WAR, PEACE AND SOCIAL NETWORKS. EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PEACE COMMUNICATION IN NEW MEDIA

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Abstract: Public relations in conflict resolution is nothing new. From old and informal methods of mediation and information organization aimed at generating a desire for peace among the public, to the formal functions of today's government institutions, public relations have been consistently designated and responsible for developing and implementing strategies and policies for public intervention in situations of conflict or potential conflict. The evolution of social media has not only revolutionized but also decisively influenced the way we communicate, interact, and react. Social media platforms have created new opportunities for connection and communication across geographical boundaries and cultural barriers. In the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, these tools have opened up new opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and engagement between individuals, communities, and organizations. In this article, we seek to explore the impact of social media on communication for peace through a quantitative analysis of online material published between September 2023 and November 2024 on the official social media channels of the United Nations.

Keywords: communication, peace studies, social media, public relations, United Nations

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and purpose of the research

Public relations in conflict resolution is nothing new. From the ancient and informal methods of mediating and organising information aimed at generating a desire for peace among the public, to the formal functions of today's government institutions, public relations has consistently been designated and responsible for developing and implementing strategies and policies for public intervention in conflict or potentially conflict situations. Public expectations of public relations are high. Public relations is more than just a persuasive message: it is about informing, persuading through understanding and listening in order to act positively in a real world often characterised by conflicting values.

In this article, we seek to explore the role of peace communication in new media. More specifically, we aim to examine the ways in which these technologies - focusing our attention on social media, particularly *Instagram* - facilitate access to information, enhance communication, amplify voices and increase transparency, representing a particularly useful tool - highlighted in an analysis of UN action from this perspective - for conflict mitigation and peace support. Therefore, by means of a mixed qualitative and quantitative analysis of online materials published between September 2023 and November 2024 on official United Nations channels, we aim to present those specific elements of communication that are linked to the notion of peace and that are designed to help mitigate the state of conflict and, of course, encourage actions in favour of peace.

In order to have the possibility to highlight how communication can influence a reconceptualisation of the notion of peace research in international relations, by surfacing the nature of the global arena and highlighting the tools that can be used in

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political actions for effective negotiation for conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies, we aim to find those elements of communication that succeed in contributing to peace threat reduction or conflict mitigation, despite the fact that international relations scholars have long failed to recognise the need for a more inclusive approach from this perspective to meet the new challenges posed by the nature or typologies of conflict.

The primary purpose of this endeavour that I have undertaken is to link the field of communication with the political science practice of peacebuilding. Despite the fact that scholars have, over the years, attempted to treat communication from the perspective of managing state-to-state relations, the link between communication and peace efforts has been less studied.

Drawing on what we consider to be some appropriate benchmarks from the literature on the approach we have set ourselves, we seek to offer worthwhile perspectives on the role of new technologies in promoting communication for peace. Through a by no means exhaustive analysis of the object of study - the United Nations' communication for peace - we ultimately aim to contribute through this research to a better understanding of the potential of new technologies to support peacebuilding efforts and to identify strategies for harnessing these technologies for communication for peace.

The framework and context of the chosen topic, that of the impact of new technologies on communication for peace, are particularly determined by the increasing complexity and frequency of conflicts and the growing recognition of the importance of communication in promoting peace. As conflicts become more deeply rooted in the murkiness of their causes and are measured over longer and longer time spans, it is becoming increasingly difficult to resolve them by traditional peaceful means, such as negotiations or mediation. In such a framework, communication through new media has the potential to become a key tool for promoting peace, building trust and reducing tensions between conflicting parties.

From the very beginning of our endeavour, we have been aware that the impact of new technologies on communication for peace is not uniformly positive and we announce that we do not intend to carry out a specific analysis of the field of political science and international relations, treating the chosen topic from this perspective.

In today's geopolitical context, the concept of communication has undergone radical transformations, irremediably marked by the technological evolution manifested in the expansion of social networks, which has led to global interconnectivity. The traditional way of disseminating information has fundamentally changed, with the emergence of new channels of interaction that have forged new relational links between international institutions and the general public. The United Nations Organisation, in its mission to maintain peace and security, is an important reference point in today's global context, rapidly adopting strategies for these new channels of communication with the intention of reaching the widest and most diverse audience. A situation which thus emphasises the fact that communication processes within social networks and beyond have become tools to be taken into account in the management of communication carried out with the intention of safeguarding peace. Also, given the ease and speed with which information can be shared through social networks, and that they can also contribute to the spread of misinformation and the creation of propaganda tools that can exacerbate conflicts and hinder peace-building efforts, we will limit ourselves to perspectives that are intended to contribute to the structure of a dialogue dedicated to peace. We remain cognisant, however, that the use of technology for peace promotion

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and conflict resolution is not without its challenges, including issues of security, privacy and access, which will not be the subject of this study.

1.1. Relevance of the topic

Given the complexity of the chosen topic, a clearer and deeper understanding of the impact of new technologies on communication for peace will always be needed, one that always takes into account both the benefits and the drawbacks of these communication tools. Only in doing so will we be able to identify effective strategies for harnessing these tools to support peace-building efforts and to promote more inclusive, effective and sustainable peace-building communication.

We believe, therefore, that the topic we have chosen to address - the role and impact of peace communication in the new media - is of significant relevance for several reasons that we intend to identify and establish at the outset:

A. Increasing complexity and frequency of conflicts: as conflicts become more deep-rooted and protracted, it becomes increasingly difficult to resolve them through traditional means such as negotiations, mediation and eminently political peacekeeping efforts. In this context, we aim to look at how communication can become a key tool for promoting peace, building trust and reducing tensions between parties in conflict;
B. Rapid advances in technology: with them come new opportunities and challenges in the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The emergence of new technologies has significantly expanded communication possibilities in the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Social networks, online platforms and mobile technologies have enabled individuals and groups to communicate with each other across geographical, cultural and/or political boundaries, allowing the exchange of information, ideas and perspectives;
C. Increasing the importance of inclusive peacebuilding: the use of technology to promote peace and resolve conflict is not without its challenges, as mentioned above. Nonetheless, we believe that if new communication tools are used effectively and targeted towards peace, they have the potential to promote more inclusive and effective peacebuilding efforts, and the milestones - 5 in number - that we consider relevant to peace communication are outlined below;
D. The need for innovative approaches: given the complexities and challenges associated with peacebuilding and conflict resolution, there may be a need for innovative approaches using the latest technologies to promote more effective and sustainable peace communication.

1.3. Hypothesis and working method

In the approach we have suggested, therefore, we will build on the assumption that new communication tools have the potential to significantly improve peace dialogue through four milestones that we consider relevant for peace communication: (1) improving access to information and (2) dialogue between community members or between parties in conflict, (3) amplifying marginalised voices, (4) increasing transparency and (5) improving conflict resolution methods, while being aware that the use of these technologies is not without challenges.

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By exploring the impact of new technologies on peace communication, we aim to identify some effective strategies for utilising these tools to support peace-building efforts and promote more inclusive, effective and sustainable peace communication.

In terms of (1) increased or improved access to information, new communication tools, such as the internet, or social networking sites, have given people access to information that in the past was unavailable or difficult to obtain. This has enabled individuals to be better informed about conflict and peace issues and helped them to take action to promote peace.

Enhanced dialogue (2) has been ensured by more accessible communication between individuals, regardless of their geographical location or cultural boundaries, often facilitating communication between peace advocates, activists and organisations and making it easier to coordinate and collaborate on initiatives to establish or maintain peace.

The amplification of voices (3) - hitherto marginalised - has been supported by the emergence and development of social media and new technology, which have provided a platform for individuals and groups to make their voices heard in the community and beyond, by getting their messages out to a wider audience, enabling peace advocates to raise awareness of peace issues more than they could have done in the past.

With regard to (4) improving transparency, modern forms of communication have also made it easier to monitor peace-related activities and possibly hold individuals and organisations accountable for their actions, which has contributed to greater transparency in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations and other peace-related activities. By amplifying marginalised voices and increasing transparency, new technologies can help promote greater participation and engagement of different stakeholders in the peace-building process.

New technologies have provided different tools and approaches to conflict resolution. For example, online platforms and software tools have been developed to facilitate online peace-building and mediation, and social networks have been used to connect people on different sides of a conflict to engage in dialogue and find common ground, which has seldom translated into (5) improved methods of conflict resolution.

In the part dedicated to the collection and interpretation of the data obtained from the mixed type of analysis, both qualitative - by observing the content of the published materials that are supported by official UN accounts - and quantitative, by collecting information on the number of materials, interactions (reactions, comments and shares), and the frequency of their publication, data that will be processed and statistically analysed using different analytical tools, we aim to identify possible trends and correlations between the types of content and the level of audience engagement.

2. Information and communication, between peace and conflict. Concepts, theories and perspectives

Peace and conflict studies, first identified as a distinct field only after the Second World War, is an interdisciplinary field encompassing systematic research and teaching on the causes of violence and war and the conditions for peace, focussing particularly on the causes of the rise and fall of violence, the conditions associated with these changes, and the processes through which the changes occur.

However, recent developments in the field of communication, information and communication technology have changed the nature of the international scene and the

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factors that impact global social movements. By intersecting with the field of communication, which we see as a component of the infrastructure for peace, we seek to bring to the fore some factors that we consider relevant from this perspective for interactions between conflicting parties, proposing alternative approaches to the socio-political activities of peace-making.

The perspective proposed by the field of communication on conflict resolution, moreover, should be considered a contribution to be taken into account for any analysis in the field of peace and conflict studies, especially as it relates to the processes of conflict management, reconciliation and peace-building. This integrative approach to peace and conflict studies is based on our conviction that the public sphere is an important component in structuring the social-psychological conditions for reconciliation, more specifically, that civil society must be involved in the peace process.

As a field of academic study, communication has been based mainly on the media-journalism, mass communication and public relations approaches (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999)[i] . The study of public relations began to develop in the mid-1970s, especially in a few Western democracies, which remained quite ethnocentric until the early 21st century (Sriramesh, 2002)[ii] . With the onset of the globalisation era in the early 1990s, scholars began to study the field of communication in other contexts or situations. In this environment, research on communication at the international level has increased, even if international public relations studies are still far from being considered robust (Sriramesh, Vercic, 2009)[iii] . Moreover, the focus on corporate communication and public relations seems to dominate the research and pedagogy of the field, even if, in the last decade, interest has also started to shift towards learning from the experiences of governments and organisations.

From the very first milestones that we set out to address, we emphasise that there can be no peace-building without building trust. This, as noted, we will be able to argue through the analysis that we propose through our study. Although the notion of trust has become a key topic in communication in general and public relations in particular, especially in the last 15 years, Welch (2006)[iv] has argued that communication practitioners have not approached the concept of distrust from this perspective. The author defined trust "as a multidimensional construct involving trust, goodwill, faith, integrity, fairness, truthfulness, veracity, competence, reliability, goodwill, risk and vulnerability" and distrust as "a multidimensional concept encompassing rational and presumptive (unconscious) distrust". Mary Welch, therefore, defined distrust as an additional and separate dimension of trust, rather than simply a lack of trust. Even though her study was exploratory, it provided important insights into the dimensions of trust and distrust that we consider relevant to the present research, heralding another landmark for the perspective we have chosen: the relationship between peace, communication and trust remains central to the present study.

Definitions and understanding of the term peacebuilding or peacekeeping have evolved over time (Broome, Collier, 2012[v] ; Lederach, 1997[vi] ; Schirch, 2008[vii] ; Paffenholz, 2013[viii]). The concept has undergone constant changes, like a rucksack term that includes other elements such as conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict mitigation, conflict prevention or transformation, but also other even more capacious terms (Schirch, 2008). Many international organisations, including the subject of our analysis - the United Nations - also understand peace-building as a backpack concept that encompasses the peace-keeping element as well as a long-term value shifting process, including early warning or prevention, military intervention, ceasefire

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agreements, the establishment of geographic zones of peace and post-conflict reconstruction and development (Maiese, 2003).

The research will focus in particular on the concept proposed by Lederach and Appleby (2010)[ix] of peacebuilding, identified as a "transformative, multi-pronged, long-term contribution to social change which is influencing the creation of a just and sustainable peace, beyond the limited definition of a post-conflict interval". The two scholars thus propose the idea that peace-building is a process and a kind of long-term and dynamic social change that takes into account multiple categories of actors. On the other hand, Lederach (1997)[x] had already proposed the idea of different levels of societal actors: top leadership, middle-level leadership and grassroots communities. According to him, it is important to integrate the reconciliation paradigm at the lower levels (middle and grassroots), otherwise the progress proposed and realised at the topmost level of this peace-building will collapse.

Conflict transformation theories are based on the understanding of conflict as a normal and natural social occurrence in society (Lederach, 1997; Paffenholz, 2013) and therefore focus on transforming violent behaviour into peaceful behaviour. These theories deal with a wide range of dimensions, from micro to macro issues, from local to global levels, from actors at the grassroots of society to the elite, but also consider short or long time spans. They aim to build capacity and support structural change, without necessarily facilitating solutions or agreements. The theory developed by Lederach is the most comprehensive and widely recognised by scholars in the field, which sees peacebuilding as a long-term process of systemic transformation from war to peace through changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, achieved at different times and affecting different levels. Lederach views conflict as an opportunity for growth and understanding of self and the other, and sees it as both a centre and root of peace. The author points out that it is important to be willing to compromise and, at the same time, to endeavour to transform the relationship between the parties from a state of conflict, often violent, to one of comradeship, especially when the parties involved in a high-intensity conflict are forced to live in the same space and, no less important, are forced to be interdependent. Conflict transformation, therefore, plays a vital role in managing relations between the parties, and communication becomes an essential factor in re-establishing dialogue and building trust between those involved.

In a paper written in 2017[xi] , the American author provides an in-depth review of the literature on communication and conflict transformation. He begins the article by defining conflict transformation as a process that involves changing the relationships between the conflicting parties in order to reduce violence and create optimal conditions for peace. He argues that elements of communication are at the centre of this process, as it is only through communication that the parties involved in the conflict are able to come to understand each other's perspectives and develop a shared vision for the future. Lederach's vision is divided into three main sections.

The first section provides an overview of different theories and models related to communication and conflict transformation, including theories of dialogue, narrative and reconciliation.

The second part focuses on the role of communication in conflict transformation, emphasising the importance of communication in building trust, promoting understanding and creating opportunities for cooperation. The author also discusses the

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challenges of communication in conflict situations, such as power imbalances, cultural differences and the difficulty of building relationships with hostile parties.

The final part of the proposed material provides an assessment of specific communication strategies and techniques that have been used in conflict transformation, such as active listening, reframing conflict and conflict mediation.

Last but not least, Lederach discusses the importance of language and the use of symbols in transforming conflict from one stage to another. The American author's endeavour thus proposes a comprehensive review of research related to communication and conflict transformation. The 2017 article provides a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners interested in the intersection of communication and conflict resolution, highlighting the importance of communication in building relationships between parties, dialogue and creating ideal conditions for peace.

The literature on peace communication is not as extensive as it might seem, but it manages to cover a sufficiently wide range of perspectives, including the role of communication in conflict prevention, peace-building and conflict resolution, and less so the impact of new technologies on peace communication and the challenges or opportunities associated with promoting effective peace communication for peace when discussing social networking.

A key area of research focuses on the role of communication in conflict prevention, with studies to date succeeding in emphasising the importance of effective communication in reducing tensions and preventing conflict escalating into violence. Effective communication can help build trust, as shown above, promote dialogue and facilitate cooperation between conflicting parties.

Another important research perspective focuses on the role of communication in peace-building and conflict resolution, with research demonstrating that effective communication is essential for building sustainable peace and conflict resolution. Communication can help promote mutual understanding, facilitate the negotiation of peace agreements and create opportunities for reconciliation and healing.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest among researchers in the impact of new technologies on peace communication, and the results - not very many - of the studies carried out have highlighted the potential of social networks, mobile technologies and online platforms for peace promotion and conflict resolution. The ways in which these communication tools can facilitate the exchange of information, ideas and perspectives at individual and community level, amplify marginalised voices and increase transparency in peacebuilding are presented in the analysis part of our study.

Researchers other than those mentioned above in the review of the landmarks in the specialised literature on peace communication have also addressed this field of study. The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung is considered to be one of the pioneers in this field and has made significant contributions to peace and conflict studies. He has written extensively on the role of communication in peace-building and is credited with developing the concept of *peace* journalism.

There are a number of key theories, concepts and approaches to peace communication that have emerged in the peace communication literature, and Galtung's proposed concept - 'peace journalism' - involves an approach to journalism that aims to provide more balanced and nuanced coverage of conflicts and peace efforts, emphasising the importance of reporting on peace initiatives and solutions rather than elements of conflict and violence. Peace journalism also seeks to avoid sensationalism

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and stereotyping, and to promote dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties.

Also presented as a key element of communication for peace is dialogue between parties in conflict (Galtung, 2000)[xii] , which is a communication process designed to promote mutual understanding and respect between parties, fostering listening, understanding and engagement with different perspectives and which, we believe, can be a powerful tool for building trust, reducing tensions and promoting peace.

Conflict transformation is an approach to conflict resolution that aims to address the underlying causes of conflict and transform the relationships between conflicting parties, involving communication and dialogue as well as other strategies such as capacity building, reconciliation and institutional reform, among other measures that go beyond communication.

Public diplomacy, so widely used as an alternative to traditional diplomacy, which has the international relations arena as its arena, is a form of diplomacy that seeks to engage with foreign publics and promote understanding and goodwill between nations. It involves communication strategies such as cultural exchanges, educational or development programmes and media outreach, and can be an important tool for promoting peace and reducing tensions between countries.

Our attention, however, focuses on the phenomenon of social networking for peacebuilding. Social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* are used as important tools for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, especially by the subject of our research - the United Nations. Social networks can be used to share information, mobilise support and amplify marginalised voices, and can be an effective tool for promoting peace and reducing tensions between conflicting parties.

From this perspective, we would like to emphasise the contribution of Norwegian Galtung in this field. He has argued that alternative forms of communication, such as *community* media and *citizen* journalism, can be important tools for promoting peace and reducing tensions between conflicting parties. In general, Galtung's work on communication for peace emphasises the importance of innovative and effective strategies for harnessing communication in the service of peace-building efforts. His insights continue to inspire and inform scholars and practitioners around the world, and his concept of peace journalism has become an important framework for understanding the role of communication in conflict and peace.

3. The importance of public relations for peace

The literature on the field of public relations for peace has sufficiently evolved for this area of research to become significant, emphasising the essential role of public relations theory and practice in promoting understanding and reducing conflict in diverse societies. The foundation on which the concept of public relations for peace rests can be seen from the earliest research debates in the field of peace psychology, as articulated by Berliner (Berliner et al, 2009), who emphasise that peace psychology not only analyses the root causes of violence, but also promotes equitable relationships, essential for the development of theories and practices aimed at preventing both direct and structural violence. Such a perspective therefore has the potential to create a framework for understanding how public relations can be used strategically to build peaceful societies by addressing basic human needs and rights: 'In the field of psychology, understanding peace-building and the prevention of man-made disasters is partly covered by peace psychology'[xiii] . Building on this foundation, Kathy Fitzpatrick

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(Fitzpatrik et al, 2013) explores the intersection between public relations and public diplomacy, arguing that integrating these fields can improve understanding of international relations. Their findings suggest that theories from public relations can contribute significantly to public diplomacy, especially in the context of global communication strategies .[xiv]

Berliner (Berliner et al, 2009), moreover, provides an important perspective on the intersection between peace psychology and social research from a peace perspective, with the authors highlighting a significant gap in the literature by emphasising that only a small percentage of articles in social psychology journals explicitly address peace psychology. This case, therefore, emphasises the need for an in-depth exploration of public relations for peace in the broader context of peace studies research. Furthermore, the authors argue that peace psychology is not just a generic academic field, but a specialised discipline that seeks to identify the root causes of violence and promote equitable relationships. Such a focus on the underlying aspects of direct and structural violence thus becomes of significant importance for peace public relations, which must manage these complex elements in order to facilitate effective communication and appropriate advocacy.

In *Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual and Practical Connections* (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013), we are offered a detailed analysis of the intersection between public relations and public diplomacy, highlighting the potential contributions of public relations theories to the understanding and application of public diplomacy. The authors argue that while there are significant parallels between the two fields, critical differences must also be recognised in order to maintain the integrity of each. One of the main issues highlighted in the article is the recognition of public diplomacy as an essential element of successful international relations. Fitzpatrick emphasises that public diplomacy efforts are essential for nations to interact effectively with external publics, thereby influencing their status and international relations. This underlines the importance of strategic communication in promoting peace and understanding between nations, as public diplomacy is closely linked to the broader goals of promoting national interests and cultural exchange. At the same time, clear warnings are also issued about the risks of a merger between public relations and public diplomacy, suggesting that such integration could lead to the erosion of the distinct identities and objectives of each field, particularly that the involvement of public relations in psychological and military intelligence operations risks the credibility of both disciplines. This concern, therefore, may be particularly relevant in the context of public relations for peace, where the integrity and credibility of communication efforts are essential to the promotion of genuine dialogue and cooperation between nations. Moreover, the article highlights the need for further research to explore the role of public relations in international policy initiatives, with the authors advocating for a deeper understanding of how public relations can bridge the gap with public diplomacy, suggesting that public relations practitioners have much to learn from the principles and practices of public diplomacy, and that such an interdisciplinary approach is essential to the advancement of both fields and to increasing their effectiveness in promoting peace and understanding on a global scale.

These researches that we have reviewed help us outline some intermediate elements that serve to set the necessary benchmarks for the analysis we have undertaken, providing an adequate perspective on how public relations for peace can contribute to dialogue, understanding and sustainable peace in diverse societies,

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highlighting the importance of strategic, ethical and inclusive communication. As an intermediate conclusion, we can therefore state that these research propositions highlight the complex role of public relations for peace in facilitating dialogue, promoting understanding and maintaining peace in communities. By addressing the complexities of conflict and emphasising ethical communication practices, specific approaches and public relations practitioners can contribute significantly to building sustainable peace.

4. UN and peace on social media

As mentioned at the outset of this venture, in the analysis section, we seek to explore the impact of new technologies on peace communication. More specifically, we aim to examine the ways in which these technologies - focusing our attention on social media, particularly *Instagram* - facilitate access to information, improve communication, amplify voices and increase transparency, representing a particularly useful tool - highlighted in an analysis of UN action from this perspective - for conflict mitigation and peace support.

To this end, in a first instance, we will proceed with a qualitative analysis of the online materials published between September 2023 and November 2024 on the official United Nations channels, following the *Instagram* account of the "United Nations Peacekeeping" (@unpeacekeeping) platform, and, in a first instance, we will make a brief presentation of them, then - following the key concepts previously discussed - *peace*, peace *building* and *peace* keeping - we aim to present those specific elements of communication that are linked to the notion of peace and to highlight those contents that are intended to contribute to alleviating the state of conflict and, of course, to encourage action in favour of peace.

In the part dedicated to the interpretation of the data obtained from the mixed type of analysis, both qualitative - by observing the content of the published materials supported by the official UN accounts - and quantitative, by collecting information on the number of materials, interactions (reactions, comments and shares), and frequency of publication, which will be processed and statistically analysed using different analytical tools, we aim to identify possible trends and correlations between the types of content and the level of audience engagement.

International conflict remains a persistent threat, but through effective global co-operation and proactive policies, risks can be managed and the prospects for peace improved. At this moment alone, the scene of international relations is shaken by conflicts that are being felt globally, with significant economic, social and political consequences. To list just a few of these, the most intense in terms of consequences, would be to mention the war in Ukraine - one of the most serious recent conflicts with major implications for European security and international order, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - a long-running dispute with recurring waves of violence and global implications, the tensions in the South China Sea - territorial disputes between China and neighbouring countries, with an impact on regional security and the global economy, and not least the conflicts in Africa (Sahel, Ethiopia, Sudan) - characterised by internal fighting, external interventions and severe humanitarian crises.

As we set out to explore the communicative dimension of the work carried out by the official @unpeacekeeping account of the United Nations on Instagram between September 2023 and November 2024, this analysis is part of a scientific approach focused on investigating the role of new media in promoting international peace and security, and our study proposes a complex quantitative and qualitative examination of how institutional messages are constructed, thematised and received by the global

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public. Using the proposed tools, we will seek to reach a conclusion on the correlation between the volume of posts and international events related to peace (UN summits, major conflicts, international days dedicated to the theme of peace, etc.), the type of content that generates the greatest engagement. Equally important to be taken into account, we will also focus on a conclusion regarding the existence of correlations between certain topics and the level of engagement, the feedback proposed by the platform's followers, also tracking the evolution of engagement with the published material over time (increase/decrease), for the set period.

Our analysis was based on a set of 151 posts published on the *@unpeacekeeping* account, for which we collected data such as: date of posting, type of content (image, video, carousel), number of likes, comments and shares, topic, tags and mentions of other accounts. The total engagement rate for each post was calculated, as well as the frequencies and distributions by semantic and functional categories. The analysis tools we used include statistical calculation of means, distributions, and correlations between variables of interest.

Thus, the intention to identify the key concepts that we set out earlier to pursue - *peace*, *peace-building* and *peace-keeping* - were found in most of the published materials, either individually or grouped in twos or all together.

From a quantitative point of view, we endeavoured to take into account the total volume of material published during the set period (September 2023 - October 2024), looking at the average monthly publication of articles, determining the frequency and type of content published. At the same time, we also considered the distribution of posts by category: individual images, carousel images or videos, in various forms. We also sought to measure the impact that the published material has on the audience following the analysed account by tracking the number of likes, comments and shares for each piece of material on , also calculating the impact rate according to the following formula: (total number of interactions / number of followers) × 100%.

During the 15 months analysed, the account published a total of 151 materials, which corresponds to a monthly average of approximately 10.79 posts. The frequency of postings was relatively constant, with slight increases in the months when international campaigns or peace and security themed days were held. The topics covered by the concepts used refer to UN field operations, the role of women in the peace process, gender equity, the protection of children, youth and youth involvement in conflict zones and the promotion of universal values. Remarkably, the materials associated with these themes achieved a high level of engagement, feedback and the type of material proposed was also a decisive factor.

The quantitative and thematic analysis of the official *UN Peacekeeping* account (@unpeacekeeping) highlights a strategic use of the social networking site Instagram to promote peace, security and the values of the United Nations. Institutional digital communication in this context is not only a form of information dissemination, but becomes a tool to strengthen legitimacy, visibility and symbolic participation of the global public in peacekeeping missions.

The research results indicate that the publication rate is balanced, with an average of about 11 posts per month. This frequency suggests a well-calibrated editorial strategy that avoids audience oversaturation and privileges timing over global events. Moreover, the peaks of activity correspond with significant international days (e.g. International Day of Peace), which underlines an effective synchronisation between the UN agenda and the visual communication calendar. Moreover, we could observe that

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the rhythmicity of visual communication suggests a balanced but reactive editorial strategy around symbolic moments in the UN calendar.

In terms of content typology, carousel and video posts had the highest average engagement values, confirming the hypothesis that complex, narrative or sequential multimedia formats are better able to capture the audience's attention and stimulate their reaction. This type of content enables more effective storytelling about UN operations, facilitating emotional and informational connection with the audience. Static content (simple images) remains valuable, but is perceived as informative rather than interactive.

The themes addressed are strongly anchored in the symbolic dimension of peace and security: UN field operations, the role of women in the peace process, gender equity, protecting children, youth in conflict zones and promoting universal values. Notably, posts associated with thematic international events achieved a high level of engagement, indicating an emotional and value resonance among the audience. The most frequent themes were related to peacekeeping operations (58 posts), the role of women in peace processes (30), UN institutional values (16), the International Day of Peace (12) and youth in reconciliation processes (9). The best-performing themes in terms of engagement were International Peace Day (3985), Smile Day (2168), International Women's Day (1996) and Environment Day.

Analysis of the tags reveals that those with a symbolic and temporal charge (#PeaceDay, #WomenPeaceSecurity) generate significantly higher engagement compared to institutional ones (#peacekeeping). This reinforces the idea that the public reacts more strongly to messages that relate to an immediate, contextual and recognisable reality

Similarly, strategic mentions - particularly of central accounts (@unitednations, @unmiss_news_media) - amplify visibility and add legitimacy to the messages being delivered. Visible collaborations through mentions reinforce a mutually supportive digital network between UN agencies, which contributes to the institution's trust capital.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis corroborates variables such as frequency, typology, topic, hashtags and mentions to determine the determinants of engagement. This integrated approach confirms that the performance of online communication is not the result of a single element (e.g. visual format), but of a coherent combination of factors.

Having reached these conclusions, we have the possibility to point out that a more intensive use of the carousel and video formats in future campaigns or in the promotion of peace materials can increase the interest of the community's followers and, in order to increase the level of impact, synchronisation of the materials with the international calendar of the organisation should be considered. Equally important to consider is the promotion of content that highlights real, human stories with local impact from the international organisation's global operations.

To outline a general conclusion of our analysis, we can state that the United Nations *Instagram* platform - *@unpeacekeeping* - not only reflects the image of the UN as a peace promoter, but actively contributes to building a global narrative about solidarity, hope and collective responsibility. Quantitative and qualitative analyses confirm the effectiveness of this form of communication in new media and provide a valuable framework for the development of future institutional digital communication policies.

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5. Conclusions

To summarise, the secondary evidence gathered in this study has confirmed that the communication process plays a critical role in peace-building, using many of the concepts and techniques found in the field of public relations.

This longitudinal study has highlighted the evolution of communication factors, public relations strategies and techniques, and the results of relationship-building efforts in United Nations peace missions. The suggested venture contributes to demonstrating that important elements of the communication process, expressed through newly available technologies, do not merely provide a promotional or publicity function, but can be used for the social good shaped by peace-building. Moreover, this study emphasises that common theories of international relations and communication have not yet fully addressed the broad applications of the practice. Incorporating communication knowledge in the specific context of peacebuilding broadens the horizons of the field and undoubtedly offers new research opportunities.

In conclusion, existing research to date on communication for peace emphasises the critical role of communication in promoting peace and conflict resolution, while highlighting the importance of effective strategies for harnessing new technologies to support global peacebuilding efforts.

In contrast to traditional public relations, a growing number of practitioners, academics and institutions that conceive of public relations for peace (PRP) as a field of practice have come to realise that the work itself can help bridge social and political divides and build a foundation for reconciliation and ongoing transformation. In essence, scholars of all kinds have begun to articulate and demonstrate how public relations practitioners can act as 'advocates for peace and justice' rather than mere propagandists.

In this sense, public relations for peace (PRP) need not be limited to non-profit organisations or social marketing for peace, nor are they restricted to conflicts of a particular intensity or stage. Rather, this sphere offers a range of principles and methods that can be applied in peacemaking processes at local, national and international levels, either proactively, promoting dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties, or reactively, in response to negative promotion or propaganda used to influence public discourse. In all its forms of application, public relations for peace is guided by a set of core values: a belief in the power of communication to create understanding between people and the pursuit of socio-cultural harmony and common understanding, without suppressing differences, conflicts or the violent impact of power relations and economic structures.

Social networks, here again, are essential tools for attracting people committed to peacebuilding and actively involving them in the initiative. These platforms are an effective means of real-time distribution, becoming a particularly powerful tool for the transmission of relevant and up-to-date information to all stakeholders. Nowadays, people are tired of simple conversations, they are looking for, they want real interaction, and digital platforms offer an interactive channel between the peace-building objective and interested people who could become part of the cultural movement for peace. Through the effective use of social networks, we can generate real-time analyses that can attract and sustain greater interest in peace. By providing direct access to a vast number of users, through images that capture the excitement of affirming or protecting life and by featuring real people involved in the peace initiative, social networks also

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provide opportunities to discuss experiences related to this goal, support or engage in a digital dialogue on this constructive topic - peace over conflict.

Social networks are transforming users from mere receivers of information into active participants in global dialogue, marking all the more the emergence of the digital environment as an increasingly active component of human reality. The interconnectivity and speed of information propagation on various topics through this channel creates powerful reactions and even opinions that influence large masses of the population, thus offering new methods of intercultural communication on an unprecedented scale. These platforms break down both geographical and cultural barriers, facilitating the effective dissemination of information through the spaces for dialogue and collaboration created. In the context of communicating for peace, social media information campaigns have proven to reduce tensions and mobilise the global community to find a peaceful solution to conflict or dispute.

Strategic communication through social networks can play a crucial role in conflict prevention. Through a continuous flow of information and two-way interaction, signs of potential escalation can be identified early on and offer the possibility of rapid intervention to prevent major tensions from escalating. In practical terms, social networks become not only a communication tool, but also a political tool, enabling international bodies to reach out directly to citizens with various messages that can have major effects on public policy, thus contributing to a favourable international climate. The United Nations Organisation has adapted very much to the complex challenges of the 21st century, developing communication strategies relevant to the present time, integrating both traditional and digital media to ensure rapid and effective dissemination of messages in favour of peace. In its conflict prevention campaigns, the UN uses social networks to inform citizens, build trust and facilitate dialogue between different groups by monitoring information flows in real time. In this way, peace messages are no longer conveyed one-way, but are developed in interactive conversations where citizens can express opinions, ask questions and help build consensus on peace solutions.

The current context thus underlines that social networks are not only channels of information, but also essential tools for mobilising communities and building a culture of peace. International organisations, in particular the UN, are embracing these new channels of communication to convey coherent messages adapted to multiple cultural contexts, demonstrating that well-structured communication can contribute significantly to strengthening international relations and has the potential to support conflict prevention efforts. Thus, the practice of the United Nations Organisation's social and sometimes political communication practice proves that this modern communicative paradigm requires a constant reassessment of communication strategies to ensure continuous adaptability to technological developments and the dynamics of international relations.

The conceptual development of public relations for peace (PRP), together with detailed case studies illustrating its successful application, are intended to confirm the practical utility of the concept. The recent literature on the principles of public relations for peace, moreover, offers a nuanced understanding of how the right communication strategies can help mitigate conflict and foster peace. This kind of critical yet constructive approach sets the proper context for further exploration of public relations as a vital tool in peace-building efforts.

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