Youth Perceptions, Use and Effects of Social Media on Peace and Conflicts in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The article focused on examining how youth perception and use of social media (SM) influences peace and conflicts among Tanzanians, using the Dar es Salaam region as a case study. A qualitative approach was used to collect and analyse data. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents, whereby youth, local government officers and community residents were interviewed. The findings revealed that SM has both advantages and disadvantages in promoting peace and activating conflicts, depending on users' perceptions and interests. SM facilitates conflicts due to the Social Media Networks (SMNs) ability to spread fake news quickly, unfounded claims, and rumours. These promote conflicts between political opponents as well as causing mistrust among citizens and their leaders. Some artists, especially comedians, instigate conflicts in society by editing political and religious leaders' messages. On the other hand, it was revealed that SM promotes peace due to quicker transfer of relevant information that nurtures positive unit values, solidarity, respect and love among the group, society members, and citizens. These values promote good deeds, such as worshipping God, working and living together amicably. However, the study found out that lack of appropriate education on SM's use and importance among many youths on youth development seems to have hindered SM use in peace promotion. The study calls for strengthening stakeholders' initiative to educate and mobilise improved use of SM among youth to sustain peace and security, which is a pre-condition for their self-development and prosperity of their country.

Keywords: social media, peace, conflicts, youth, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionised the speed and levels of communications and aided remarkable success in information sharing (Internet World Stats, 2020; Nemer, 2016; Coleman et al., 2015). The flow of information through new forms of social media networks (SMNs) such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram has enabled a considerable number of people to interact in various ways (Asongu & Othiambo, 2020; Bouliane, 2015; Wallis, 2015; Tisone, 2012). Social media (SM) misuse has triggered social and political conflicts due to the easy spreading of fake and hateful news. Some studies show that SM facilitated political uprising movements, violent and terrorist groups, to mention but a few (Reuter et al., 2020; Kaufhold & Reuter, 2019; Reuter, 2019; National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011). As the primary users of SM, youth are the critical information propagators and hence potential promoters of good or malicious aspects of SM (Pew Research Center, 2019; Pawelz & Elvers 2018). Studies have shown that insecurity challenges such as Arab Spring and other political uprising movements in many African countries mainly were accelerated and mobilised by youth through SMNs (Khamis, 2013; Comunello & Anzera, 2012; Kalliny et al., 2018). As Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood (2006) purport, "socially interactive technologies (SITs), such as instant messaging and text messaging, are beginning to redefine the social networks of today's youth". According to Schmidt & Cohen (2012:122; Schmidt & Cohen, 2015; Kadoda & Hale 20150), the mix of activism and arrogance in young people is universal. In that regard, youth activeness in the use of various social media platforms is not immune to political activism. It may have an adverse impact on the peace and security of the country if not taken with precaution.

Several scholars have defined the concept of SM. SM can refer to 'web-based services that allow individuals, communities and organisations to collaborate, connect, interact and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible' (McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase 2016: 17). According to Mayfield (2008), SM is described as 'a group of emerging online media with several characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness.' For this article, the definition is adopted from Buda et al. (2020), who define SM as virtual communities that help the user interact across various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. The present study definition of youth is based on Tanzania Youth Development Policy (2007) that defines youth in terms of age, including 15-35

years (URT, 2007). In the context of the present study youth cohort is the main target group considered to be the key and active SM users. According to URT (2018). "user" means a person or legal entity accessing online content whether by subscriptions or otherwise. Notwithstanding universal value attached to the concept peace, scholars have multiple definitions of the world. The paper uses Anderson (2004) definition of peace which refers to a condition in which individuals, families, groups, communities, and/or nations experience low levels of violence and engage in mutually harmonious relationships. The adopted definition of concept conflicts is from Heywood (2014) who refers it as competition between opposing forces, reflecting a diversity of opinions, preferences, needs and interests.

Tanzania is globally identified as an island of peace and has been socially and politically stable since her political independence in 1961 (Kessler, 2006). Of recent, SM, have been widely used in Tanzania in aspects, including but not limited to socio-economic and health-related (Ross et al., 2018; Pfeiffer et al., 2014). Indeed, the availability and affordability of ICT facilities such as smartphones have enabled a more significant number of Tanzanian youths in both rural and urban areas to interact through SM. According to the Citizen newspaper (2020), Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) report released in January 2020 indicates an increase of internet penetration in the country up to 43 per cent in 2018, whereby 48.77 per cent of the mobile phones subscribers being internet users. In other words, out of 43.62 million mobile subscribers, at least 23.14 million were internet users. Statistics further show that 13.8% of internet users engage in SM (The Citizen, 2020).

The National ICT Policy in Tanzania recognises the security threats and development challenges due to erosion of national culture among citizens, younger ones, in particular, posed by SM (URT, 2016). It emphasises the need to regulate SM abuse and facilitate its better use. The adoption of the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulation on 16th March 2018 that impose hefty fines or jail for individual convicted on violating online content use speaks clearly of the security threats of SM felt by the Government of Tanzania (John, 2020). Among other things, the regulation prohibits hate material, hate speech, content that portrays violence or leads to public disorder, promotes genocide or hatred against an identifiable group or any content that may threaten national security or public health and safety (URT, 2018). Clear evidence was the action of the Tanzania Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) to order a temporary suspension on the access to short bulk messaging services (SMS) and bulk voice services to telecom before, during and after 28th October 2020, the general election date on the pretext of avoiding

the abuse of SM use on the forthcoming general election. As such, the directive was considered as a strategy to avoid the country's plunge into conflicts or post-election violence.

Despite available evidence, SM networks use as political activism tools that triggered upheaval in the Arab world (Khamis, 2013). Little is known on how the growing number of SM users in Tanzania, youth, in particular, can promote peace or causes conflicts in the current socio-economic setting and political tension emerging among opposing political parties and their members, especially before, during and after the general election in the country. Therefore, this article intends to fill that gap. It aims at examining the effects of youth engagement in SM on peace and conflicts in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam region as a case study. Specifically, the article focuses on, first, examining youth perceptions and use of SM. Second to examine the role of SM in nurturing peace and facilitating conflicts. In view of the above, the article addresses two main questions: First, what perceptions do youth have regarding the use of SM? Second, what is the main role of SM in nurturing peace and facilitating conflicts in Tanzania?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Perceptions and Use of SM

SM have become a global phenomenon and the number of worldwide users continues to grow, it was expected to reach approximately 2.95 billion people in 2020, nearly a third of the Earth's population (Chen, 2020). According to Baytiyeh (2019), each SM platform provides features that cater to different types of users, some platforms are more popular than others, but even the unpopular ones are utilised by a portion of the world's population. Likewise, the use of SM can be manifested in various aspects of human lives among youth (Henry & Harte, 2012). Through SM, young people have established an online community as their digital neighbourhood referred to as super-peer, which significantly contributes to influencing behaviour, shifting attitudes, and shaping cultural norms (Stevens et al., 2016). SM is used to facilitate connections, representation, and airing out their voices. SM enabled the youth in the formation of identity-based communities and networks. An example is Brough et al. (2020) unveils shared success stories among low-income and under-resourced youth of getting work, connecting with

professional contacts, or gaining access to career mentorship due to interactions on SM.

Notwithstanding positive effects, SM is a potential catalyst to increase youth vulnerability to peer victimisation and psychosocial difficulties (Parris et al., 2020). This supports the view that active youth use of SM and available social apps influence adolescents' affective well-being (Weinstein, 2018). Youth perceive SM as a useful tool for self-expression, relational interactions, exploration, and browsing. They can interact to share peer-based learning and new media literacy (Thakur, 2020; Ito et al., 2009). SM is viewed as important in facilitating online and offline friendship ties to support the development of intimacy and connection to others. (Reich et al., 2012). SM is also viewed and used as an enabler in building social capital among various people, such as youth cohort, to accomplish various activities (Camps & Marques, 2014).

SM Role in Promotion of Peace and Causing Conflicts

Social media can promote peace and/or cause conflicts, depending on users' intentions or interests. As such, SM can help share beneficial information that can help overcome the crisis and maliciously promote terrorist activities and spread their harmful propaganda (Reuter et al., 2020). Additionally, violent perpetrators have used SM to recruit youth to their course, posting and displaying hateful messages and texts and propagating their violent ideologies. For example, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are said to have been using SM to mobilise and facilitate the recruitment of their members across the world, including developed countries such as Canada (Naseem et al., 2017). Such groups have also used the SM platforms to spread fear and violence (Blaker, 2015; Farwell, 2014). Besides, Blevins et al. (2016) noted that gangs in the US use SM to express themselves, send threats and intimidate, brag, display aggression, and mourn.

Suzor et al. (2019) posit that SM has intensified existing patterns of gendered violence and introduced new forms of intrusion, abuse and violence against women, referred to as online gender-based violence or technology-facilitated violence. Generally, such forms of violence aim to maintain structural inequalities and spaces that men have traditionally occupied, causing harm to women's well-being, safety and sense of security, civic and social engagement, education and employment opportunities (Harris, 2020). Steward and Follina (2006) have shown that excessive and inappropriate SM use has resulted in many media

violence behavioural effects. Youth exposure to social media in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in United States has been manifested to activate aggressive thoughts, violence and sexual harassment (Stevens et al., 2017). Online information sharing and communication make users speak to a screen, not a person (Recuero, 2015). According to Boyd (2010), such "context collapse" of SM allows animosity and aggressiveness among social networks. Such aggressive and offensive messages have led to political violence among competing parties in the Brazil election.

In contrast, SM has several positive features in promoting peace in conflict-affected regions and building social cohesion. For instance, SM help to bring together hostile groups and individuals by encouraging dialogue, addressing negative perceptions of violence and reshaping attitudes, and promoting tolerance and mutual affection (Baytiyeh, 2019). In addition to that, SM allows citizens to receive and produce the necessary information, keeping them up-to-date on the happenings concerning existing socio-economic and political developments. According to Grossman (1996), the democratic process should promote an 'electronic republic', whereby individuals or citizens are empowered to generate and receive information on issues, decisions and any other legislative scenario that may impact the citizenry massively. Jotia (2018) supports the view by arguing that SM has positively impacted many democracies and governments over the years, whereby Botswana can be one of the best examples.

SM provide a space for excluded and marginalised voices to be informed and heard by those who hold positions (Thakur, 2020). According to Naseem et al. (2017), SM in the form of the blogosphere in Pakistan, have shown to have a role in facilitating voices of the excluded and marginalised be heard as well as providing democratic and inclusive multilogues among civil society participants, a space for peace education which cultivates conversation and debates. It is especially critical among citizens in developing countries where the public space has been dominated by the academic elite, religious scholars and politicians for a long time, limiting multilogues among civil society participants, in turn, weakening tranquillity. On top of that SM has been useful in coordinating peaceful democratic processes such as organising and archiving protests intending to send a particular message to society to be worked upon. For instance, Cortright (2007) observed that SM had been used to propel anti-war protests against the war in Iraq. Other events included the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in 1999.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This study was conducted in the Dar es Salaam region. The region was selected because it is the principal city and commercial centre with the highest population with numerous socio-economic and political activities (World Population Review, 2020). Thus, the potential to provide relevant data regarding SM use and its impact on peace and conflicts.

Study methods

Primary data were obtained through the face-to-face one to one Key In-depth Interview (KII) technique. The technique was used to ensure collected data from key informants are detailed and rich. An interview technique was important because it is one of the most appropriate methods for revealing the richness and vividness of the issues from the respondents' perspective. According to Cohen et al. (2007), interviews offer practical and flexible means of collecting relevant data through multi-sensory channels like verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. Secondary data were collected from various sources, including trusted databases like Google Scholar, Sociological Abstract Springer Link and Wiley Online Library. Various peer-reviewed articles were obtained from these databases. Other data sources were from grey literature such as government reports, books and policies. Tanzania Commission Regulatory Authority (TCRA) provided key information about up-to-date reports and key regulations guiding telecommunications in the country. SM sites and websites provided up to date information about how SM is used by youth and other age groups; National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy Tanzania (2016) provided a national blueprint on priorities, practices and expected future use of SM among the youth. Other sources include published articles from various journals

A purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants. A total of 41 respondents participated in the study; 22 youth as a key target group in the study area, 9 Community Development Officers as local government officials at both district and ward levels and 10 community residents (CRs). Youth SM users and non-users were purposively selected to obtain multiple youth perspectives. The local government officials were purposively selected based on their engagement

with youth and understanding of youth activities and SM use in their day-to-day activities in their working stations. Local government officials also assisted the research process in identifying youth and CRs involved in the study.

This study used a qualitative approach to collect and analyse data. It is an interpretive aooroach whose primary concern is how people understand things and give meanings based on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed. It is argued that the qualitative approach main focus is on learning what the problem means to the participants rather than the meaning that the researcher brings to the research (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the use of this approach was relevant given the nature of the study, since it intended to gain a deep understanding of youth perceptions, use and impacts of social media on peace and conflicts in Tanzania. In that regard, the study used qualitative data analysis technique and presentation. Denscombe (2007) argues that qualitative analysis is a constant process of comparing pre-existing ideas with collected field data, and improving the emerging concepts and theories by checking them against the new data collected. The analysis process started in the field by listening to audio records. The recorded data were thereafter transcribed in the field to ensure no frustrating transcription work after the field. Because the language that was used for all interviews was Kiswahili, the manuscripts were later translated into English. Data analysis used NVivo Version 12 software. The use of the software was due to its advantage of being relatively simple to use and quick, since it is electronic, compared with the other old method of cutting and pasting pieces of text either manually or electronically. In addition, it made it easier to export documents directly from a word processing package and codes these on screen. the software facilitated an accurate, transparent data analysis process, at the same time providing a quick, simple way of identifying who said what and where.

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Dar es Salaam and Dar es Salaam regional (District and municipal) offices to access data from relevant sources. Before interviews, respondents were informed about the study's aim, and a consent form was signed by both parties to ensure voluntary participation and anonymity of respondents. It was necessary to ensure that data collection, analysis process and dissemination of findings respect respondents' dignity and protect them from any harm that may arise due to their involvement in the research

RESULTS

Youth Perceptions and Use of SM

This part presents the results of the first specific objective that examined youth perceptions and SM use. It is essential to note from the outset that perception and interest influence SM use. Therefore, a better understanding of the youth's perception of SM is critical to explain how and why they use SM. Interviews with youth, local government officers, and community residents had unveiled mixed views on how youth perceive SM. Many interviewed youths viewed SM as forums for exchanging information relating to entertainment and recreation, others perceived them as useful to attain their economic targets. The statements below from youth describe youth perceptions on SM:

> The way I understand SM is how people can share information and give advice to one another. Because a large percentage of us (youth) use SM, a significant percentage of people get information when the news comes out. People share information about particular details on various events such as death announcements. So, they help a lot in our day to day life. (KII TMK WAL YO5)

The above extract shows that SM is viewed as an important communication tool among the youths. Youth seem to have positive perceptions about SM as it unveils how SM facilitates positive relations through sharing of information. However, this view is not fully supported by some local government officials considering how youth behaviours manifested while using SM. Some local government officials believed that a significant share of youth misuse SM by posting irrelevant content. Leading to negative impacts on their socio-economic development as well as causing misunderstanding among community members and between leaders and citizens. The below statements from Community Development Officers (CDOs) substantiate the claim:

> Instead of undertaking development activities, youth can stay naked and get a picture to post on SM. Sometimes with his/her girl/boyfriend in the bar or just post his worn dress to show how she looks. (KII TMK GRZ CDO O3)

> Youth comedians can take a picture or a video clip of a government or political leader's speech and insert some words/voice questions

> in the clip that completely change the intended message. The aim here can be to entertain people, but the result is misleading society and compromising the message. (KII TMK GRZ CDO O3)

The above statements show the other side of the story regarding youth perceptions on social media. It is evident that SM, are not always used by youth to help them get useful advice and engage themselves in various social issues as they claim. Youth are seen not to perceive SM positively by exposing their private lifestyle and changing relevant messages from government leaders for entertainment purposes that mislead their society. Hence, the results suggest that there are positive and negative perceptions of SM on the part of youth, as demonstrated by youth themselves and local government officials. It was evidenced not only how youth claim but also on how SM are used.

Social Media Role in Causing Conflicts

The findings show much evidence of how youth SM use can promote peace or potential cause conflicts in Tanzania. Several respondents narrated their fear regarding how SM can cause conflicts, notwithstanding the political stability enjoyed since its independence. The below statement explains further how SM can bring conflicts in society.

> For those who misuse SM, there is an issue of sedition, fake news and rumours. All these can cause conflicts to threaten the peace of the country. (KII KND MAK CDO O4)

> Socially, people may give their self-opinion in SM, but I may give comments that are entirely different from what you expected because we differ. Such divergence of opinions can lead to conflict in society. (KII KND MAK CR O5)

> There are so many challenges brought by SM that can threaten peace in the country. For instance, currently, we have a multiparty system. It usually happens that whenever youth posts issues related to politics, which is right on their perception targeted to a particular audience, you may find that audience has a different perception of what youth meant. Indeed, this can cause misunderstanding and later conflicts among some political party members. For instance, some opposition political parties' members may say something

against the ruling party, which may differ from the ruling party's position or be perceived to offend the same. So, SM can be considered as the source of the conflicts because some people can be taken into custody or tried in a court of law to provide evidence on what they have claimed. (KII KND MAK CDO O5)

From the above statements, the politicians feel intimidated and hence likely to take aggressive positions to report matters to the police for further actions. These can lead to further misunderstanding and conflicts. As such, some political opponents play dirty politics by creating unfounded allegations expressed in various means SM included to gain popularity or maintain their positions. At the national level, conflicts can be facilitated by SM users who may have personal interests in mobilising citizens to take some actions that may lead to violence and social destruction. The below extract substantiate:

We can refer to what some opposition political parties mention UKUTA,[1] where political parties tried to mobilise citizens for demonstrations through SM. Nevertheless, it happened that before the protest day, the government intervened and stopped the planned protests. I believe that if such things (demonstrations) occurred, I am sure it would have threatened Tanzania's peace and security. (KII KND MKC YO8)

The statement above shows how active political engagement facilitated by SM can be perceived as a threat to national security. The potentiality of SM in causing insecurity was narrated by growing tendencies to misuse SM among youth in several online forums. It was stated that some youth post inappropriate things, including unproven information, dishonest messages, pictures and video clips. When respondents requested to substantiate how youth SM posts endangered the peace and security of the country, they provided the below explanations:

SM can cause conflicts among the people, especially those who use them, without considering what they are supposed to do. Because you may find that someone has posted something, someone else takes that thing and exaggerate it. So, you don't understand those

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1   UKUTA is an acronym for Swahili phrase "Umoja wa Kupinga Udikteta Tanzania", literally means Coalition to Protest against Doctorship in Tanzania. Some opposition political parties had vowed to galvanize supporters into a series of countrywide demonstration from 1st September 2017. Tanzania Police Force warned the move as outlawed, managed to prevent its occurrence.

who exaggerated it and for whose interests! In the beginning, the issue can be insignificant, but later it may be a big thing. So, SM can cause conflicts between people. Apart from person to person, even the nation can risk its state of peace and security. (KII MBG WAL Yo6)

Yes, it can cause conflicts, and we can even see now that when people are talking bad things about a particular country, for instance, in politics, political parties' followers state lousy stuff about other party members. Just like I said in the first place, SM is something that reaches people very quickly. So, if someone tries to do any bad thing about a particular party, it is easy to reach the people and cause confrontation among members of opposing parties and the country. (KII TMK WAL Yo5)

The above statements show how SM misuse can cause conflicts among political party members and citizens in general. SM are potential propagators of socio-political misunderstanding due to their easy accessibility and speed transfer of information which can go viral in a very short time to cause adverse impacts. Hence, the potential negative impacts of SM on threatening political stability in Tanzania cannot be overemphasised.

Social Media Role in Promotion of Peace

Notwithstanding SM's challenges in promoting conflicts, respondents also acknowledged SM's role in bringing peace and stability to the country. As a communication tool, SM can be used to promote best practices that are known to promote peace. These include worshipping God and promoting inter-faith dialogues. In this way, SM enables individuals to get relevant positive information that promotes the country's peace and security in Tanzania. The below statement explains how SM has been effective channel for sharing important information.

If SM are well used to mobilise peace, it can bring peace because it is a tool that makes information reach the people speedily. For instance, I am with my friends together in a WhatsApp group. Through the group, we used to motivate ourselves as Muslims, that every Friday we should go to the mosque for prayers or if we were Christians we would also mobilise our fellows to go to the church and things like that. I am sure that every praying person has peace in his/her soul. So in that way, SM would have helped us mobilise

each other to go to the mosque or church. In that way, peace will
be attained and sustained since a person who is praying can not do
foolish things. (KII TMK MBG Yo3)

The statement above explained how SM are essential tools to mobilise acceptable
practices and deeds that promote a peaceful atmosphere among group members
and citizens. SM promote friendship among individuals and at the community level
at large. Friendship ties can assist in nurturing positive values in social and economic
terms. For instance, some respondents narrated their personal experiences on how
SM facilitated friendship ties at an individual level.

When talking about peace, it covers up for loveless among the
people. For instance, here I am at Mikocheni (Dar es Salaam region),
but you may find that I established friendship connections with
someone far away and maybe at Songea (Ruvuma region) interior.
We are staying very far away from each other, A to Z, until we come
together as we are becoming familiar with one another. I have one
person with whom we came to know each other and became close
friends through that communication style via SM. (KII KND MKC Yo8)

SM can connect a person to a friend that was not familiar to you. So
that is one of peace. Because I can communicate with people that
I do not know well in the first time. However, through SM, he later
becomes my friend, that we can understand each other better. You
can even be surprised that we even share business idea or income
generation opportunity. (KII MBG WAL Yo6)

The statements above express SM's role in making friendship networks among
people with common interests, albeit available geographical distance from each
other. People can take such an example to benefit from each other socially and
economically. These are some of the critical strategies to sustain the peace and
security of the country.

Stakeholders' Initiatives to Assist Youths' Positive use of SM

It was found out that some youth development stakeholders were concerned with
youth SM misuse. There were many challenges posed by that on peace and security
and, hence, helped youth get rid of such behaviour. However, it was also found out
that some stakeholders did not assist youth to avoid such potential risks behaviours

that cause conflicts nor educate positive values of SM for youth benefits. The below statements narrate how different stakeholders participated in assisting youth to use SM positively:

> I usually tell the youth that they must have evidence if they want to post anything on SM. They consider that if they post anything that has a damaging effect on another person, automatically, the person will be touched and will get pain that will cause an opposite reaction and that can cause a big problem. So, I advise youth that if one wants to send a picture or video clips or a particular idea, it must benefit him/her, but it should not harm someone else. Generally, it should benefit the whole society. KII KND MAK CDO 05

The local government officer's above advice relates to many other responses from officers and residents in the study area. The statement unveils the active engagement of development stakeholders to address the existing youth SM misuse problem that negatively affects society's peace and security. On the part of youth, the study unveiled that they also work together with other stakeholders to educate their fellows.

> We remind each other to use SM well; otherwise, can result in misunderstanding. For instance, now we are in the challenge facing the world, the corona (COVID-19). Therefore, to bring peace, there is a need for youth and citizens to share educative information on how to protect ourselves against this problem. So, we inform each other to avoid misinforming others. For instance, some people talk about things that are not in reality, causing frustrations and government reactions. (KII KND MKC Y07)

Given persistent challenges of youth SM misuse, community residents have educated the youth on better use. Several pieces of advice and support have been provided by community residents to help youth, as crucial SM users, avoid SM misuse and hence ensure peace sustenance. The following statements from community residents substantiate:

> Our contributions as citizens and parents are critical to making youth use SM appropriately. We educate them on the general systems of living to promote. These issues start from the parent the way they are upbringing their children. It goes to the leaders at various levels depending on how people are educated. (KII TMK MBG CR07)

> We advise youth in our areas and family members not to exaggerate issues posted on SM. We do this to sustain and maintain peace. It is quite different from talking in the street and using SM. We also use SM to educate our fellow citizens. Even if you take a speaker and speak in the street, you will meet only people on your street. However, if I use SM, all the society, even citizens living abroad, will also be reached. (KII TMK MBG CR03)

The above statements show how community residents take part to educate fellow members as well as family members. They also use SM to advise youth who visit online forums to avoid SM misuse. Doing this helps address SM's misperception, take positive steps for practical use, and sustain peace and stability.

DISCUSSION

The article focused on examining how youth perception and use of social media (SM) influence peace and conflicts among Tanzanians, using the Dar es Salaam region as a case study. Two main questions were addressed. First, what perceptions do youth have regarding the use of SM? Second, what is the main role of SM in promoting peace and facilitating conflicts in Tanzania?

The study has unveiled mixed views on the part of youth, community residents as well as local government officials regarding youth perceptions and use of SM. It was evident that youth perceptions of SM had a notable socio-economic impact on their lives. Better SM users accrued a number of benefits in various socio-economic aspects. SM improved friendship networks, facilitated information sharing related to supporting each other and used it as a forum for entertainment and recreational purposes. On the other hand, negative perceptions of youth on SM led to several negative impacts among the youth and other community members. Some youth, active users of SM, manifested bad behaviours such as posting degrading content like naked pictures and false content that is misleading or causes misunderstanding among community members or between leaders and their followers. Generally, youth's access to and using smartphones and other electronic gadgets has significantly facilitated their SM engagement, resulting in both positive and negative effects. According to Rao & Lingam (2020), smartphone culture is an essential part of youth culture for the current generation, where there is an increased rate of internet technology use. Therefore, if left unguided, youth in Tanzania will continue to learn from colleagues bad practices such as sharing and sending inappropriate

content like pictures and video clips that show promote abusive words, sexting and violent behaviours. Therefore, the current study findings are useful in contributing to youth development stakeholders understanding existing challenges facing youth regarding how SM are perceived. This will help them to initiate and improve available positive development training that can nurture youth behaviours and instil appropriate values to improve youth development in a holistic way.

The current study has demonstrated that SM use among youth has promoted peace. They are also potential to facilitate conflicts among community members and between citizens and their leaders. Key challenges on conflicts were manifested in variations in political views and an understanding of laws guiding the practices of political parties. Coupled with SM misuse among political parties' members against their opposing parties, there has been a growing trend of political misunderstanding among community members. The growing trend is the potential to cause socio-political conflicts and endangering long existing peace and security in the country.

If political politicians are given more space rather than a legal framework, the growing trend of misunderstanding is left unattended. There is a danger of Tanzania plunging itself into the existing list of politically unstable countries where SM had contributed in their state of situation. This is more evident, especially when there is no common understanding between the government and opposition political parties about political processes such as the rights or appropriate procedures to participate in demonstrations.

Individuals and youth groups have used SM platforms to spread fear and violence, which have impacted many countries' peace and political stability (Blaker, 2015; Farwell, 2014). According to Farwell (2014), groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) have used social media and cyber technology to recruit fighters and intimidate enemies. Blaker (2015) also advocated that ISIS makes a great use of the Internet and online social media sites to extent their influences so as young people can join them easily and support their missions and actively take part in combat—fighting side-by-side with other jihadists. Previous study by Blevins et al. (2016) noted that gangs in the United States have been using SM to express themselves, send threats and intimidate, and display aggression. In Africa and various emerging economies, several studies (Khamis, 2013; Comunello & Anzera, 2012; Kalliny et al., 2018; Castells et al., 2007; Shirky, 2011) have shown SM use among the youth have accelerated political movements that lead to political uprising movements such as Arab Spring. The findings from the current study unveil that Tanzania is not an

Island that can isolate itself from existing SM potential risks to peace and security, especially in the contemporary world of ICT where youth have become the primary users of SM and politically active age group. All development stakeholders in the country, political parties in particular, needs to work together to discuss matters pertaining to their sectors in order to understand important issues which would calm their members to avoid SM misuse that may lead to facilitating conflicts.

Youth as an important, vibrant cohort needs to emulate best practices manifested by appropriate SM users. The current study has also shown that SM has enabled many youths to share crucial information leading to positive actions such as establishing friendship ties potential for other socio-economic benefits. The online SM forums and platforms have enabled socio-economic gains and political tranquillity. These are manifested in the state of peace and security in Tanzania. Previous studies show related findings regarding SM role to promote peace but with a different context of post-conflict situations. According to Baytiyeh (2019), SM help to bring together hostile groups and individuals by encouraging dialogue, addressing negative perceptions of violence, reshaping attitudes, and promoting tolerance and mutual affection. Through the interactions facilitated by SM tools, individuals can support each other, promote inter-community relations, and strengthen the social capital needed for significant post-conflict recovery and lasting peace. Therefore, if well used SM can become essential tools to address conflicts at individual, national and global levels. Youth being cohort faced with many poverty-related challenges such as unemployment are linked with insecurity events in many countries, given its impact on social, economic and political fronts (AFDP, 2013; Urdal, 2006, 2012; Zakaria, 2001:24; Alfy, 2016). With that in mind, this study contributes to youth development stakeholders supporting initiatives that focus on nurturing a positive attitude on SM use among youth cohort are relevant.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings provide useful insights about youth perceptions of SM, which influence their use and the potentiality of SM on promoting peace and causing conflicts in Tanzania. A better perception of SM among youth is critical to enable youth to accrue multiple associated benefits, such as improved sharing of information to facilitate youth development in various aspects and as a forum for entertainment and recreation. In contrast, negative perception of SM is manifested on negative impacts on youth like engaging in immoral behaviours that hamper their positive development. As the leading active age group in using SM, youth are

potential contributors to promoting peace and facilitating conflicts in any society. Hence, if SM is used positively by youth, Tanzania, peace and tranquillity will be maintained, and socio-economic aspects will be attained. However, for this to materialise, various youth development stakeholders need to take their positions to educate and mobilise the youth cohort to perceive SM positively. Public and private institutions need to work together; community residents such as neighbours and youth educators are key stakeholders to make this possible. ICT specialists should train youth on relevant skills to look for SM's opportunities to transform themselves into all aspects of their lives. Parents, guardians, and siblings are also crucial stakeholders to groom positive attitudes among children and youth at the family level. To create awareness of SM sites' nature to avoid time wastage, addiction, and violent behaviours lead to conflicts. Authorities responsible for regulating and monitoring the communication sector should adhere to SM use rules and regulations. This is critical to instil nationhood and patriotism among youth and the general citizens to guarantee predictable political stability.

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