into accessible stories that inspire collective action.

Between 2022 and 2024, Comciencia collaborated with FES-ILDIS and PUCE's Faculty of Economics to transform academic research into short videos for TikTok and Instagram. These addressed issues such as menstrual poverty, unpaid care work, gender discrimination in labour markets, and adolescent pregnancy as a source of inequality. Combining data with personal testimony, the videos showed that social exclusion is not an abstract concept but a tangible injustice.

Partnerships with the *WHO* and *UNICEF* produced audiovisual materials promoting maternal health and the *Healthy Living Initiative* for the prevention of Chagas disease. These efforts made science and human rights more approachable and relevant to everyday life.

Comciencia gives voice to the voiceless online, viewing communication as a bridge that heals by listening, naming, and restoring dignity. It demonstrates that social media, when used with care, can serve justice rather than division—a space where empathy replaces judgement, and visibility becomes a form of empowerment.

3. Helping Young People Build a Hopeful Digital Future

The third Apostolic Preference, *"to accompany the youth in the creation of a hopeful future,"* lies at the heart of Comciencia's work. Its team—comprising young communicators, biologists, and designers—represents a generation eager to use creativity for the common good. Through videos, podcasts, and workshops, the lab transforms youthful energy into a force for reflection and civic imagination.

Comciencia's TikTok and Instagram communities, with more than 250,000 and 60,000 followers respectively, form Ecuador's largest digital university network. Its early success came from formats inspired by *The Office,* using light-hearted portrayals of campus life to engage students and make scientific content relatable and entertaining.

Behind the humour and sarcasm lay a deeper goal: to help young people see themselves as protagonists in a story about knowledge—capable of transforming society through understanding rather than anger.

This mission is reinforced through education. In 2024, Comciencia offered nearly a thousand students masterclasses on *Fundamentals of Research* and hosted international interns from *Ohio University*. These initiatives fostered cross-cultural learning and understanding, embodying the Jesuit spirit of forming individuals who think critically, feel deeply, and act justly.

In a world where digital spaces often breed cynicism, Comciencia turns the screen into a window of hope.

4. Taking Care of Our Shared Home: The Ecology of Communication

Laudato Si' lies at the heart of Comciencia, calling us to care for our Common Home. The lab's logo, "C³", stands for *communication, community,* and *science,* but it also signifies Care for the Common Home—the foundation of all its projects.

Its environmental campaigns—such as *"In a World Without Water," "Environmental Collapse," "Day of the Condor,"* and *"World Oceans Day"*—remind us that caring for the planet begins with feeling connected to it.

Comciencia uses photography, graphic design, storytelling, and scientific evidence to promote what Pope Francis calls "ecological conversion"—an inner transformation that inspires a life in harmony with the environment.

This spiritual view of ecology also extends to the way people communicate. The lab speaks of an "ecology of communication"—a harmony between data and narrative, rigour and empathy, presence and silence. Just as ecosystems need diversity to thrive, dialogue, too, flourishes through balance. And just as nature rejects waste, communication must avoid noise, distortion, and manipulation.

With this vision, Comciencia transforms digital networks into gardens of meaning, where everyone shares responsibility for nurturing knowledge.

Comciencia uses photography, graphic design, storytelling, and scientific evidence to promote what Pope Francis calls "ecological conversion"— **an inner transformation that inspires a life in harmony with the environment.**

Challenges and Discernment in Action

Like any living organism, Comciencia has faced moments of pruning and renewal. In early 2023, organisational changes temporarily limited its creative freedom and reduced its online activity.

Rather than retreat, the team embraced these constraints as an opportunity to refine its mission and deepen its spiritual roots.

It discovered that in the digital world, peace is not achieved through control but through coherence—when message, method, and mission align as one.

This collective discernment reaffirmed Comciencia's Jesuit identity: to seek God's greater glory (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*), even when the algorithms offered no clear path.

The Meaning of Influence: From Metrics to Mission

Between 2022 and 2024, Comciencia produced well over 3,400 pieces of multimedia content—videos, photographs, and infographics.

Yet, its true measure of influence lies beyond numbers. What matters most is transformation: the spark of curiosity in a student, a mother's gratitude after learning how to prevent Chagas disease, or the realisation that science and faith can work together for the good of humanity.

In a time obsessed with virality, Comciencia redefines influence as relational depth—"the quiet contagion of understanding."

Conclusion: Networks of Peace and Understanding

Comciencia–PUCE stands as living proof that social media can become an apostolic frontier—a space where faith and reason unite for peace. Guided by the Four Universal Apostolic Preferences, it has grown not merely as a communication project, but as a community of discernment:

• It nurtures curiosity in the digital age, guiding people to make informed decisions.

• By walking with the excluded, it transforms visibility into justice.

• By journeying with the young, it empowers them as creators of hope.

• By caring for our Common Home, it fosters a complete ecology of communication.

In an era marked by division, violence, and misinformation, Comciencia–PUCE demonstrates that digital networks—when grounded in ethics, empathy, and curiosity—can become spaces of meaning and mutual care.

Its work unites people of faith and those of none, all convinced that dialogue, knowledge, and human dignity are pathways to peace.

Comciencia helps shape a digital culture where truth is sought together, creativity serves the common good, and connection—not conflict—becomes our shared language of hope.

Esteban Baus-Carrera is the Principal Researcher, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE).

George Pattery
gpattery@gmail.com

JEMIMAH, CRICKET AND GODS

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA GOT IT WRONG!

It is more than just a game; it is a statement about Indian women—who, despite the inherited perceptions of their roles and ways of living in Indian society—continue to redefine their place with determination and grace. **But Jemimah has added yet another 'wonder' chapter to this tale of the struggles and triumphs of Indian women.**

It has been an eventful week (1st week of November 2025) in India. That the Indian women's cricket team finally won the world title is an achievement India can always be proud of. It is more than just a game; it is a statement about Indian women—who, despite the inherited perceptions of their roles and ways of living in Indian society—continue to redefine their place with determination and grace. But Jemimah has added yet another 'wonder' chapter to this tale of the struggles and triumphs of Indian women.

Jemimah Rodrigues stood firm, helping India accomplish the almost impossible task of defeating Australia, who had set a formidable total of 338 runs, in the semi-final. By her own account, she was able to achieve this because she relied entirely on Jesus, from whom she drew the strength and confidence to remain steadfast.

She faced personal challenges that had shaken her confidence, compounded by social media controversies arising from religious groups who accused her family of conversion activities. These issues weighed heavily on her at the crease, yet she stood firm, strengthened by her faith and the support it offered. She went on to score a remarkable 127 runs on her own, leading India to victory against South Africa in the finals.

Jemimah recounted boldly that she was guided by Jesus in this endeavour, quoting from the Bible: *"Be still, and your God will fight for you."* As a player, a woman, and a team member, she spoke with conviction about the strength she drew from her faith in those critical moments. The experience was so profound that she could not, and would not, keep it to herself. So far, so good.

The Thin Line of Gods

In a situation where 'religious sentiments' dominate public discourse in India, such personal confessions are often viewed with suspicion—especially on social media. It is, therefore, important that Jemimah clarifies that her testimony was not a comment on other faiths or deities. Equally, it is crucial that the so-called 'saffron squad' refrains from attributing motives to her confession or positioning themselves as the self-appointed guardians of Hindutva.

When one is truly at peace with one's belief and understands it from within, one does not need to 'demonise' another's confession. The numerous incidents of mob lynching and attempts to disrupt places of worship, particularly in North India, demonstrate that the 'Hindutva pot' is being deliberately kept boiling—instrumentalised repeatedly under the pretext of 'conversion', with social media ever eager to serve the cause of majoritarianism.

Although the Indian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to propagate their religion, or to convert to any religion—or none at all—this principle remains unacceptable to the saffron fold. Likewise, the rich diversity of interpretations and rituals within Hinduism itself is intolerable to them.

Even after more than seven decades of Independence, despite political and social progress and the presence of vibrant academic spaces, the saffron brigade continues to act aggressively, unaccountable to anyone. Why, then, do these groups take exception to Jemimah's sincere expression of faith? There is neither logic nor genuine religiosity in the saffron critique of a woman athlete's personal confession.

Interrogating Faith-Confessions!

Faith-confessions have a life and value of their own. However, in a multi-religious context, they must be subjected to proper scrutiny and evaluation. By nature, faith-confessions are *sui generis* (self-generating), non-rational, experiential, and deeply personal. They need to be valued and studied accordingly. They may not satisfy the requirements of either rationalists or fideists, yet they deserve appreciation for what they are.

Jemimah's statement is a confessional account of how she coped with her *personal dilemma and doubts* through her religious faith. It is not intended as a comment on other religions, but as a confession of her faith — one that contributed to her athletic success.

Confessional statements often employ in-group language that may not, and need not, be fully understood by a wider audience. Hence, they cannot be completely subjected to strict rational scrutiny when taken out of context. Jemimah's

confession is a personal testament to how she faced her inner struggles and pain through total reliance on Jesus. She has every right — and indeed a duty — to share that with her peers and the wider world; not as a critique of other faiths, but as a declaration of her own. In the formation and training of any team, it is vital that such inner struggles and questions are allowed to surface and be addressed.

However, one must remain attentive. Some charismatic and evangelical groups — including certain newly formed Catholic sects — use Biblical texts to explain or reinforce their confessional faith. They often pick and choose passages from scripture at random, finding personal resonance within them. While this may hold deep emotional value for individuals, it can be naïve to apply such formulas to broader socio-religious issues. To pluck a sentence or phrase from sacred texts out of context and apply it to present situations can be problematic.

Jemimah's confession is valuable because it explains, *post factum*, the intensity and urgency of her struggle. Her companions seem to have recognised this, and therefore accepted her fully. This offers a word of caution for both groups — those who confess and those who critique.

A faith-confessional narrative should neither be belittled nor used selectively without proper analysis. Scriptures are products of their time, yet not confined to it; they possess transcendental value and continuing relevance for true believers. What we need is a new *hermeneutics of Dhwani* (Vinoba Bhave) — an approach that seeks the implied and emergent meaning of a text or narrative.

Members of a team may find religious meaning and support from one another in different ways, whether within or beyond their group. That diversity enriches the collective spirit and reflects the strength of an interfaith group. Rather than critiquing or rejecting Jemimah's confession, let us receive it with an *aesthetic hermeneutics of dhwani* — one that recognises how her faith strengthened both her and her team. This stands in stark contrast to the mob-lynching mentality that thrives on political patronage.

Diversity and variety are signs of richness, not weakness. In the World Cup team's meetings with **the President and the Prime Minister, Jemimah stood out for her distinct way of appreciating the joyful, uniquely feminine, and empowering spirit of her team — and the legacy handed down by earlier generations.**

Diversity and variety are signs of richness, not weakness. In the World Cup team's meetings with the President and the Prime Minister, Jemimah stood out for her distinct way of appreciating the joyful, uniquely feminine, and empowering spirit of her team — and the legacy handed down by earlier generations. Perhaps the dominant masculine, binary thinking of the religio-political hierarchy and TRP-driven media could learn much from Jemimah, Kaur, and their companions. They were religious — but not for sale.

Questions Unanswered

Can Jemimah conclude, therefore, that Jesus supported her team and abandoned Australia or South Africa? Does God take sides? In the First Testament, many texts describe Yahweh taking sides — Israel's enemies are seen as God's enemies, and Yahweh is depicted as defeating them. Such literal readings are problematic and unscientific. When one selects scriptural texts to suit one's own ends, one effectively constructs enemies and drags God into personal battles.

It is worth noting that neither the Australians nor the South Africans were offended by Jemimah's faith. They understood and respected her confession for what it was. The *saffron brigade,* however, sees red — precisely because it follows the same path of literal interpretation and selective reading.

Sadly, despite India's many vibrant religions, diverse practices, and thriving academic campuses, there is little space or atmosphere for the scientific study of religions, their texts, and their practices. Religion has become a mortgaged tool for advancing majoritarian politics. Rather than picking up stones to throw at Jemimah, perhaps we should learn from the creativity and playfulness of the Indian Women's World Cup team — their ability to play together and celebrate cricket in all its richness as a *national* team. They refused to let the "religious conversion" googly steal cricket's spirit as a game.

Playfulness is a profound epistemic tool — one sorely lacking in India's saffronised sects and the political hierarchies of all religions.

In conclusion, I recommend Ian T. Ramsey's booklet *The Logic of Religious Language,* which explains how language functions within religious discourse. It should serve as an essential primer — both for the playful and the serious, especially those on social media.

George Pattery is former Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Religions at Visva Bharati University in West Bengal, India.

Deepanjalie Abeywardana
deepanjalie@veriteresearch.org

SOCIAL MEDIA
MEDIUM OF DEBATE, MEGAPHONE OF EMOTION

I n Sri Lanka, social media plays a dual role: a medium for dissent and debate, and a megaphone for emotions and echo chambers. **In a landscape where mainstream media has often served as a vehicle for the manufacture and dissemination of misinformation, many Sri Lankans turn to social media to consume news and exchange ideas.**

P eacebuilding carries many meanings and can be understood in multiple ways.

For me, it is about how we navigate and negotiate our differences — with an emphasis on dignity and inclusivity in the context of diversity.

It is a process that humanises those differences rather than demonising them. Ultimately, peacebuilding is grounded in three core values: amity, inclusivity, and dignity.

Discord — the antithesis of peace — takes many forms. To me, it signifies enmity, marginalisation, and the demonisation of others.

In today's world, social media often amplifies this discord, fuelling division and hostility. Yet, it also holds the potential to become a space for dialogue and empathy — a platform where peace can be cultivated rather than compromised.

In Sri Lanka, social media plays a dual role: a medium for dissent and debate, and a megaphone for emotions and echo chambers. In a landscape where mainstream media has often served as a vehicle for the manufacture and dissemination of misinformation, many Sri Lankans turn to social media to consume news and exchange ideas.

During moments of crisis and collective action — such as the *Aragalaya* (mass uprisings) in 2022 or #CoupLK in 2018 — mainstream media faltered as a reliable source. Social media filled that vacuum, becoming the arena for sharing updates, expressing dissent, and mobilising public sentiment.

It became a space for accountability and critique, amplifying issues that might otherwise remain unseen or unaddressed in the mainstream media.

However, these same platforms have also served to deepen divisions by amplifying the most vicious voices. During moments of communal violence, misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric spread rapidly, contributing to marginalisation and demonisation.

This essay examines two instances of newspaper reporting in 2019 and 2025 in Sri Lanka as a window into how social media drives both accountability and animosity. These examples — reflecting ethno-religious and sexual-orientation demonisation — reveal how platforms that could challenge bias sometimes instead reinforce it. Understanding this dynamic is essential to grasping the challenge of humanising differences — an integral aspect of peacebuilding.

(De) humanising Differences: A Window into Accountability and Animosity

The architecture of social media contributes significantly to polarised narratives. Its algorithm prioritises engagement over empathy — and in such a context, hostility and enmity gain greater traction.

When an issue surfaces — whether related to gender, religion, or minority representation — comments and posts often turn into battlegrounds of identity and ideology. Reactions to two recent

news reports—one on sterilisation claims against Dr Shafi and another on homosexuality— illuminate this troubling trend.

Example I: Manufacturing Fear – The Dr Shafi Case

In May 2019, a Sinhala mainstream newspaper reported, in its headline, that Dr Segu Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi had *"illegally sterilised"* 4,000 Sinhala-Buddhist women following caesarean operations.

This sensational claim emerged just weeks after the Easter Sunday attacks — coordinated suicide bombings that killed more than 250 people and inflamed anti-Muslim sentiment across the country. The reports linked Dr Shafi to extremism and framed him as part of an alleged plot against the Sinhala-Buddhist majority.

Within hours, social media platforms, politicians, and television networks repeated the story without verification. Headlines branded him a *"mass steriliser",* and some commentators even compared him to the leader of the Easter attackers.

However, later investigations by the Criminal Investigation Department found no evidence of sterilisation, terrorism, or financial misconduct. By then, the damage was irreversible. Dr Shafi's name had been vilified, his family forced into

hiding, and prejudice against Muslim medical professionals had deepened.

Online discussions reflected profound division. Many justified the accusations or dismissed the official findings as cover-ups, while a smaller group demanded evidence and accountability. What began as a single, unverified report spiralled into a nationwide moral panic.

As Verité Media and Politics later analysed, the episode illustrated how mainstream media can act as both producer and amplifier of mis- and disinformation. Sensational framing transformed speculation into perceived truth.

Yet amid this destructive cycle, journalists, citizens, and independent platforms such as Ethics Eye of Verité Media and Politics called for ethical reporting — a reminder that critical reflection remains possible, even within deeply polarised media environments.

Example II: Misrepresenting Homosexuality

A Sinhala mainstream newspaper published an article that contained two major issues, both of which reveal the deeper prejudices ingrained in the psyche of Sri Lankan readers.
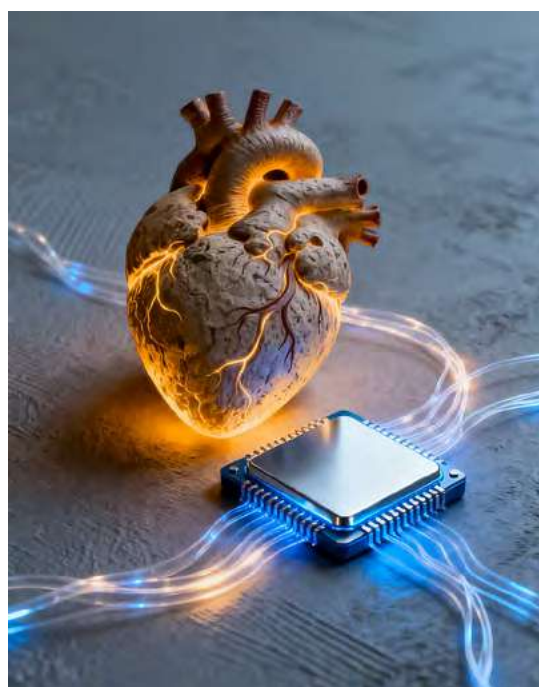
U nfortunately, the online commentary responding to Ethics Eye's post largely reinforced these prejudices. **Rather than challenging or questioning them, users endorsed the biases, reflecting the deeper intolerance embedded within sections of social media discourse.**

First, the article portrayed homosexuality as a 'perversion', using specific derogatory Sinhala terms. This framing directly contradicts the consensus of global scientific and medical communities, which long ago affirmed that homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality — not an abnormal condition.

Second, it equated members of the queer community with those engaging in bestiality. This false and damaging association raises serious concerns about the ethics of such reporting. It can only be described as an act of demonisation. Ethics Eye flagged this problematic coverage on its Facebook page, as it routinely does, to hold the media accountable.

Unfortunately, the online commentary responding to Ethics Eye's post largely reinforced these prejudices. Rather than challenging or questioning them, users endorsed the biases, reflecting the deeper intolerance embedded within sections of social media discourse.

Conclusion

These patterns confirm that the platform's underlying logic — prioritising engagement over ethical considerations — undermines the humanisation of differences, a vital element of peacebuilding. By promoting enmity over empathy, social media's very design often turns calls for accountability into new arenas of polarisation.

Yet, despite this, such online exchanges — however contentious — also reveal the potential of digital spaces to nurture accountability,

visibility, and solidarity. These values form the foundations of amity, inclusivity, and dignity, demonstrating that social media can, when used consciously and ethically, become a powerful tool for peace.

This highlights the urgent need for education that extends beyond technical competence. True digital literacy lies not only in knowing how to operate devices or navigate platforms, but in understanding how to engage responsibly and ethically online — to question information, challenge bias, and communicate with empathy, one of the core pillars of peace.

Cultivating this deeper digital literacy is essential to transforming social media from a megaphone of emotion into a medium for meaningful dialogue — one that strengthens public discourse, humanises differences, and ultimately contributes to a peace rooted in amity, inclusivity, and dignity.

Deepanjalie Abeywardana is the Head of Verité Media and Politics of Verité Research, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Rumaan Mecci
rumaanmecci1996@gmail.com

A DETOXIFYING PILGRIMAGE

A social media detox is what this self-imposed embargo is fashionably termed nowadays. **It is the modern-day equivalent of undertaking a pilgrimage to spiritual lands for a finite period, in order to purify oneself.**

I t has been a week since I deactivated my Instagram. It feels like an app off my phone, a boulder off my shoulders — and, most importantly, a huge weight off my mind.

This article, therefore, does not come from an analytical or research perspective as much as it comes from an anecdotal, actionable one — something we can all relate to.

A social media detox is what this self-imposed embargo is fashionably termed nowadays. It is the modern-day equivalent of undertaking a pilgrimage to spiritual lands for a finite period, in order to purify oneself.

Detoxification, traditionally, has been a process of eliminating toxins from the body. This particular modern exercise, too, is as much a spiritual one as it is a physical and psychological one. The spiritual excesses of social media overuse are plenty, and those will be addressed in the latter half of this piece.

First, let us look at the bright side of this medium.

The whole world meets at the softest tap of the tip of our little-most finger, or the slightest tremble of our slender voice. It is a colossal global cauldron simmering with ideas about everything the human mind has been capable of envisioning.

It may, perhaps, be the closest material manifestation of what Carl Jung called the *collective unconscious*. With a democratisation of knowledge at such a grand scale, anyone can be anything they wish to be.

If I were to summarise this in a single sentence: the world has changed more drastically and monumentally in the last twenty-five years than it has cumulatively in the past two and a half millennia — at least in terms of human connectivity.

However, this hyper-connectivity has come at a huge cost — hyper-isolation.

Our phones have become the truest extension of ourselves. Our search histories — and the huge conglomerates who conduct 'market research' — know more about us than our family

members do. The algorithm seems to 'get us' better than our simpler, real friends ever can. Increasing camaraderie is being established with various large language models that, well, model human tendencies.

The situation is not all that bad, at least not yet. But it seems to signal towards caution — demanding our immediate attention right now, before it is too late.

I mean, the last thing I want to be called is a doomsayer — but the doom in the current, largely prevalent present-day sport of doomscrolling ought to be signalling something, right? Or am I reading too much into this? Perhaps I have read a little too much of Huxley and Postman (together) in recent times, but this certainly should not go unnoticed.

From external influences such as short-form content, sensationalism, quick fixes, and the obsession with statisticising everything as data that needs to be tended to — to changing individual behaviours like scanning every moment for an Instagrammable photo, a trending reel, or, worse, partaking in hateful discourse without any penalty — the user and their usage need to be brought under scrutiny.

We must address tough questions about the ethics of free speech and the need for a serious crackdown on misinformation. Most importantly, we need to lay down limits to the access of certain aspects of knowledge itself.

Some information is questionable (for instance, the dark web), and some is simply useless (for example, the pimple on Taylor Swift's face). We must learn to harness our critical thinking faculties to work through and categorise these vast swathes of information as such.

The answers aren't easy. The only way forward is through tangible, plausible, and intelligent policymaking — where the well-being of our planet, and those who inhabit it, is made the ultimate priority.

The adults and the youngsters are equally at risk; no demographic is safe. Research shows that a staggering number of elderly people are turning into screen addicts, or falling victim to fake news — and worse, cybercrime.

The younger generation seems to be faring even worse, with their entire lives centred around their devices, jumping from one platform to another — all for the same purpose, but through a different interface. The journey towards dystopia seems to have commenced, and at present, we appear to be midway through the sweet spot of connectivity romanticisation.

S ocial media was meant to occupy only a small part of our social lives. Instead, it has taken over most of it. **Now, it is a worrying reality that we may miss out on wonderful opportunities simply because we lack a significant digital footprint.**

There is simply too much infiltrating our senses and our nervous system, all the time. The phrase *'feeling overstimulated'* has become a commonplace response to a casual *'how are you?'*

Social media was meant to occupy only a small part of our social lives. Instead, it has taken over most of it. Now, it is a worrying reality that we may miss out on wonderful opportunities simply because we lack a significant digital footprint.

Spiritual life has perhaps been hit the hardest. The seven deadly sins have taken on newer, more elusive forms — the excessive consumption of mindless content (gluttony), which fuels unproductive behaviour (sloth); the vanity of showcasing every favourable condition as content (pride); and the unease born of constant comparison (envy).

There is also the urge to self-aggrandise one's social and economic capital through having the best feed, reel, or post (greed); the hatred spewed across platforms at anything opposing one's ideology (wrath); and, most disgustingly, the gross and humiliating objectification of people on the internet (lust). The devil, it seems, has adapted all too well to the ways of the modern world.

Loneliness is skyrocketing, and so is addiction. This must be treated delicately. The disease has now become a way of life — difficult to separate, and even harder to categorise.

The internet is a glorious invention that must be restored to its original intent. Discerning, empathetic, ethical, and intelligent stakeholders and representatives from around the world need to convene urgently, seriously, and consistently on this matter to chart a recourse.

And for the rest of us, in the meantime — when the entire world comes to you, where do you, then, go to?

I would highly recommend a detoxifying pilgrimage.

Rumaan Mecci is a Public Policy Professional based in Delhi.

Barnet Chokani Phiri
barnet.chokani@hekima.ac.ke

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FUTURE OF MORALITY AMONG AFRICAN YOUTH

I n many African societies, the body—especially the female body—has long been associated with modesty and privacy. **Social media challenges these values, exposing a tension between traditional expectations and modern self-expression. What was once sacred or private is now curated and consumed publicly.**

I n recent years, social media has become one of the most powerful forces shaping human interaction and opportunity across Africa. For many young Africans, these platforms are not merely for entertainment but gateways into the *attention economy*—a marketplace where visibility itself holds value. Those who attract attention can convert it into profit through advertisements, sponsorships, or influence.

A few minutes on TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook reveal countless young women showcasing their bodies in pursuit of online fame. Algorithms reward content that provokes emotion—excitement, controversy, or sensuality. As a result, success is often measured by likes and views rather than by quality or substance, creating immense pressure to present oneself in ways that draw attention.

In many African societies, the body—especially the female body—has long been associated with modesty and privacy. Social media challenges these values, exposing a tension between traditional expectations and modern self-expression. What was once sacred or private is now curated and consumed publicly. The platforms that promise empowerment and freedom often foster new forms of objectification and dependency. In this attention-driven economy, the body itself risks becoming a form of currency.

Some may argue that African cultures historically embraced minimal dressing without sexual connotation. Yet, anthropological studies show that such customs carried different meanings from today's online trends, which often bear misogynistic undertones. The posting of revealing images is not a revival of tradition, but a symptom of commodification.

To understand this moral dimension, Zoë Cunliffe's essay *"The Objectification of Women's Bodies"* (2022), building on Martha Nussbaum's earlier work, argues that in today's image-driven culture, women's bodies are often viewed in ways that strip them of self and agency. On social media and in advertising, women are valued

more for how they look than for who they are or what they do. This reduces them to physical appearance or function, undermining dignity and reinforcing inequality. Society must move beyond such shallow visual culture and affirm women's full humanity.

Many young women on social media assert that their self-presentation expresses personal freedom and choice. They argue that they control how they appear and what they share. Yet, this freedom carries emotional and moral costs. It reinforces harmful stereotypes, pressures individuals to conform to unrealistic standards, and influences the wider moral climate of society. The question, therefore, is not whether social media is good or bad, but how it shapes the moral and cultural identity of African youth today.

Behind every image, lies a deep human longing—to be seen, to be known, and to be affirmed. In contexts marked by unemployment and limited opportunity, social media offers visibility and recognition where ordinary life may not. Yet from an African communitarian perspective, this represents a moral rupture. Every society possesses a moral grammar—an unspoken sense of dignity and respect. African traditions have long regarded the body as sacred: a vessel of life and a site of divine reflection.

The visual culture of social media challenges this understanding by transforming the body into advertisement. What once served as an expression of identity within community is now a commodity in the global market of attention. This shift invites serious ethical reflection. Are we preparing our youth to navigate spaces where moral compromise is rewarded? Do our schools, families, and faith communities still offer moral formation strong enough to resist the seductions of digital culture?

For many Africans, the sacredness of the body is not merely sociological, but theological. St John Paul II's Christian anthropology teaches that the body is the visible sign of the invisible image of God. To exploit it for fleeting approval is to obscure that sacred dignity. The appropriate pastoral response, however, is not condemnation but accompaniment. As Pope Francis reminds us, the Church must walk with young people, offering compassion and formation rather than judgement.

Many who seek attention online are not immoral but lost—yearning for affirmation in an unanchored world. Here, the Church, families, and educators have a shared task: to guide young people in discerning between empowerment and exploitation. Digital spaces must not become arenas where worth is equated with visibility or where self-value depends on external approval.

W hat once served as an expression of identity within community is now a commodity in the global market of attention. This shift invites serious ethical reflection. **Are we preparing our youth to navigate spaces where moral compromise is rewarded? Do our schools, families, and faith communities still offer moral formation strong enough to resist the seductions of digital culture?**

The challenge is not to abandon social media but to redeem it—to make it a space that builds dignity rather than destroys it. When young Africans are offered opportunities to channel creativity into meaningful and sustainable work, the temptation to trade dignity for visibility diminishes. The Church can play a vital role by promoting digital literacy and creating online spaces that celebrate authenticity.

Africa's digital future must rest on an ethic of dignity. Social media can be a tool of empowerment only if families, educators, and religious institutions help young people see that their worth lies not in being seen but in being true. A society that teaches its youth to create with integrity rather than perform for approval will ensure that Africa's digital revolution strengthens, rather than corrodes, its moral soul.

Barnet Chokani Phiri, S.A.C is a Malawian priest of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines). He serves in the Diocese of Mzuzu, Malawi.

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In her 1995 essay 'Objectification', published in Philosophy and Public Affairs (252:1995), the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum described objectification as treating a person like an object, something to be used for pleasure or gain, rather than recognizing them as a full human being with dignity, autonomy, and the ability to make choices. https://www.mit.edu/~shaslang/mprg/nussbaumO.pdf

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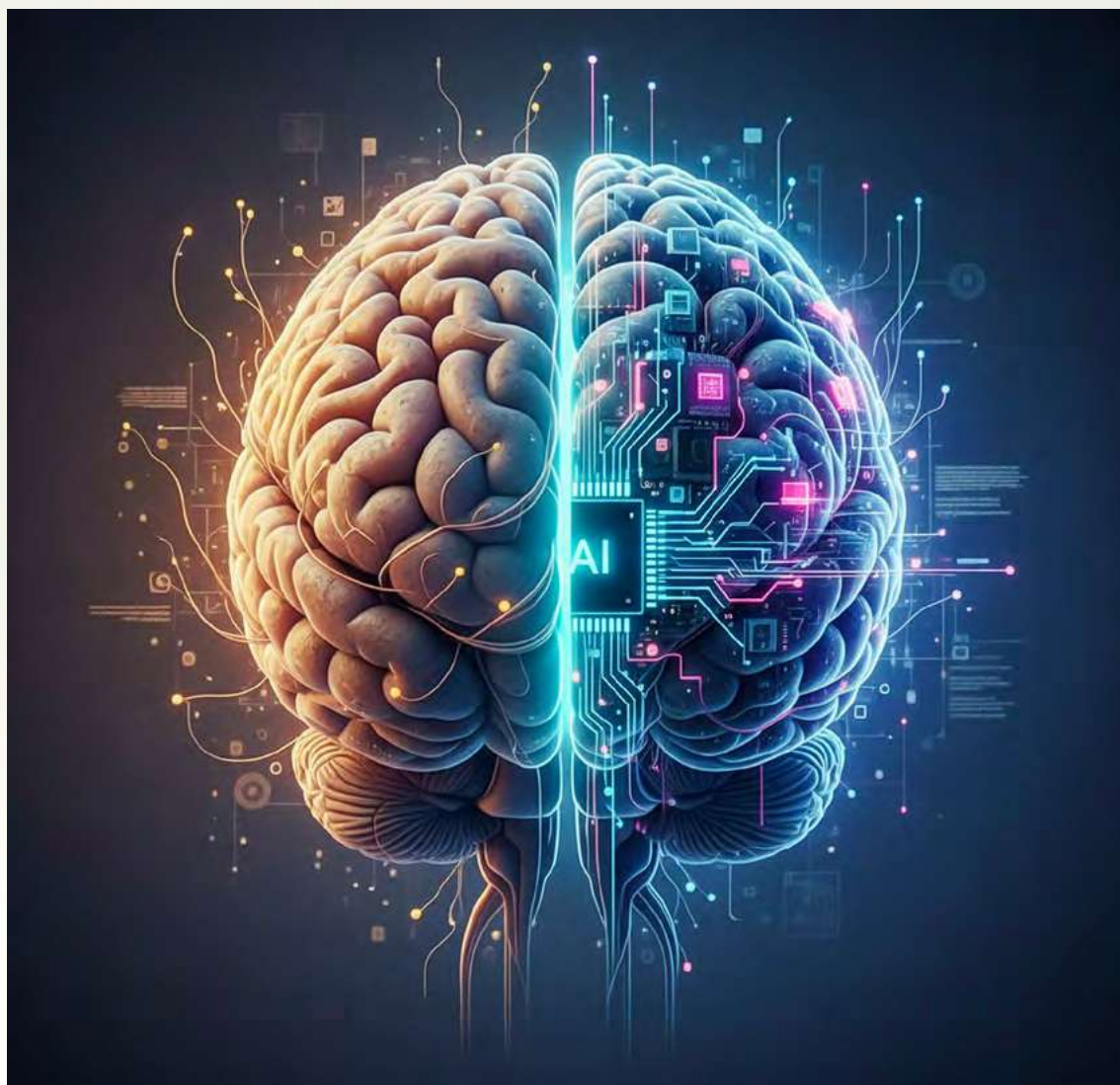
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Biju Dominic
Biju.Dominic@fractal.ai

SOCIAL MEDIA
A **CATALYST** FOR **POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

Recently, my team used smartphone-based prompts to encourage individuals in a Middle Eastern country to become more active. **Participants who initially averaged just 600 steps a day increased their daily average to 4,000 steps. These examples show how thoughtfully designed social media content, delivered through smartphones, can become a powerful catalyst for positive behavioural change.**

Human innovation is a saga that began with a simple yet transformative act: affixing a stone tool to a stick to create the axe. This marked humanity's first step into a future brimming with inventions. As centuries unfolded, humans invented the wheel, harnessed electricity, split the atom, and ushered in the digital age with the internet and smartphones.

Today, we stand on the frontier of Artificial Intelligence. Each of these milestones, while a testament to human ingenuity, carries an inherent duality — the power to uplift humanity or to inflict harm.

The Dark Side of Innovations

Consider the axe, designed to cut wood and provide warmth to a family, yet capable of being wielded in violence. History is replete with examples reflecting this dual nature across every human creation.

This duality is not confined to tangible inventions; it extends into the digital realm, where social media epitomises the paradox. As a recent innovation, social media connects and informs while simultaneously fostering division and spreading misinformation.

Much like other addictions, many people find themselves wasting precious time scrolling through social media feeds. Those addicted to their phones may experience stress, anger, or even panic when unable to access them. In one study, more than a fifth of respondents admitted they would find it harder to be without their phone for a week than to be without their partner.

By examining the tactics used by fraudsters to "digitally arrest" even well-educated individuals and seize their savings, we see how they employ sophisticated persuasion strategies grounded in a deep understanding of human frailty. These fraudsters skilfully manipulate emotions such as fear, or adopt the classic good cop–bad cop approach.

The problems created by social media are far too significant to ignore — and not easily solved. Superficial solutions like awareness campaigns about its harms, or outright bans, are unlikely to help. Like the fraudsters, those striving for good must develop a nuanced understanding of social media's complexities. The deeper we explore, the greater our chances of shaping social media into a force for positive behavioural change.

The Positive Side of Innovations

Yet, amid the shadows, there shines a beacon of hope — social media's potential for positive transformation. A striking example is the Hallow app, a Catholic platform that recently outpaced giants like Netflix, Instagram, and TikTok in downloads, as reported by *The New York Times*. This success invites us to ask: what strategies can further amplify social media's positive influence?

Social media offers several advantages over traditional media such as television or newspapers. Smartphones — today's dominant medium — are always on, always accessible, and capable of becoming a constant companion, gently nudging users towards wiser choices at the right moments.

The New England Healthcare Institute estimates that non-adherence — patients not taking medications as prescribed — results in around $290 billion in avoidable healthcare costs each year in the United States. Imagine the impact of a simple smartphone reminder prompting a user to take their medication on time.

Recently, my team used smartphone-based prompts to encourage individuals in a Middle Eastern country to become more active. Participants who initially averaged just 600 steps a day increased their daily average to 4,000 steps. These examples show how thoughtfully designed social media content, delivered through smartphones, can become a powerful catalyst for positive behavioural change.

MicroStimuli: The Content of the Future

Creating content for the smartphone medium demands careful consideration. With any new medium, there is often a tendency to replicate lessons from earlier platforms directly onto the new. When television replaced newspapers as the primary communication medium, many early TV advertisements merely mirrored the lengthy, wordy press ads that preceded them. It took decades for television to recognise its strengths and evolve towards visual communication.

Context duration refers to the average time an individual remains cognitively engaged with media content before their attention shifts. Studies reveal that the context duration for television ranges from 5 to 21 minutes, meaning that 90% of interactions with television last less than 5 minutes, and 95% are under 21 minutes.

In contrast, research by Fractal Analytics indicates that for digital natives (aged 20–30), the smartphone context duration is only 5–10 seconds, highlighting the fleeting nature of smartphone interactions. Thus, simply transferring long-duration content designed for television to smartphones is inappropriate.

The accelerating trend towards ever-shorter context durations invites us into the realm of *MicroStimuli*—where stories transcend time, gripping attention in mere seconds, not minutes. **It calls upon us to craft content that resonates deeply and swiftly in this dynamic digital landscape, ensuring our messages are not only heard but felt.**

Already, the 30-minute serials that once dominated television entertainment are being replaced by *microdramas*—short narratives that tell engaging stories in 60 seconds. This shift calls for the creation of *MicroStimuli*—content designed to communicate effectively with the target audience in mere seconds, if not milliseconds.

Smartphones have clearly overtaken television as the leading medium of communication. Scientific advancements such as Meta Glass and Brain–Computer Interfaces are slowly emerging as the future modes of interaction. Along this evolutionary path, one trend is unmistakable: the context duration of human interactions will continue to shorten, and the content of these future communication media will become increasingly microscopic.

Way Forward

These are exciting times in the world of communication. As we continue to navigate the dual-edged sword of social media and other technological marvels, our challenge is twofold: to harness their vast potential for good while vigilantly countering their pitfalls.

The accelerating trend towards ever-shorter context durations invites us into the realm of MicroStimuli—where stories transcend time, gripping attention in mere seconds, not minutes. It calls upon us to craft content that resonates deeply and swiftly in this dynamic digital landscape, ensuring our messages are not only heard but felt.

Indeed, as William Shakespeare insightfully remarked in *Hamlet,* "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." To safeguard the future of communication, we must empower thoughtful minds to comprehend the complexities of the world we are ushering in—minds capable of doing so more adeptly than any with ill intent. In an era where each innovation heralds new capabilities, creativity and ethical foresight together will ensure that technology remains a force for positive impact.

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Biju Dominic is Chief Evangelist Officer, Fractal Analytics Ltd.

Tathagata Chatterji
tathagata@xim.edu.in

FROM **HASHTAGS** TO **STREET POWER**

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE **NEW URBAN** PROTEST POLITICS

From Hong Kong and Lagos to Santiago and Beirut, the same story repeats itself: digital networks are redefining how people organise, protest, and imagine democracy. **The immediacy of online communication has removed old barriers to mobilisation, turning private anger into public action almost overnight.**

In September this year, Nepal witnessed a striking wave of youth-led mobilisation. Angered by the government's ban on Facebook and other social media platforms, Gen Z protestors first voiced their dissent online, then poured into Kathmandu's streets. The discontent quickly broadened into a nationwide call for accountability—particularly against the rise of politically connected "nepo kids" accused of corruption.

What began as hashtags and shared posts became mass demonstrations that ultimately helped bring down a government. Armed with smartphones and a clear sense of injustice, young Nepalis showed how digital outrage can rapidly convert into organised, street-level political power.

A Global Phenomenon

Nepal's youth uprising was not an isolated event. Across continents, social media has become a catalyst for urban protest, giving voice to new generations of citizens demanding accountability.

From Hong Kong and Lagos to Santiago and Beirut, the same story repeats itself: digital networks are redefining how people organise, protest, and imagine democracy. The immediacy of online communication has removed old barriers to mobilisation, turning private anger into public action almost overnight.

The Early Sparks of Digital Mobilisation

The potential of digital media first became evident over two decades ago. In 2001, President Joseph Estrada of the Philippines was ousted

after thousands of people, mobilised through simple text messages, gathered in Manila to protest the decision of the Filipino Congress to absolve him of serious corruption charges.

It was a turning point—the first time that mobile technology toppled a sitting leader.

A decade later, the Arab Spring gave social media global prominence. Facebook and Twitter became instruments of revolution, helping citizens in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen coordinate rallies, share images of repression, and spread calls for freedom.

The fall of leaders such as Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak seemed to prove that digital connectivity could be a new force for democracy.

But optimism soon met reality. The same platforms that united protesters also divided societies. Governments learned to monitor, manipulate, and infiltrate online movements. Disinformation spread faster than truth. Leaderless, horizontal networks struggled to convert their momentum into lasting political institutions.

When Money Enters the Digital Square

In the years that followed, the link between social media and money power deepened. Platforms that once empowered citizens began

shaping political campaigns and public opinion on a global scale.

Today, elections are influenced as much by data analytics firms, political consultancies, and micro-targeted ads as by rallies or public debates. Social media companies, driven by profit models based on engagement, increasingly prioritise content that provokes strong emotion, making political messaging more polarised and sensational.

The 2016 U.S. elections and the Brexit referendum exposed how digital platforms could be weaponised to manipulate voter sentiment. Data harvested from users was used to create psychological profiles, enabling political messages tailored to individual fears, anxieties, and biases.

Similar strategies have since spread across the Global South—from coordinated WhatsApp campaigns in India and Brazil to organised troll networks in the Philippines and Indonesia. In many cases, political actors now hire digital consultants to quietly shape discourse, drown out dissenting voices, and manufacture consent.

This merging of media and money has reshaped politics into a contest of attention. Right-wing populism, in particular, has used digital ecosystems to build echo chambers, vilify opponents, and normalise divisive narratives.

Outrage becomes profitable; emotional triggers become political tools. What appears spontaneous online is often carefully engineered—and public debate increasingly unfolds on terrain shaped by those with the resources to dominate it.

Gen Z in the Age of Algorithmic Politics

For youth-led movements like those in Nepal, this environment presents both opportunity and risk.

On one hand, social media gives young people unprecedented reach and visibility. They can expose corruption, mobilise crowds, and challenge State narratives without relying on traditional media. Their creativity—expressed through memes, videos, music, and livestreamed protest—has become a distinct political language.

On the other hand, they must navigate platforms driven by algorithms that reward sensationalism over substance. Authentic voices compete with paid influencers and disinformation networks. Maintaining the credibility and coherence of a movement requires ethical discipline, fact-checking, and internal trust.

Despite the risks, social media continues to show its power for constructive civic engagement. It has amplified environmental campaigns, women's rights movements, and anti-corruption activism. It has created spaces where marginalised voices can be heard and can connect across borders.

But digital protests alone cannot secure lasting change. They must be met by institutions willing to listen, and by citizens committed to using digital tools responsibly. Media literacy, transparency in online political advertising, and protection of the digital commons are now central to any democratic future.

Hope in a Connected Generation

Kathmandu's Gen Z protests are part of a longer story—from Manila's text-message revolution to Cairo's Twitter uprisings and the algorithm-driven political battles of today.

Each phase reminds us that technology is never neutral: it can be a tool for liberation or a means of control. The same platforms that help communities organise can also be used to manipulate and divide.

For those concerned with peace and governance, the task is not to reject social media, but to re-humanise it—ensuring it becomes a space for dialogue rather than division. The young people of Nepal, Dhaka, and beyond have shown that moral conviction still matters, even in an age of digital manipulation and orchestrated narratives.

Their protests were not only expressions of discontent—they were expressions of hope: hope for fairness, accountability, and a politics rooted in dignity.

In the end, the shift from "hashtags to street power" is not just a story about technology; it is a story about agency. Whether this renewed energy strengthens democracy or fragments it will depend on how societies choose to respond—not by silencing young voices, but by listening to them and engaging them as equal partners in shaping the future.

Tathagata Chatterji is the Coordinator, Centre for Humanities and Compassion Studies, XIM University, Bhubaneswar, India.
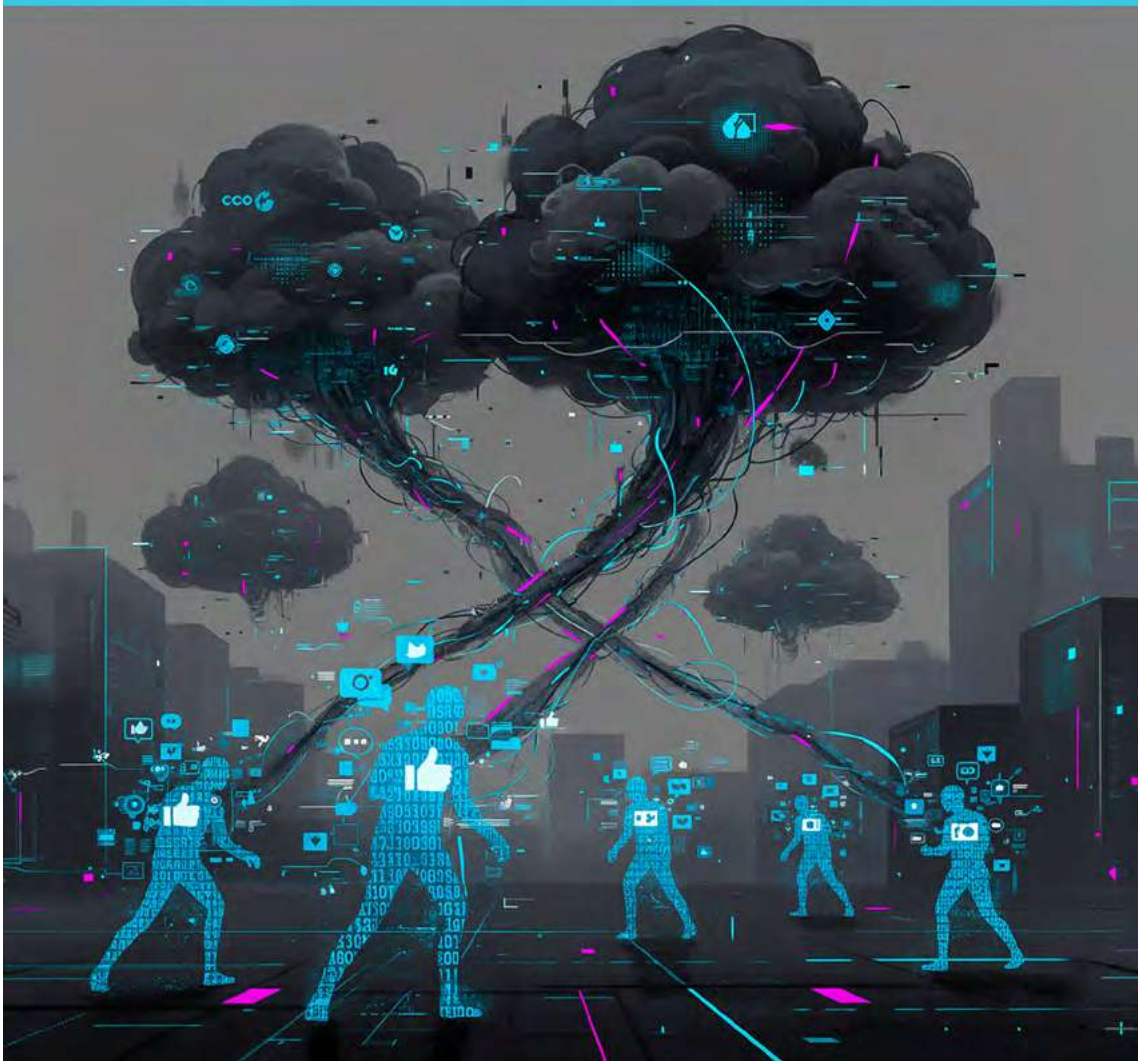
Verónica Yépez-Reyes

vyepezr@puce.edu.ec

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

DIALOGUE, CONNECTION, AND THE ETHICS OF PARTICIPATION

Drawing from critical pedagogy, theories of the social imaginary, rhizomatic thinking, and Media Ecology, **it argues that universities and learning communities have a crucial role in nurturing ethical and participatory digital cultures.**

Social media platforms shape much of contemporary social experience. They influence how individuals imagine belonging, debate differences, and construct knowledge about the world. Yet, these same platforms also amplify polarisation, emotional manipulation, and the rapid spread of misinformation.

In this sense, social media is profoundly double-edged: it enables solidarity and empathy on one side, while deepening fragmentation and distrust on the other. This paper explores how social media can be reimagined as a space for civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and peacebuilding.

Drawing from critical pedagogy, theories of the social imaginary, rhizomatic thinking, and Media Ecology, it argues that universities and learning communities have a crucial role in nurturing ethical and participatory digital cultures. Service-learning further complements these frameworks, providing an applied model that links online reflection with social action, and connects the logic of networks to the practice of global citizenship.

At the conceptual level, Castoriadis (1987) and Anderson (1983) offer key insights through their notion of the *social imaginary*—the shared frameworks through which societies imagine and sustain collective life. Today, social media functions as a primary arena where these imaginaries are constructed, negotiated, and contested.

Platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok have become laboratories of collective imagination, constantly reshaping ideas of fairness, belonging, and truth. Yet, as Zuboff (2019) argues, they operate within the logic of surveillance capitalism, transforming users into data subjects and reducing

communication to patterns of prediction and profit. The challenge, therefore, is to reclaim these spaces for social learning—to reintroduce reflection, empathy, and dialogue into systems designed for attention and acceleration.

Freire's (1985) pedagogy of dialogue remains vital to this reimagining. For Freire, authentic communication is a reciprocal act—a co-creation of meaning grounded in critical consciousness *(conscientização)*. Applied to social media, this pedagogy calls for deliberative participation: a culture in which posting and sharing become acts of reflection rather than reaction.

Freire's notion of *praxis*—the unity of reflection and action—redefines the digital citizen not as a consumer or influencer, but as a participant in a shared search for understanding. This dialogical participation aligns closely with UNESCO's (2021) Media and Information Literacy (MIL) framework, which distinguishes between misinformation (false but unintentional), disinformation (deliberately false and harmful), and malinformation (true information used to harm).

MIL situates digital literacy within an ethical and civic context, emphasising discernment, accountability, and inclusiveness as essential competencies for the digital age. Through these principles, social media can evolve from a site of distraction and division into one of engagement, empathy, and shared responsibility.

To conceptualise the structure of participation, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of the rhizome offers an alternative to hierarchical and linear models of communication. Social networks resemble *rhizomes*—decentralised, horizontal, and constantly evolving through unpredictable connections.

This structure nurtures creativity and pluralism, yet it also breeds volatility. When guided by relational ethics and civic awareness, the rhizomatic nature of social media can encourage intercultural collaboration and empathy. Without critical consciousness, however, it risks descending into fragmentation and noise.

The task is not to tame the rhizome but to inhabit it critically—to transform connectivity into conviviality, a term Illich (1973) used for technologies that enable participation rather than domination.

Media Ecology further clarifies how communication environments shape perception and social behaviour. McLuhan (1964) noted that the medium itself determines the message it

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conveys, while Postman (1985) warned that when entertainment replaces education as the dominant mode, public discourse deteriorates.

Strate (2017) extends this idea to digital culture, suggesting that online environments demand *ecological literacy:* awareness of how media ecosystems condition attention, emotion, and civic engagement. These insights echo boyd's (2014) concept of *networked publics* and Papacharissi's (2021) *affective publics,* both describing how emotion circulates and forms community in digital spaces.

Integrating Media Ecology with such contemporary approaches deepens our understanding of social media as both infrastructure and atmosphere—a dynamic environment where affect, attention, and ethics intertwine.

From a critical standpoint, the key issue is not simply how networks connect people, but under what conditions those connections foster understanding. Couldry and Mejías (2019) argue that social media infrastructures function through *data colonialism,* appropriating human experience as raw material for computation.

Recognising this dynamic calls for educational and institutional efforts to reclaim digital participation as a civic, rather than commercial, act. Universities, media organisations, and civil society can play transformative roles by embedding media literacy, critical pedagogy, and intercultural dialogue into their communicative practices.

In this light, social media becomes a space for democratic experimentation—a laboratory where dialogue and participation are continually redefined for an interconnected world.

The pedagogical bridge between theory and practice lies in *service-learning.* As Jacoby (2015) and Tapia (2022) emphasise, service-learning links reflection with social engagement, connecting academic inquiry to community needs.

Applied to digital contexts, it provides a framework for learning through service—integrating online collaboration with local and global initiatives that promote inclusion, sustainability, and peace.

Service-learning positions social media as a site of civic action, where communication technologies align with values of empathy, diversity, and justice. By involving students and citizens in projects that unite digital storytelling, public service, and intercultural exchange, institutions can transform social networks into ecosystems of cooperation and learning.

The broader aim of this reflection is to advance a renewed understanding of social media as a *communicative commons*. This commons is fragile, shaped by both technological architectures and the imaginaries of its participants. Sustaining it requires a critical awareness of how platforms influence perception and emotion.

Freire's dialogical pedagogy, Castoriadis's creative imaginary, Deleuze's rhizomatic multiplicity, and McLuhan's media ecology converge in a shared insight: communication is not a passive exchange of symbols but a generative process that constructs the social world itself.

Reclaiming social media for peace, therefore, means designing conditions where dialogue can thrive—environments that reward curiosity, listening, and collective imagination rather than outrage and isolation.

Social media remains a paradoxical space. It mirrors our conflicts, yet it also holds potential for transformation. When guided by principles of critical literacy, participatory ethics, and service-learning, it can become a site of civic renewal—where imagination and empathy function as public virtues.

The challenge for 2025 and beyond is not to escape the networks that bind us, but to reimagine how we inhabit them: as learners, collaborators, and co-creators of a shared and plural world.

Verónica Yépez-Reyes is the Principal Researcher, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE).

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Tejaswini Uma Sudhir
b25104@astra.xlri.ac.in

SOCIAL MEDIA AS CATALYSTS FOR PUBLIC GOOD, SOCIAL HARMONY AND PEACEBUILDING

As an educator, I have witnessed both sides of social media—the corrosive and the creative. **I have seen students fall into endless loops of distraction, but I have also seen young people from remote villages and small towns use the same platforms to transform their lives. Social media is, in essence, a tool. The intent of its user decides whether it divides or unites, misleads or enlightens.**

When I was in Class 10, I never looked at any YouTube channel for help with my studies. But when I began teaching students of Class 10 in 2019 on our educational YouTube channel, *Study with Sudhir,* I realised that in the hinterland of Bharat, where not all students have access to quality teaching at their schools, this social media platform is like manna from heaven.

Teaching is provided free of cost, delivered right inside your study room, and can be accessed any number of times, at a time of your choice—what could be better? What's more, teachers can even clear doubts in the comments section. The following year, when Covid-19 locked all of us inside our homes, the public-good factor brimmed over.

We often see social media being described as anti-social and anything but a positive catalyst for public good. Many of these platforms, in fact, contribute to social disharmony and are often accused of disturbing peace. But it would be wrong to tar them all with the same brush.

The glowing rectangle of the mobile phone, as I have seen in a student's hand, can be his or her passport to learning, awareness, motivation, and success. Blaming social media for everything is like blaming the pen for bad handwriting.

As an educator, I have witnessed both sides of social media—the corrosive and the creative. I have seen students fall into endless loops of distraction, but I have also seen young people from remote villages and small towns use the same platforms to transform their lives. Social media is, in essence, a tool. The intent of its user decides whether it divides or unites, misleads or enlightens.

During the early months of the pandemic, our YouTube channel became a virtual classroom for thousands of students. Many of them came from small towns where schools had shut down and teachers had little access to online tools. Messages poured in from students who said they were able to continue learning only because of our videos.

One girl, who hailed from my grandmother's village in Thiruvilwamala, Kerala, wrote, "Your channel is my school now." That message was more than just feedback—it was a reminder that, when used responsibly, social media can bridge geographical and economic divides in education. It also carried, for me, a benign sense of giving back to my grandmother's roots.

It was a classroom without walls, and to personalise and brand it, we gave it the tagline *Teju ki Paathshaala.*

The most beautiful aspect of social media is that it has broken the walls of the classroom. A student sitting in Maoist-hit Dantewada can learn from a teacher in Kolkata; a girl in a government school in Jharkhand can ask a question to an educator in Hyderabad. The comments section becomes a shared learning space, where curiosity is not bound by roll numbers or uniforms. The channel alumni then become a vibrant community of learners.

What's remarkable is how students begin helping one another. When one student posts a doubt, others often respond with solutions even before the teacher does. This peer-to-peer learning is one of the purest examples of how social media fosters community and cooperation. Education is evolving into a collective act rather than a one-way delivery of knowledge.

Beyond academics, I have seen how stories of courage, resilience, and kindness shared on social media can build bridges across geographical, religious, economic, and caste divides. On our platform, we encouraged students to exchange their pre-board papers. This meant a student in, say, Ludhiana had access to question papers prepared by teachers in schools in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Ranchi, and Shillong—a diversity of this kind that no publisher could ever provide.

In many ways, different forms of social media have become the new civic spaces where opinions are shaped and collective action begins. Whether it is raising funds for flood victims in Kerala, mobilising volunteers for blood donation drives, or spreading awareness about mental health, social media has become the first responder in times of crisis.

D uring the pandemic, when physical distancing separated us, social media connected us. It allowed information, support, and compassion to flow freely. I remember one instance when a student created a post requesting plasma donors for her relative. **Within hours, help arrived. That moment underscored a profound truth: while social media may have its flaws, it also possesses an unmatched power to mobilise humanity.**

During the pandemic, when physical distancing separated us, social media connected us. It allowed information, support, and compassion to flow freely. I remember one instance when a student created a post requesting plasma donors for her relative. Within hours, help arrived. That moment underscored a profound truth: while social media may have its flaws, it also possesses an unmatched power to mobilise humanity.

For social media to become a catalyst for peace, its influence must extend beyond the virtual world. When online campaigns translate into real-world initiatives, transformation becomes tangible. I have seen students who first connected with me through Study with Sudhir later start free tutoring programmes in their own towns, helping juniors prepare for exams using digital tools. They became educators in their own right, carrying forward the same spirit of service from which they once benefited.

This ripple effect is what gives social media its true power—the ability to inspire not just clicks, but change. Therefore, I firmly believe that if we consciously use social media for public good, social harmony, and peacebuilding, it can become one of the greatest instruments for collective progress. Imagine platforms that reward truth as much as virality, that highlight cooperation instead of conflict, and that elevate teachers, artists, and changemakers as much as entertainers.

When I look back at my journey—from a student who never used YouTube for learning to an educator who now witnesses its impact on millions—I see how social media has rewritten the very meaning of access and empowerment. It has democratised knowledge, connected hearts across distances, and given every individual a voice.

Yes, it can divide. But it can also unite. It can misinform, but it can also enlighten. The challenge—and the opportunity—lies in choosing which version of social media we nurture.

Tejaswini Uma Sudhir is BM- B 1st Year student at XLRI-Jamshedpur
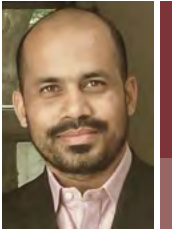
D'Souza Arun Prakash
arundsj@gmail.com

EXCELLING FROM *MASS MEDIA* TO *MY MEDIA* FOR THE **SAKE** OF **HUMAN DIGNITY** AND **CHARITY**

Let us commence with a structural dilemma. Should social media be viewed as a singular or plural entity? That is to say, should social media be regarded as something *that is,* or something *that are?*

While there is no definitive solution to this riddle, it is generally accepted among Latin scholars that the term media is the plural form of *medium*. Yet, as various applications together constitute a new phenomenon or concept in communication, it could also be considered singular.

Viewed from a historical perspective, we find that at the University of Illinois in 1973, social media platforms began as a technological innovation with the introduction of Talkomatic, a multi-user chat room application.

Nevertheless, it was not until the launch of SixDegrees.com in 1997—rightly regarded as the first independent social networking website—that social networking services became the talk

of the day. Over the years, registered users of these platforms have utilised technology to communicate, interact, and create spaces for freedom of expression.

In recent years, AI-driven social networking platforms have begun to influence both social and personal spheres—offering senders and audiences alike the chance to inform and be informed, to entertain and be entertained.

In 2025, with the launch of the Sora 2 app, which allowed users to create, share, and view short videos akin to TikTok—entirely AI-generated—questions surrounding the real and the fake, the true and the false, the natural and the artificial, have become matters of serious concern.

Some recent trends in social media include the persistent dominance of short-form videos—particularly on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels—the growing prominence of e-commerce and in-app shopping, and an increased demand for authentic, user-generated content (UGC). There is also a noticeable focus on niche communities and genuine engagement, the continued popularity of live streaming on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, and the rise of interactive and ephemeral content, such as polls, quizzes, and stories that disappear within twenty-four hours.

Another key development is the integration of social search and social SEO, where users turn to social media as a search engine. This makes it essential for brands to optimise their content with searchable text and keywords to enhance visibility across platforms. Added to this is the growing importance of artificial intelligence in content creation and strategy.

In recent years, the use of social media by popular influencers for advertising has also been on the rise. This is a rapidly evolving phenomenon in which an influencer's outreach fuels marketing, with increasing attention given to micro- and nano-influencers and to long-term collaborations.

The principal distinction between old media—such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—**and new media, namely the Internet, social networking sites, and news apps, lies in the two-way nature of communication and the limits of information dissemination.**
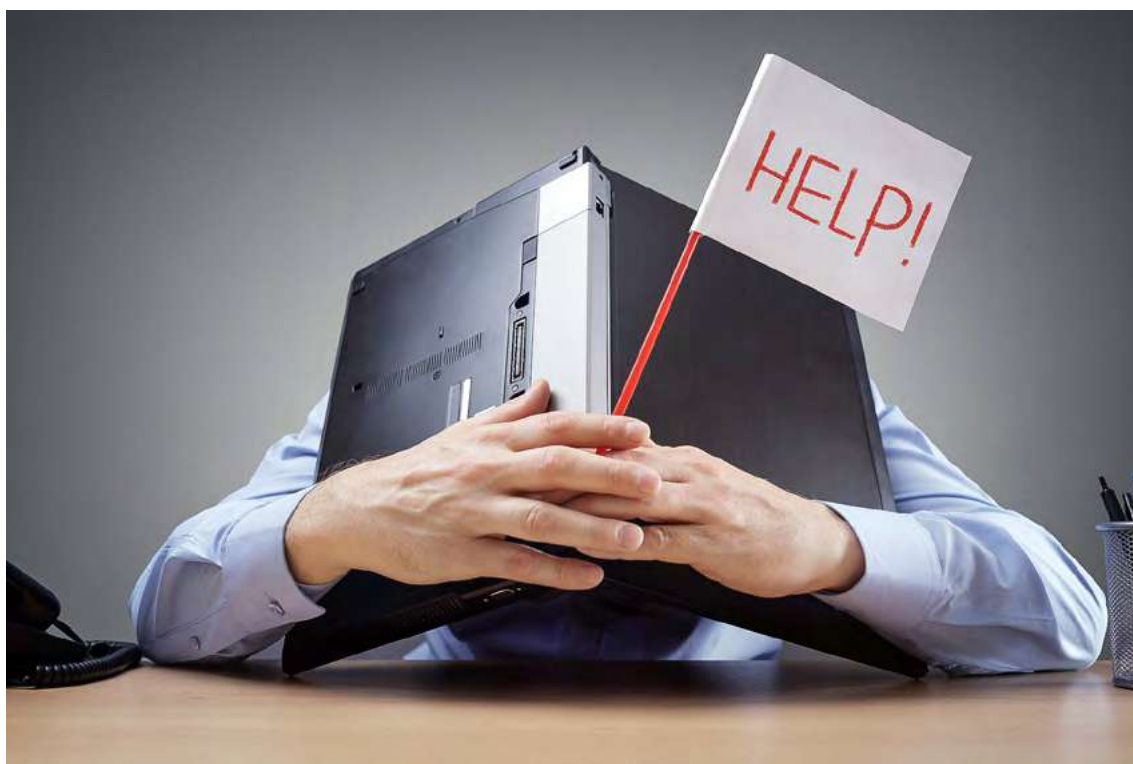
At the same time, the creator—or online—economy continues to expand, with more individuals using social media to build their brands and businesses, generating revenue to support their livelihoods. Meanwhile, both individual and organisational brands are engaging tactically with users and creators through comments and conversations in order to widen their reach.

The principal distinction between old media—such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—and new media, namely the Internet, social networking sites, and news apps, lies in the two-way nature of communication and the limits of information dissemination.

While old media is largely one-way, with information flowing from a central source to a mass audience, new media allows anyone to send information instantaneously, enabling almost unlimited dissemination in a many-to-many, user-generated content structure.

In terms of credibility, old media is generally perceived as more reliable due to formal editorial processes, fact-checking, and the presence of gatekeepers. New media, however, demands more caution, as the reduced oversight and abundance of user-generated content can increase the risk of misinformation.

Interestingly, our present generation—drawn to breaking news, instant fame, quick results, and profitable outcomes—appears entirely at ease with the dynamics of new media.

Social media spaces have offered humans a digital or even anonymous identity, detached from the physical world. Registered users often treasure these identities, expressed through their email addresses or account names, profile pictures or pseudonyms, and contact numbers—or sometimes, just a few neatly arranged dots.

These multiple identities offer users opportunities for self-expression, platforms for communication and promotion, and avenues to become what one dreams of. While such identities often convey constructive ideas and messages, thereby building bridges among audiences and social groups—both virtual and real—for the promotion of peace and goodwill, the social media space is also frequently misused to provoke hatred and distress, and to indulge in cyberbullying and digital cacophony.

Not surprisingly, in 2024, Australia became the first nation to impose a ban on social media for those below the age of sixteen, a move later followed by Florida. This indicates that all is not well with social media usage across age groups. Consequently, guardians and administrators across the globe are seriously concerned about these platforms that both disseminate and receive content.

Freedom of expression, as ensured in a democratic society, is a universal right that must be exercised with prudence. It should empower people to grow into better human beings who are, as Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests, intangibly part of a wider imagined community.

Goal 12 of the SDGs 2030 calls upon us to ensure responsible consumption and production patterns, while Goal 16 urges the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of justice for all, and the building of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at every level. Social media has a significant role to play in achieving these goals.

Whether viewed as singular or plural, all forms of media share one key responsibility: to build bridges, not walls. Wilbur Lang Schramm, fondly remembered as the Father of Communication Studies, in *Mass Media and National Development* (1964), outlines three major roles entrusted to the mass media—functioning as a watchdog, acting as a policy adviser, and serving as an educator for change and modernisation.

Social media undoubtedly plays a vital role in promoting information, culture, and education. As stated in several Church documents, the media bears a responsibility to spread truth and to foster the peace that truth brings. The Church underscores the need to protect and support a life rooted in goodness, justice, and truth within society.

In his Apostolic Letter *The Rapid Development,* His Holiness Pope John Paul II proposes three crucial steps to serve the common good in society: education, participation, and dialogue. In a world where media exists in the tension between space and time, and between speed and credibility, these goals can be realised only when both mass and social media become *my media*—instruments that uphold human dignity and charity, transcending the boundaries of faith, nationality, colour, or economic status.

D'Souza Arun Prakash belongs to the Department of Journalism, Sophia University, Tokyo.
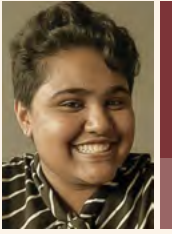
Namitha Tom
h25158@astra.xlri.ac.in

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PEACEBUILDING

HOW DIGITAL SPACES SHAPE CONFLICT AND PEACE

T he principal distinction between old media—such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—**and new media, namely the Internet, social networking sites, and news apps, lies in the two-way nature of communication and the limits of information dissemination.**

W hat makes an action right or wrong? Is it the law, religion, society, or the quiet voice of conscience within us?

For centuries, the question of morality has haunted humanity — shaping civilisations and, at times, tearing them apart when ideals collide. Today, in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world — the much-discussed *VUCA* world — there is an urgent need for sustainable moral structures.
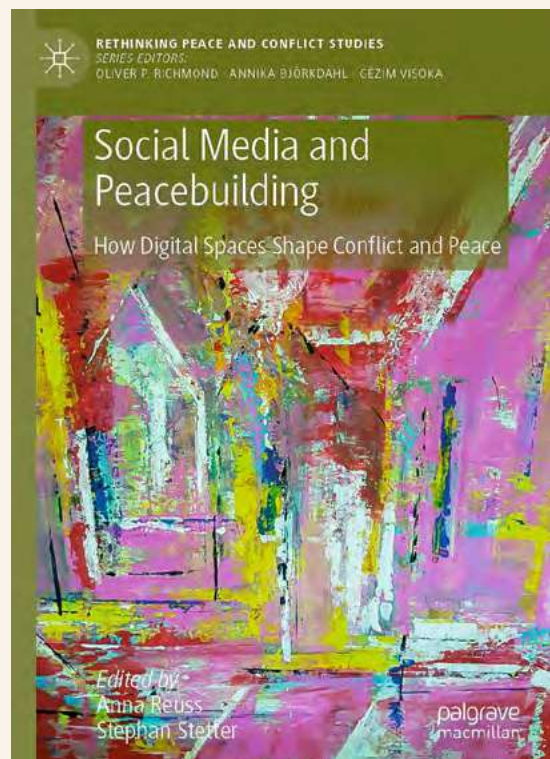
Institutions and organisations, like individuals, require moral awareness and imperatives that help them distinguish between right and wrong — and, quite simply, to be good.

In this review, I argue that the emerging concept of *digital peace* — particularly the power of social media to shape violence, dialogue, and reconciliation — has become essential for our world to endure and evolve.

I approached *Social Media and Peacebuilding: How Digital Spaces Shape Conflict and Peace,* edited by Anna Reuss and Stephan Stetter, as a student who teaches juniors case-writing and leads campus discussions on technology and society.

The book presents a clear and balanced thesis: social media is neither inherently peace-promoting nor peace-destroying. Its effects depend on how actors — such as States, platforms, UN missions, and civil society — deploy these tools within specific *conflict ecologies.*

That framing feels refreshingly honest. It resists both hype and defeatism, preferring a careful, actor-centred analysis over platform determinism.

The opening chapters lay out why this debate matters. The editors situate the volume within a maturing body of literature that has moved beyond early utopianism, and now grapples with tougher questions of power, governance, and risk in digital spaces.

They anchor the discussion with essential references — Zeitzoff on conflict dynamics, Schirch on conflict and democracy — before justifying the book's focus on strategy and institutions.

For a course in business ethics or public policy communication, this scaffolding is ideal. It

helps students see what has changed in the last decade, and why our assessments must now be context-sensitive.

From the very first chapter, the book immerses the reader in how it constructs its central argument. Three chapters, in particular, form the backbone of its analysis.

First, Marc Owen Jones reframes disinformation as part of a *"deception order."* He traces how both State and non-State actors weaponise low-cost, high-reach content to pollute the information environment.

The value of this contribution lies not in its headline claim, but in its conceptual shift — from episodic "fake news" to a structural understanding of deception networks and their incentives.

This shift equips practitioners to anticipate disinformation campaigns rather than merely react to them. Jones's own public summary of the chapter underscores this strategic perspective.

Second, Julia Leib's chapter on UN peace operations argues that strategic communications is no longer a peripheral function; in digitally saturated theatres, it has become operational. Messaging now shapes force protection, civilian trust, and the ability to counter malign narratives.

This argument aligns with independent policy analyses of UN communications and recent research on how missions use social media to engage local publics. The implication for mandates and budgets is stark: without communications capacity—such as analytics, local language proficiency, and ethical guardrails—missions are fighting yesterday's information war.

Third, Andreas T. Hirblinger's open-access chapter serves as the book's moral centre. He dissects what he calls "lexicalism," "dashboardism," and "deletionism"—fast, surface-level approaches to hate speech that blunt immediate harms, but rarely touch the deeper social relations that make hate persuasive.

Hirblinger calls instead for "deep work": slow, relational, and historically aware engagement that pairs digital tactics with offline trust-building. When read alongside his earlier essays on uncertainty and performative technology in peace processes, his case grows even stronger:

durable peace demands more than quick dashboard wins.

Other chapters widen the lens. Frank Möller and David Shim map the politics of digital images, exploring how visuals choreograph attention and moral responses in times of crisis. Their contribution serves as a reminder to treat seeing as a political act, not merely an aesthetic one.

A research note reinforces their focus on "digitising the agenda of visual peace," connecting image cultures to the wider field of peace research. For anyone training communicators or CSR teams, the takeaway is concrete and urgent: image ethics is mission-critical.

What, then, are the book's core insights for those of us thinking about corporate responsibility, platform governance, or civic tech?

From platform myths to actor strategy: Outcomes hinge on the incentives and capabilities of those using platforms. Peacebuilders should model adversaries' deception strategies, stress-test their own communication plans, and invest in institutional capacity rather than assuming that "more speech" solves speech harms. Jones's framing helps operationalise that mindset.

Treat communications as an operational capability: If missions and NGOs are targeted by narrative warfare, then staffing, training, and measurement must reflect that reality. This is not about vanity metrics; it is about trust, safety, and civilian protection.

UN-focused research converges on this point, underlining the need for communications to be treated not as an accessory, but as an operational pillar.

Move beyond "dashboard peace" Rapid takedowns and counterspeech are necessary, but insufficient. Without the slow work of relationship-building, memory work, and inclusive dialogue, digital interventions merely skate on the surface.

Hirblinger's chapter gives language and practical direction for funders and implementers to go deeper, grounding peacebuilding in sustained human connection rather than reactive digital gestures.

also appreciate what the editors do not do. They do not promise a one-size-fits-all framework. **Instead, they curate disciplined, empirical chapters and offer a reflective synthesis that acknowledges fragmentation—peace itself appearing in "pieces" across platforms, publics, and practices.**

Centre visual ethics: The book reminds us that a single image—whether a drone video, a protest photo, or a deepfake—can set the agenda. Teams need clear protocols for sourcing, consent, context, and potential harm.

Möller and Shim's analysis offers a timely prompt to integrate visual ethics into every stage of communication planning and training.

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For classroom use, that honesty is a feature, not a flaw. It encourages comparative case studies rather than forcing premature generalisations. The Springer overview reinforces this positioning—challenging state-centric frames and simplistic binaries.

If I were to ask for more, it would be for deeper regional granularity beyond UN-mediated contexts and greater attention to locally owned digital infrastructures operating outside formal peace operations.

The book gestures to such work, but future editions could spotlight community-led initiatives where vernacular media, faith networks, or youth collectives co-produce safety online. Even so, its concise design and balanced mix of policy-oriented and theory-rich chapters make it a strong teaching text.

How would I use this in my personal and professional life?

I would pair Jones and Hirblinger with a live analysis lab where students map a current disinformation network, design a risk register for a peace-oriented campaign, and specify which tactics qualify as "deep work" versus "dashboard work."

In a CSR or ESG module, I'd draw on Leib to explore what responsible engagement might look like for firms operating in fragile contexts—especially regarding community communications, harm mitigation, and grievance redress.

These are not hypothetical concerns. Current policy and research show that communication failures can escalate risk and rapidly erode legitimacy.

For me, the headline Social Media and Peacebuilding captures a pragmatic approach to thinking and acting in volatile information environments. It shifts the conversation from outputs to outcomes, from speed alone to depth with care, and from platform blame to strategy, institutions, and ethics.

For scholars, it consolidates a field that has finally moved beyond both naïveté and nihilism. For practitioners and students, it provides vocabulary and examples that can be put to work immediately.

Reference:

Reuss, A., & Stetter, S. (Eds.). (2025). *Social Media and Peacebuilding: How Digital Spaces Shape Conflict and Peace.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73917-0

Namitha Tom is an MBA student in Human Resources at XLRI – Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur, India.

Neena Joseph
facultyimgdrnj@gmail.com

COMMEMORATING
Dr JACOB THOMAS, IAS (Rtd.)

The passing away of Dr Jacob Thomas, IAS (Rtd) is a profound loss to all of us—especially to *Pax Lumina* and LIPI, Kochi. His contributions to *Pax Lumina* were nothing short of foundational. His concept notes, always meticulously crafted, offered a comprehensive treatment of each issue's theme. They conveyed, with clarity and conciseness, what readers could expect—serving as a lamp post that guided contributors to align their articles with the magazine's vision.

In Peace Studies sessions, Dr Jacob's lectures were brief, but deeply impactful. His compassion for the vulnerable—particularly for Scheduled Castes and scavenger communities—was evident in his talks and discussions. He brought sharp insight and moral clarity to the monthly meetings of the Newman Association.

I had the privilege of being his student first, and later, a fellow faculty member in the Peace Studies programme, where he served as Academic Director. His feedback was incisive, always steering us towards the programme's objectives.

A single question—"What can we do about this social phenomenon?"—could transform a session from theoretical rigour to practical relevance. He believed in doing, and he led by example—an administrator *par excellence*.

Dr Jacob championed project-based learning, always emphasising implementability. His eyes were not just on ideas, but on their real-world impact. I recently learned that he personally donated to a student's project within one Peace Studies programme—a quiet act of generosity that speaks volumes about his commitment to nurturing change.

Though Dr Jacob Thomas possessed impressive academic and professional credentials, he remained remarkably humble and unassuming in his interactions. His simplicity was not merely a personal trait—it was a quiet strength that made him deeply approachable.

In every session, he gently but consistently reminded us of the centrality of empathy. Those who had the privilege of working with him knew—he did not just speak of empathy; he lived it.

Dr Neena Joseph is a member of the faculty, LIPI, member of the Editorial Board, Pax Lumina, and former Professor, Institute of Management in Government, Trivandrum.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,
What you are doing through/with PAX LUMINA is just wonderful! excellent!

High quality, in-depth articles.Great presentation with a totally professional make-up.
Impressionable and meaningful pictures/photos.
A credit-worthy and invaluable contribution to print journalism today.

Congratulations.

Cedric Prakash
Gujarat

Dear Editor,
Thank you so much for sharing Pax Lumina with us – we truly appreciate your contribution.
We've received your document and will review it for possible inclusion in our News.

We'll let you know once it goes live or if we need any further information. Many thanks again for being part of our global community.

Best wishes,

Tony Antoine Mwelwa
Educate Magis

Dear Editor,
Thank you!

What a great edition!

George Griener
Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Dear Editor,
Received the September 2025 issue of Pax Lumina on Peacebuilding.
It looks great.

Masoom Stanekzai
Honorary fellow at the Asia Institute of Melbourne University

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Dear Editor,
Congratulations for the excellent articles.
Of course, peacebuilding is a multidisciplinary approach where we have to establish sustained relationships among people locally and globally. Strategic peacebuilding activities should address the root or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution, and stabilize society politically and socioeconomically.

Prof Dr Sabu Thomas
Former Vice-Chancellor
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

Dear Editor,
Received Pax Lumina September 2025.
It is a fantastic edition.

P. Daniel Figuera
Venezuela

Dear Editor,
Thank you for reaching out, and giving us a space to share our work. Please feel free to contact us if you see fit on peace processes, peacebuilding, and peace implementation topics. As you know, we are a research program and work very closely with policy-makers around the world and both national and local level stakeholders in Colombia and the Philippines.

Best regards,

Madhav Joshi
Kroc Institute for Int'l Peace Studies
University of Notre Dame, USA

Conversations are happening whether you are there or not.

- Kim Garst

LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (LIPI)
Ponoth Road, Kaloor, Kochi - 682 017, Kerala, India

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION NETWORK
New Delhi, India

INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE (ISI)
24 Benson Road, Benson Town, Bengaluru - 560 046