

# Digital Warfare: Exploring the Influence of Social Media in Propagating and Counteracting Hate Speech in Sudan's Conflict Landscape

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## Abstract

*Social media is a double-edged sword in Sudan's conflict, acting as both a conduit for hate speech and a platform for peacebuilding. This study examines how digital platforms shape Sudan's conflict landscape post-April 15 2023 by facilitating divisive rhetoric and enabling counter-speech initiatives. The study uses a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach comprising qualitative content analysis of 200 social media posts; trend analysis over 12 months (April 2023–April 2024); and 30 semi-structured interviews with journalists, activists, and officials. The research reveals that algorithmic biases amplify misinformation and polarization, while grassroots campaigns leverage platforms for peace advocacy. Findings highlight the urgent need for localized content moderation, digital literacy programs, and regulatory frameworks to curb hate speech while preserving free expression. This study offers policy recommendations to balance security and civic engagement in digital conflict settings.*

Keywords: hate speech, social media, Sudan war, digital governance, conflict, propaganda

## المستخلص

تُعد وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي سيفاً ذا حدين في سياق النزاع السوداني، حيث تعمل من جهة وسيلةً لنشر خطاب الكراهية، ومن جهة أخرى منصةً لبناء السلام. تستعرض هذه الدراسة كيفية تشكيل المنصات الرقمية لمشهد النزاع في السودان بعد حرب 15 أبريل 2023م، من خلال تسهيل الخطاب التحرري والانقسامي، وفي الوقت ذاته تمكين المبادرات المناهضة لخطاب الكراهية. تعتمد الدراسة على منهجية مختلطة يغلب عليها الطابع النوعي، تشمل تحليلًا نوعيًّا لمحتوى 200 منشور على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، كما شملت تحليلًا للاتجاهات خلال فترة 12 شهراً (من أبريل 2023م إلى أبريل 2024م)، بالإضافة إلى 30 مقابلة شبه مُنفَطَّمة مع صحفيين ونشطاء ومسؤولين. تكشف النتائج أن التحيزات الخوارزمية تُفَاقِمُ من انتشار المعلومات المضللة والاستقطاب، بينما تُشَرِّفُ الحملات المجتمعية القاعدية هذه المنصات للدعوة إلى السلام. وتعزز النتائج الحاجة إلى تطبيق سياسات محلية لمراقبة المحتوى، وتعزيز برامج التوعية بالثقافة الرقمية، ووضع إطار تنظيمي للحد من خطاب الكراهية مع الحفاظ على حرية التعبير. وتقدم الدراسة توصيات سياسية لتحقيق توازن بين الأمن والمشاركة المدنية في سياقات النزاع الرقمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: خطاب الكراهية، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، حرب السودان، الحكومة الرقمية، النزاع، الدعاية، بناء السلام

## 1. Introduction

The rise of digital technology has transformed the way conflicts are waged, with social media emerging as both a battlefield and a mediator. In contemporary conflicts, including that of Sudan, social media platforms have become powerful tools for information dissemination, public mobilization, and political activism. However, these same platforms have also been exploited to spread hate speech, misinformation, and divisive rhetoric, exacerbating tensions and fueling violence. As Sudan continues to navigate political and social unrest, understanding the role of social media in shaping conflict narratives and influencing public perception is of critical importance.

In Sudan, where historical ethnic and political divisions have long driven instability, digital platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube have become spaces where competing factions engage in information warfare. These groups include the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), alongside political actors and foreign entities, and use social media to manipulate narratives, mobilize support, and launch disinformation campaigns. While social media amplifies polarization and deepens grievances, it also offers opportunities for counter-speech initiatives, grassroots peacebuilding efforts, and civic engagement. The ability of digital platforms to influence conflict outcomes necessitates a closer examination of their role in Sudan's crisis.

This study seeks to explore the complex and multifaceted impact of social media on Sudan's conflict, addressing the mechanisms through which digital platforms facilitate hate speech and misinformation while also examining their potential for conflict resolution. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative content analysis, sentiment analysis, and interviews with key stakeholders, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the digital battlefield in Sudan.

Understanding the evolving role of social media in Sudan's conflict is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate its negative effects while maximizing its potential for constructive engagement. This research contributes to the broader discourse on digital warfare, online hate speech, and peacebuilding, offering valuable insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and social media platforms seeking to navigate the complexities of modern digital conflicts.

## 2. Research Aims:

Social media has been criticized for accelerating Sudan's conflict by spreading hate speech and propaganda, but it also holds potential for peacebuilding.

This project explores how social media influences conflict dynamics, hate speech, propaganda, mobilization, and peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan. By understanding these platforms' operations, policymakers, aid agencies, and peacebuilding organizations can develop targeted interventions—such as digital literacy campaigns, localized content moderation policies, and grassroots peace advocacy programs—to mitigate the harmful impacts of social media while leveraging its potential for conflict transformation and reconciliation.

As much as social media has been blamed of promoting and accelerating the conflict in Sudan, it is essential to explore its function and operation for war communication and propaganda. That said, based on a clearer understanding of how these platforms operate, policymakers, aid agencies and peacebuilding implementers can devise action plans or program implements aiming to reduce the downside massive impact while positively leveraging social media's full escalatory potential along with its beneficial role in conflict transformations towards reconciliation.

The research question lies upon an examination and understanding the role of social media in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, as this could certainly alter aspects of latter dispute and therefore may be able to provide positive or negative repercussions. The project also aims to inform practice and policy on peacebuilding and conflict through a deepened insight into how social media affects processes of conflict dynamics.

### 3. Research Questions

The study follows these research questions:

- 1/ How does social media influence public opinion and perceptions of the conflict in Sudan?
- 2/ What strategies and tactics are employed by state and non-state actors to disseminate propaganda and shape conflict narratives through social media?
- 3/ How do social media algorithms and user-generated content contribute to the spread of hate speech and misinformation, and what are their implications for ethnic and political polarization in Sudan's conflict?
- 4/ What are the opportunities and challenges of utilizing social media as a tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation in Sudan?

### 4. Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1/ To analyze the role of social media platforms in shaping public opinion and conflict perception in Sudan.
- 2/ To examine the use of social media for propaganda dissemination by state and non-state actors.
- 3/ To assess the extent to which social media contributes to hate speech and misinformation in Sudan's conflict.
- 4/ To explore how social media can be leveraged as a tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

## 5. Research Approach

The research was conducted through a systematic analysis of social media discourse, focusing on 200 reels and videos from influencers and war activists affiliated with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and Sudanese diaspora activists contributing to war discourse. The sample size of 200 was chosen to ensure a manageable, yet representative, dataset, capturing diverse perspectives across major platforms (Facebook, X (Twitter), YouTube, TikTok) over a 12-month period from April 15, 2023–April 15, 2024. This allowed for in-depth thematic analysis while reflecting key trends in conflict-related content.

This study employs a **qualitative methodological approach** to comprehensively analyze the role of social media in Sudan's conflict, the spread of hate speech, and the effectiveness of counter-speech strategies. Given the complex and evolving nature of digital warfare, a **multi-dimensional methodological framework** is necessary to capture the full scope of online discourse, its impact on real-world conflict dynamics, and potential interventions for peacebuilding.

### 5.1. Analytical Framework

The research is designed as a **qualitative-dominant mixed-methods research project**, integrating qualitative content analysis, trend analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

The **qualitative content analysis** comprised systematic analysis of social media discourse, focusing on 200 reels and videos from influencers and war activists affiliated with the two warring parties—the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)—as well as activists from the Sudanese diaspora who have significantly contributed to the war discourse. The selection of content is based on the affiliations and support of these actors to the SAF and RSF, ensuring a diverse representation of perspectives.

For the **trend analysis**, we undertook an examination of patterns in hate

speech, misinformation, and counter-speech across major social media platforms over a 12-month period from April 15 2023 to April 15 2024. This time-series analysis allows for the identification of escalation patterns and the evolution of online narratives.

**Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with 30 interviewees. These interviewees were Sudanese journalists and fact-checkers, civil society activists, and government and policy officials. The journalists and fact-checkers were asked about their experiences in countering misinformation and the challenges they face in verifying content in a conflict zone. The civil society activists explored their efforts in digital peacebuilding, including counter-messaging campaigns and grassroots initiatives. While the government and policy officials discussed their roles in digital regulation, the effectiveness of existing policies, and the challenges of enforcing content moderation in a politically volatile environment. Overall, the interviews focused on the effectiveness of existing policies in regulating hate speech, challenges in enforcing content moderation, and best practices for using digital platforms to promote peace.

## 5.2. Data Sources

### 5.2.1. Social Media Content Analysis

To examine the spread of hate speech, misinformation, and counter-speech, we conducted a **systematic content analysis** of major social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter (now X); WhatsApp and Telegram; and YouTube and TikTok. Posts on **Facebook & Twitter (X)** were used to monitor trending narratives, propaganda campaigns, and counter-speech efforts. Posts were analyzed for themes such as hate speech, incitement to violence, ethnic/gender-based violence, religious biases, political propaganda, and peace-building narratives. **WhatsApp & Telegram** posts were analyzed to assess how closed-group messaging contributes to misinformation and mobilization efforts. Here, the study focused on the role of encrypted platforms in spreading harmful content and organizing real-world actions. While **YouTube & TikTok** videos were evaluated for video-based propaganda, extremist rhetoric, and peace-oriented content. This analysis included the virality of videos, emotional engagement, and the impact of visual content on public perception.

**Manual coding techniques** and **thematic analysis** were employed to categorize posts based on recurring themes, such as: hate speech and incitement to violence; ethnic, gender, and religious biases; counter-speech and peace-building narratives; and misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

### 5.3. Analysis Methods

The analysis is based on the UNESCO definition and classification of Online Hate Speech. Hate Speech is defined as “Expressions that advocate, incite, promote, or justify hatred, violence, or discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons, including race, religion, gender, or other identity factors.” (UNESCO, 2021). Considering race-related speech, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination call for a ban on expressing ideas of superiority or inferiority of people categorized by “race.” Hatred based on nationality or religion is criminalized in Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – but with the qualification that the expressions involved should amount to (i) advocacy, which (ii) constitutes incitement to (iii) discrimination, hostility or violence.

It is possible, but not required, that hatred – such as that based on people’s gender, sexual orientation or other features – may be limited in terms of the ICCPR (Article19), in the interests of respect for the rights or reputations of others. (UNESCO Countering Online Hate Speech Manual, 2015). The analysis is also based on Rabat plan of Action six-part threshold test for hate speech which are: the context of the speech, the speaker’s position or status, the intent of the speech, the content and form of the speech, the extent and reach of the speech, the likelihood of harm resulting from hate speech (OHCHR) Rabat Plan of Action (2012).

The study uses thematic analysis, trend analysis, and triangulation in its data analysis. **Thematic Analysis** is applied to qualitative data from interviews and social media content to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives. This approach provides a rich understanding of the strategies, motivations, and impacts of social media in Sudan's conflict. For **Trend Analysis**, quantitative data from social media platforms was analyzed to identify trends in hate speech, misinformation, and counter-speech. This includes tracking the volume of posts, engagement levels, and sentiment over time. While **Triangulation** enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings. Findings from qualitative and quantitative methods were integrated through triangulation to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Sudan's digital conflict landscape.

### 5.4 Ethical Protocols

Given the sensitive nature of this study, strict ethical protocols are followed to ensure the integrity and safety of the research process. The study adheres to ethical guidelines for social media research, respecting the rights and dignity of all participants. All interview responses are anonymized to protect the identities of participants and confidentiality was maintained throughout the data collection and

analysis process. We also took care in handling user-generated content to minimize privacy violations when analyzing social media content. Analyzing sensitive content, including graphic or inflammatory material, poses psychological and security risks to researchers. To mitigate these risks, researchers received mental health support and training on secure data handling to protect against emotional distress and cyber threats.

To adhere to research integrity and ethical standards, no direct engagement with extremist or violent groups<sup>(1)</sup> was conducted. The study adheres to ethical guidelines for social media research, ensuring that the research process respects the rights and dignity of all participants (Townsend and Wallace, 2022).

## 6. Conceptual Foundations:

This study integrates multiple media, communication, and social influence theories to comprehensively analyze social media's dual role in propagating and countering hate speech in Sudan's conflict. The framework highlights how digital platforms can both propagate and combat hate speech, utilizing social media's extensive reach and capacity to shape public discourse. Social Identity Theory and Spiral of Silence Theory address group dynamics and silencing effects in online communities, while Agenda-Setting and Media Framing Theories examine how platforms shape public perceptions. Social Learning and Diffusion of Innovations Theories explore the spread of counter-speech, and Media Ecology and Critical Discourse Analysis highlight the platforms' structural and discursive impacts. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding digital warfare and peacebuilding in Sudan's polarized digital landscape. These theories are explored in more depth below. **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) provides an essential framework for understanding group dynamics in Sudan's online communities. The theory posits that individuals identify with social groups and derive self-esteem from this affiliation, often creating in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In conflict scenarios, like Sudan, where ethnic and political identities are central to the crisis, social media can amplify divisive rhetoric, fostering "us vs. them" narratives. Hate speech thus emerges when in-groups express derogatory or inflammatory content towards perceived out-groups (Wang and Yan, 2020). Countering such speech on digital platforms requires understanding these

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<sup>(1)</sup> In this context, **extremists** are individuals or groups who advocate for and act upon ideologies that reject or undermine democratic values, often employing hate speech as a strategic tool to dehumanize others and incite violence against targeted groups. Hate speech in this context serves as a mechanism for radicalization, creating an "in-group vs. out-group" dynamic that legitimizes violence as a form of defense or retaliation (Perry and Olsson, 2009; Koehler, 2016). Extremists frequently utilize online platforms to disseminate inflammatory rhetoric, spread misinformation, and recruit followers by framing violence as a moral or religious duty (Conway, 2017; Ganesh, 2018).

group identities and designing interventions that disrupt harmful group-based narratives (Huddy, 2001).

**Agenda-Setting Theory**, initially proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), suggests that media platforms significantly influence the public's perception of issues. Social media's ability to prioritize specific topics through algorithms shapes public discourse and collective awareness regarding hate speech (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In Sudan's digital landscape, where social media influencers and advocacy groups highlight hate speech and its consequences, they effectively set the agenda for broader societal awareness and action. This targeted use of agenda-setting on digital platforms can prioritize peacebuilding narratives, and highlight the dangers of hate speech and fostering societal condemnation (McCombs, 2004).

**The Spiral of Silence Theory** (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) posits that individuals may withhold their opinions if they perceive them to be in the minority or at risk of social isolation. In Sudan's conflict landscape, where opposing hate speech may result in backlash, individuals often refrain from publicly condemning such rhetoric. However, social media offers an alternative platform that can empower marginalized voices and reduce isolation (Gearhart and Zhang, 2014). By creating virtual communities that oppose hate speech, digital spaces can break the spiral of silence, encouraging broader participation in counter-speech initiatives.

Bandura's **Social Learning Theory** (1977) emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. In Sudan, social media serves as an arena where counter-speech campaigns can model constructive discourse, showcasing influential figures actively opposing hate speech. Bandura's theory suggests that such visibility encourages others to adopt similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977). In this context, when leaders, activists, and peers counter hate speech online, they provide models that others can imitate, potentially fostering a digital culture of peace and inclusivity.

The **Diffusion of Innovations Theory** (Rogers, 2003) explains how counter-speech tactics can spread through social media. This theory posits that ideas and innovations diffuse over time within communities (Rogers, 2003). Countering hate speech in Sudan's digital environment can be seen as an innovation that spreads as users adopt and promote anti-hate messaging. When prominent Sudanese figures support counter-speech campaigns, these messages gain traction and reach a tipping point where counter-speech becomes the norm, reducing the presence and influence of hate speech (Valente and Rogers, 1995).

**Media Framing Theory** (Entman, 1993) examines how media shapes perceptions by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while de-emphasizing others.

In Sudan's conflict, the framing of hate speech and counter-narratives on social media influences public attitudes. Strategic framing that emphasizes peace and unity can shift audience perceptions away from divisive rhetoric (Entman, 1993). Social media's framing of hate speech incidents and responses can affect the broader discourse on conflict and cooperation (De Vreese, 2005).

**Media Ecology Theory**, developed by McLuhan (1964) and Postman (1970), emphasizes the influence of media environments on human perception, understanding, and interactions. In the digital age, social media serves as a powerful "media ecology" that creates, amplifies, and reshapes discourses in conflict areas like Sudan. This theory suggests that the platforms themselves—each with distinct formats, algorithms, and user behaviors—affect how hate speech spreads and how counter-speech efforts take root (McLuhan, 1964). The instantaneous, interactive nature of social media uniquely positions it to combat hate speech by facilitating real-time responses and collective action (Postman, 1970).

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, as developed by Fairclough (1989), examines how language and discourse practices reflect, reproduce, or challenge power structures. CDA provides tools to analyze hate speech on social media within Sudan's conflict, revealing how power dynamics between social groups manifest in digital interactions. CDA enables researchers to investigate how language contributes to societal perceptions of "the other," examining how hate speech reinforces stereotypes and social inequalities (Fairclough, 1989). Additionally, CDA helps in analyzing how counter-speech efforts can dismantle divisive language and promote peace through strategic discourse shifts (Van Dijk, 2001).

## 7. Research Context

### 7.1 Social Media and Hate Speech in Conflict Zones

Numerous studies have addressed the role of social media in both fostering and mitigating hate speech within conflict settings. Howard (2019) analyzed hate speech in African conflict zones, concluding that social media platforms often intensify ethnic and political tensions. The study found that ineffective content moderation on platforms like Facebook allowed harmful content to spread, exacerbating violence in Ethiopia and Nigeria. Similarly, Benesch (2020) examined how social media algorithms promote engagement by prioritizing polarizing content, thus creating an environment conducive to the spread of hate speech.

In the context of Sudan, Asad (2021) provided an analysis of the political crisis and how social media has been used to spread inflammatory messages that exacerbate existing tensions. Using qualitative discourse analysis of posts on

platforms like Facebook and Twitter, the study found that these platforms commonly facilitate hate speech between ethnic groups in Darfur and other conflict-prone areas. Similarly, Al Zahra (2023) analyzed the weaponization of social media in Sudan's conflict, conducting content analysis of posts from the official Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF, 1.4 million followers) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF, 965,000 followers before closure). The study outlined the objectives of parallel war as delegitimization, war image, propaganda, religious cover addressing the international community while civil forces remain neutral.

An Irish study by Siapera, Eugenia, and others (2018) on tracking and monitoring racist speech online combines social, scientific and computational methods to trace online racists and hate speech. The study analyzed posts from Facebook and Twitter to detect hate speech through feeding the Facebook algorithm with hate language collected through focus group discussions with experts to compile a glossary of jargon and words to detect online hate speech.

Slom, 2025), explores the intersection of disinformation, hate speech, and social media in shaping conflict dynamics in Sudan. It examines how online narratives fuel group violence and exacerbates political instability, utilizing qualitative research methods, including content and discourse analysis. The data collection is based on secondary sources from publications between May 2010 to 2023, offering historical insights into Sudan's conflicts, particularly during the Darfur crisis. The study focuses on case studies such as the Darfur Conflict and the SAF-RSF Conflict, exploring how hate speech and disinformation are used to manipulate public perception and escalate ethnic tensions through digital platforms. It also examines community-level responses to these narratives and their impact on peacebuilding initiatives.

## 7.2 Counter Hate Speech and Digital Interventions in Conflict Mitigation

Several scholars have explored how social media can be used to counter hate speech and promote peace. Zeitzoff (2017), for example, studied counter-speech initiatives in the Israeli Palestinian conflict and found that social media campaigns led by influential figures were effective in diffusing tensions. Similarly, Mathew et al. (2019) demonstrated that counter-speech initiative, especially those led by community leaders—successfully redirected negative conversations and fostered online spaces for dialogue.

## 7.3 Social Media, Conflict Resolution, and Digital Warfare

The concept of digital warfare describes the strategic use of digital platforms to influence public opinion and affect social dynamics in conflict settings. Owens

and Bailey (2021) examined the weaponization of social media in African conflicts, including Sudan, concluding that while social media exacerbates tensions, it also offers opportunities for conflict resolution through counter-narratives and peace campaigns. Silverman and Johnson (2020) further emphasized the role of media literacy in countering hate speech, arguing that education initiatives that empower users to critically evaluate online content can significantly reduce the spread of inflammatory rhetoric.

## 7.4 Summary and Research Gaps

Despite extensive research on social media's role in conflict, studies on countering hate speech in Sudan remain limited. While there have been some interventions – notably Asad (2021); Owens and Bailey (2021); and ElZahra (2023) – that provide insights into Sudan's digital conflict, comprehensive research that combines theoretical frameworks and empirical data is still lacking. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining Sudan as a case study, exploring how social media can serve both as a platform for hate speech and as a tool for promoting peace and unity.

## 8. Insights and Analysis

The widespread use of social media in Sudan's conflict has fueled hate speech and deepened digital polarization, exacerbating ethnic, political, and ideological divisions. Hate speech – often disseminated through Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and Telegram – plays a critical role in intensifying hostilities by fostering resentment and dehumanizing opposing groups. For example, terms like “sons of guests” (targeting RSF soldiers as outsiders) and “traitors” (used against civilians supporting anti-war campaigns) have been widely circulated, demonizing specific groups. This jargon necessitates the compilation of a linguistic observatory to document and criminalize hate speech terms, studying their historical roots and usage with the aim to eradicate them from online and societal discourse. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous in a society fragmented by historical grievances, fueling cycles of violence and retaliation.

While social media has undeniably amplified the intensity of Sudan's conflict, it also presents opportunities for countering digital warfare through strategic interventions. Digital literacy campaigns can help citizens recognize and resist manipulation, while social media platforms must strengthen their efforts to detect and remove coordinated disinformation campaigns. By leveraging these platforms for strategic counter-messaging and peace-oriented campaigns, stakeholders can transform social media from a digital battlefield into a space for constructive dialogue and reconciliation. A more concerted effort is required from international organizations, tech companies, and civil society to ensure that social

media does not remain an unchecked weapon of war, but instead becomes a tool for truth, accountability, and peace.

## 8.1 Findings

In this section, the findings of the research are discussed. The findings highlight the significant role social media plays in Sudan's ongoing conflict. The data collected through interviews and content analysis reveals several key themes, and the data analysis is discussed under seven main themes below.

### 8.1.1 Mechanisms of Influence

Social media platforms have revolutionized the way that information is disseminated in conflict zones. One of the most impactful mechanisms is rapid dissemination, where platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, and WhatsApp provide real-time updates, enabling the public to access news and developments instantly. Live coverage and eyewitness accounts shared through videos, photos, and posts create an immediate and often emotionally charged portrayal of the conflict. This accessibility allows both local and international audiences to follow unfolding events in ways that traditional media cannot match. However, the speed of dissemination also contributes to the spread of misinformation, as unverified content can go viral before being fact-checked.

Another critical mechanism is narrative framing, where various actors, including governments, rebel groups, activists, and media organizations, use social media to present the conflict in ways that align with their respective agendas. The use of hashtags and trending topics further solidifies these narratives, creating a framework that influences both domestic and international understanding of the conflict. The strategic framing of events determines whether certain groups are perceived as aggressors or victims, influencing public perception and policy decisions. The ability to control these narratives has made social media a battleground for ideological and political influence.

Echo chambers and polarization represent another major consequence of social media's influence in Sudan's conflict. Algorithms used by platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to show users content that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, reinforcing biases and deepening divisions (Monsted and Lehmann, 2024; Asgari and Zannettou, 2024; Steard, McCabe and McCarty, 2023). As a result, people are exposed primarily to perspectives that confirm their views, leading to increased ideological rigidity and social fragmentation. This phenomenon significantly contributes to the escalation of conflicts as opposing groups become more entrenched in their positions, viewing their adversaries as fundamentally

illegitimate or hostile.

Virality and emotional engagement also play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. Content that triggers strong emotional responses, such as anger, sympathy, or fear, is more likely to be shared widely, often without critical evaluation. Videos depicting atrocities, humanitarian crises, or heroic acts gain traction rapidly, amplifying their impact on public sentiment. For example, videos showing mass killing in Aljazeera state central Sudan went viral showing hundreds of death bodies in Wad Elnora village after the RSF invaded the village, creating a national sentiment against the RSF and ElGutteena White Nile province causing more than 400 deaths<sup>(1)</sup>. While such content can raise awareness and prompt humanitarian action, it can also be exploited to manipulate emotions, inflame hostilities, and incite violence. The viral nature of social media thus becomes both a tool for advocacy and a mechanism for exacerbating conflict: such as the brutal assassination and dragging of the body of west Darfur governor in Al Junina, *Khamis Abaker* from *Masaleet* tribe by members of Arab tribes in RSF, which was a shock to social media followers<sup>(2)</sup>.

Finally, user-generated content and citizen journalism have fundamentally altered the media landscape by allowing ordinary individuals to document and share real-time accounts of events that may be missing from traditional media. Elinsirafi<sup>(3)</sup> an online ‘daily live broadcast’ about the war proceedings and operations was followed by thousands every day. The live broadcast was shared daily in WhatsApp and on other media outlets, exceeding two million views. Those who are called pro-war campaigners and influencers supporting the army can play a vital role in peacebuilding<sup>(4\*)</sup>. This democratization of information has empowered civilians to act as journalists, exposing human rights violations and highlighting aspects of the conflict that would otherwise go unnoticed. However, the lack of editorial oversight and fact-checking mechanisms means that user-generated content can also contribute to misinformation and biased reporting. Juhaina, a fact-checking group was established in 2016 and tried to make an impact on disinformation and false news

<sup>(1)</sup> Link atrocities of wad Elnora in Aljazeera State  
<https://youtube/IteXADAaWu4?si=Bgn3h7bjmEZHgEK>

alguttaina White Nile state:  
<https://tryagnews.com/57257>

<sup>(2)</sup> Videos about the death of Khamis Abaker, Governor of Western Darfur and other racists allegations <http://www.facebook.com/share/r/1A1phMSoTV/>

<sup>(3)</sup> Yasin Ahmed @yasin123ah  
Sudan War Updates@sudan\_wa

<sup>(4)</sup> Elinsrafi link on daily live stream pro-war campaign influencers  
<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%99>

dissemination<sup>(1)</sup>. While this type of content has the potential to hold perpetrators accountable, it also increases the risk of spreading false or exaggerated claims, further complicating the conflict's narrative.

### 8.1.2 Social Media as a Tool for Political and Military Mobilization

Social media has become an essential tool for political and military mobilization in Sudan, serving as both a strategic communication channel and a recruitment platform. Armed groups, political factions, and activists leverage social media to rally support, recruit members, and coordinate movements. Digital platforms provide a space where different actors can amplify their messages, influence public sentiment, and gain legitimacy in the eyes of both domestic and international audiences.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) actively use social media as part of their digital warfare strategy. Both factions engage in targeted messaging campaigns to justify their actions and garner public sympathy. By sharing battlefield updates, showcasing military operations, and portraying themselves as protectors of national sovereignty, these groups seek to consolidate their support base. This online presence also enables them to counter opposing narratives and discredit their adversaries by labeling them as aggressors, foreign agents, or threats to national stability. Members of the sovereignty council have their official stands propagated in the media, talking about war proceedings, threatening enemies and criminalizing countries supporting the RSF, for example, the social media accounts of Yasir ElAtta<sup>(2)</sup>. On the other hand, the spokesperson of RSF engaged in daily accounts on X talking about the victories of the RSF<sup>(3\*)</sup>, unlike the spokesperson of SAF whose contribution to the war scene was limited<sup>4</sup>.

Beyond narrative control, social media has also played a pivotal role in real-time coordination of military actions. Encrypted messaging platforms, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, are frequently used for planning and executing military strategies, as well as for organizing mass protests. These platforms provide a level of security and immediacy that traditional communication channels lack. Anti-war groups, for example, use social media to disseminate anti-war news, meetings and plans to share safety protocols, and coordinate large-scale meetings abroad. The

<sup>(1)</sup> Juhaina fact checking group link: <https://www.Juhaina.net/ar/5787>

<sup>(2)</sup> AlAtta, Deputy of head of Sovereignty council on Emirates sponsoring RSF war against Sudan on YouTube: [https://youtube.com/shorts/c\\_mLezdzObw?si=Xom7MpXGxGoR4XRR](https://youtube.com/shorts/c_mLezdzObw?si=Xom7MpXGxGoR4XRR)

Head of Sovereignty council on the foreign interference on Sudan

<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMMdsvnX/>

<sup>(3)</sup> RSF spokesperson on Tiktok and twitter: Yousuf ezzat @ ezzat\_yousuf

<sup>(4)</sup> SAF spokesperson" <https://youtu.be/cegCyO6glGs?si=KCM1LpuLFhLjleZ->

ability to mobilize people quickly through digital means has significantly shaped the course of Sudan's conflict, allowing both pro- and anti-war factions to organize in unprecedented ways.

The role of social media in fundraising and resource mobilization cannot be overlooked. Online crowdfunding campaigns, often driven by Sudanese diaspora communities, provide financial support for humanitarian causes. The Eltakaya project was initiated by activists in different areas of Sudan and provide free food to war affected citizens regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation. The project was nominated for the Nobel Prize as an unprecedented social pond among war displaced and affected groups<sup>(1)</sup>. These campaigns leverage digital payment platforms and transactions to bypass traditional financial restrictions, ensuring a steady flow of resources. At the same time, social media is used to solicit logistical support, such as medical aid, food supplies, and safe passage for displaced populations. This has enabled non-state actors to sustain prolonged engagement in the conflict.

However, the widespread use of social media for mobilization also has significant negative consequences. The ease with which inflammatory content can spread exacerbates tensions and escalates violence. Hate speech, calls for retaliation, and misinformation campaigns contribute to a cycle of conflict, making resolution more challenging. Additionally, extremist groups exploit social media to radicalize and recruit individuals, often using encrypted platforms to evade surveillance. However, many fake accounts have been detected and Meta closed down the Facebook pages for propagating hate speech. The unchecked spread of such content highlights the need for stronger regulatory mechanisms to prevent the misuse of digital spaces for violent and destabilizing activities. The current war breeds a situation where ethnicity and hate speech related to ethnic groups surpassed any efforts of peaceful coexistence among the RSF groups. Leaders were killed by their own tribal superiors the death of Sufian and general Gelha, an RSF leader from *Myseeria*, was said to be assassinated by the RSF after he criticized *Mahiria* leaders of RSF<sup>(2)</sup>. Tribal conflicts in Darfur emerged in Sudan's conflict landscape, as old disputes and prejudice resurfaced. Examples of how Mahiri treated *Myseeria* soldiers showed the hidden scenario of ethnic biases in Darfur as well as other regions in Sudan.

In summary, social media has become an indispensable tool for political and military mobilization in Sudan, facilitating everything from propaganda dissemination and recruitment to resource mobilization and real-time coordination.

<sup>(1)</sup> AlTakkaya (free food distribution accounts):

<https://youtu.be/VEmwULA0FXA?si=oDC5NXpstssl2EiF>

<sup>(2)</sup> The death of General *Gelha* on ethnic background

<https://youtu.be/A7UP72kl2Uk?si=cAWAYXi16dkrDx0d>

While it offers strategic advantages to various actors, it also presents significant risks by intensifying divisions and prolonging conflict. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, tech companies, and civil society to regulate harmful content while preserving the positive aspects of digital engagement.

### 8.1.3 Hate Speech and Digital Polarization

The widespread use of social media in Sudan's conflict has fueled hate speech and deepened digital polarization, exacerbating existing ethnic, political, and ideological divisions. Hate speech, often disseminated through Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and Telegram, plays a critical role in intensifying hostilities by fostering resentment and dehumanizing opposing groups. Jargon such as “sons of guests” and illegal children targets RSF soldiers to demonize them as ‘outsiders.’

Media activists who are classified as pro-war campaigners target civilians who support those who claim to be anti-war campaigners using phrases like “traitors” and “foreign embassy spies”<sup>(1)</sup>. RSF activists target all northern Sudan people calling them names and dehumanizing them. *So, hate speech war is becoming the war of all against all.* This phenomenon is particularly dangerous in a society already fragmented by historical grievances, as it fuels cycles of violence and retaliation.

One of the key drivers of hate speech is the way social media algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content. Posts that trigger outrage, fear, or anger tend to receive higher engagement, leading to their rapid amplification. This creates an environment where inflammatory rhetoric spreads more quickly than neutral or reconciliatory messages. Political factions, activists, and even foreign actors exploit this dynamic to manipulate public sentiment, using targeted disinformation campaigns to incite fear and hostility against rival groups.

In addition, digital polarization is exacerbated by social media's tendency to create ideological echo chambers. Users are often exposed primarily to content that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, reinforcing biases and reducing their willingness to engage with alternative viewpoints. This self-reinforcing cycle strengthens divisions, making dialogue and reconciliation efforts increasingly difficult. As communities become more isolated in their digital spheres, they adopt more extreme positions, viewing opposing groups not just as political adversaries but as existential threats.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Elinsraafi on Yasir Arman and Tagadum Leaders: <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMk7WVVGc/>.  
<https://t.me/Basioni> channel on Telegram

Moreover, coordinated online campaigns frequently employ bots and troll farms to flood digital spaces with hate speech and misinformation, overwhelming any attempts at counter-narratives. These campaigns target specific ethnic or political groups, painting them as aggressors or traitors, thereby justifying violence against them. In Sudan's ongoing conflict, both state and non-state actors have engaged in these tactics, escalating tensions and making real-world violence more likely.

The real-world consequences of digital hate speech are alarming. Online incitements have directly contributed to outbreaks of violence, with inflammatory messages preceding ethnic clashes and attacks. The dehumanization of groups through social media rhetoric has created an environment where extreme acts of brutality are not only tolerated but encouraged by certain factions, examples include calling RSF burnt bodies grilled meat and praising air strikes pilot as *great kebab* maker. Poets appeared on Sudanese national TV with poems dehumanizing the enemy and were praised. Furthermore, the normalization of hate speech in online spaces has desensitized many users, making them more accepting of divisive rhetoric and less inclined to challenge it.

Addressing the issue of hate speech and digital polarization requires a multifaceted approach. Social media companies must improve content moderation, particularly in conflict zones, by implementing stronger policies against hate speech and investing in AI tools that can detect inflammatory language in local dialects. Additionally, civil society organizations should promote digital literacy initiatives to help users critically evaluate online content and recognize manipulative narratives. Efforts to foster intergroup dialogue and reconciliation must also extend to digital spaces, encouraging constructive discussions that challenge divisive rhetoric.

Ultimately, while social media has provided unprecedented opportunities for communication and mobilization, its role in amplifying hate speech and polarization poses a significant threat to peace and stability in Sudan. Without decisive intervention, the unchecked spread of digital hate speech will continue to inflame tensions and hinder efforts at conflict resolution.

#### **8.1.4 State and Non-State Actors' Use of Social Media for Propaganda**

The real-world consequences of digital hate speech are alarming. Online incitements have directly contributed to outbreaks of violence, with inflammatory messages preceding ethnic clashes and attacks. The dehumanization of groups through social media rhetoric has created an environment where extreme acts of brutality are not only tolerated but encouraged by certain factions.

Addressing the issue of hate speech and digital polarization requires a multifaceted approach. Social media companies must improve content moderation, particularly in conflict zones, by implementing stronger policies against hate speech and investing in AI tools that can detect inflammatory language in local dialects. Additionally, civil society organizations should promote digital literacy initiatives to help users critically evaluate online content and recognize manipulative narratives. Social media accounts belittle organizations such as the Freedom and Change alliance and the coordination body of the democratic and civil forced in an obvious violation of human rights. One such account is known as Elinsrafi, a secret activist who doesn't reveal any personal details, he became famous after the war due to his adoption of a line supporting the temporary government in its confrontation with the Rapid Support Forces. He is known for his confrontational accounts with civilian forces that Burhan ousted in his coup in October 2021, his account on Hanan Hassan and Rasha Awad is widely circulated<sup>(1)</sup>. Other activists of the December revolution targeted Islamic leaders from Engaz regime with online hate speech, for example, Osman Zanon has a daily live stream targeting RSF and other religious and political leaders<sup>(2)</sup>.

Efforts to foster intergroup dialogue and reconciliation must also extend to digital spaces, encouraging constructive discussions that challenge divisive rhetoric, a list of influential activists, journalists and websites is attached, this group can initiate the peace dialogue online.

Ultimately, while social media has provided unprecedented opportunities for communication and mobilization, its role in amplifying hate speech and polarization poses a significant threat to peace and stability in Sudan. Without decisive intervention, the unchecked spread of digital hate speech will continue to inflame tensions and hinder efforts at conflict resolution.

### **8.1.5 Role of International Actors and External Influence**

The Sudanese conflict has not only been shaped by domestic actors but also by international stakeholders who leverage social media to influence narratives, advance strategic interests, and sway public opinion. Foreign governments, intelligence agencies, international organizations, and advocacy groups actively

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<sup>(1)</sup> Elinsraffi on Hanan Hassan: [https://youtu.be/nHzPc\\_WgW6k?si=7Ko6f1cdO3QE6GTy](https://youtu.be/nHzPc_WgW6k?si=7Ko6f1cdO3QE6GTy) and Rasha Awadd: <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/18iP4qktM/> [https://youtu.be/\\_twrt-KRLIK?si=wUkZLie-gzf2EvPh](https://youtu.be/_twrt-KRLIK?si=wUkZLie-gzf2EvPh)

Eltayb Elsubaai on Kanabi people: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19n6gccivA/> Bit Elddyf hate speech on Shandi: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/15snQsk2hH/>

<sup>(2)</sup> Zanoon Osman on Abdulhai Yousuf: [https://youtu.be/wUbGD\\_IfWqQ?si=a5o3V625mLipltB8](https://youtu.be/wUbGD_IfWqQ?si=a5o3V625mLipltB8) Alrabea Abdulmonim @arabea\_abdo

engage in Sudan's digital discourse, using online platforms to shape perceptions and policy responses. Their involvement ranges from diplomatic messaging and humanitarian advocacy to covert influence campaigns and disinformation efforts.

One of the most prominent ways that international actors exert influence is through diplomatic and political messaging. Foreign governments and international organizations use social media to issue statements, condemn human rights violations, and call for ceasefires. Platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook have become tools for global diplomacy, where governments express their positions on Sudan's conflict in real time. These digital statements not only shape international discourse but also influence the actions of Sudanese political factions, who seek to gain legitimacy or avoid condemnation.

International advocacy groups and human rights organizations also play a crucial role in amplifying Sudan's crisis. They use social media to highlight humanitarian needs, expose war crimes, and pressure global institutions to act. Viral campaigns on TikTok and Instagram, such as those run by the Sudanese diaspora using hashtags like #KeepEyesOnSudan or amplifying the calls of Sudanese people with hashtags such as #sudanupdates, #notowar, #No\_War\_Yes\_for\_peace, have successfully drawn attention to the conflict, mobilizing global audiences to advocate for interventions such as sanctions, aid relief, and peace negotiations. The Sudanese diaspora plays a significant role in shaping international perceptions, using digital platforms to share firsthand accounts, organize protests, and rally support from global civil society<sup>(1)</sup>.

However, not all international involvement is benign. Foreign intelligence agencies and state-backed media outlets often engage in information warfare to advance their geopolitical interests. Some governments support factions within Sudan, using social media to spread narratives that align with their strategic objectives. These influence campaigns may involve covert funding of local media organizations, deployment of bot networks to manipulate public discourse, or the dissemination of misleading information to create political instability. The involvement of external actors complicates efforts to discern authentic narratives from orchestrated disinformation, further muddying the information landscape.

In addition, Sudan has witnessed cases of digital interference where international actors exploit social media to push conflicting agendas. Foreigners from different Arab and Western countries were arrested while running propaganda rooms and competing foreign powers may fund rival factions and influence online

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<sup>(1)</sup> Sudanese Diaspora on 15<sup>th</sup> of April war. <https://www.sudancoup.com>

discussions<sup>(1)</sup>. The war in Sudan has a multinational dimension, and the invasion is supported by many Arab and African countries. As Sudan reported in its complaint to the security council<sup>(2)</sup>, thousands of fake accounts supporting RSF narrative are based in the UAE. Additionally, mega media cooperations such as Al Arabia, Aljazeera Sudan, Sky News have social media accounts which are viewed and shared by thousands of viewers. This external digital interference exacerbates internal divisions, making conflict resolution more challenging. It also impacts global diplomatic efforts as different international actors push competing narratives that shape policy responses in conflicting ways.

The presence of international actors in Sudan's social media space has both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, international advocacy has played a crucial role in exposing atrocities, mobilizing humanitarian aid, and pressuring warring factions toward negotiations. On the other hand, external influence campaigns and geopolitical maneuvering have often escalated tensions, prolonged the conflict, and undermined Sudanese sovereignty through interference.

To mitigate the risks associated with external influence, increased transparency is needed in digital diplomacy and international advocacy efforts. Governments and international organizations should work to ensure that their engagement in Sudan's digital landscape aligns with conflict-sensitive coverage and approaches that promote peace rather than exacerbate tensions. Social media platforms should also implement measures to detect and limit foreign interference, ensuring that Sudanese citizens are not subjected to manipulated or deceptive information campaigns. As an example, the Facebook accounts of Al Jazeera and AlHadath framed the war differently and were projected to reflect a hidden stand with one of the warring parties.

Ultimately, while international engagement in Sudan's conflict is inevitable, its impact should be carefully managed to support de-escalation and peacebuilding, rather than deepen polarization and instability. Thoughtful, evidence-based interventions - rather than reactionary, interest-driven digital campaigns - will be crucial in shaping a constructive role for international actors in Sudan's digital warfare landscape.

### **8.1.6 Grassroots Peacebuilding Efforts through Social Media**

Despite the prevalence of online hate speech, misinformation, and

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<sup>(1)</sup> The arrest of foreigners running propaganda rooms in Khartoum Sudan  
<https://youtube.com/.shorts/OMa-fekzk?si=G7Yc3PdgR-RGUDMt>

<sup>(2)</sup> Sudan complaint to security council about the intervention of Arab and African countries in Sudan's war. <https://youtu.be/W1I2Ob0TkKQ?si=JrNyyzEsYRc-qnve>

propaganda, social media has also emerged as a vital tool for grassroots peacebuilding efforts in Sudan. Civil society organizations, local activists, and humanitarian groups have leveraged digital platforms to foster dialogue, counteract divisive narratives, and advocate for peaceful coexistence. These initiatives have demonstrated that while social media can be used to fuel conflict, it can also serve as a powerful medium for reconciliation, bridge-building, and community resilience.

One of the primary ways grassroots organizations use social media for peacebuilding is by promoting intergroup dialogue. Online discussions that bring together individuals from different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds to engage in constructive conversations are hosted on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp. These digital forums create safe spaces for exchanging perspectives, addressing grievances, and finding common ground. Initiatives like Twitter Spaces and Facebook Live have been particularly effective in facilitating real-time conversations on issues such as reconciliation, human rights, and pathways to peace. By amplifying voices that advocate for unity rather than division, grassroots organizations help disrupt the cycle of digital polarization.

Another critical aspect of grassroots peacebuilding through social media is combating misinformation and hate speech. Digital literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and counter-messaging campaigns are deployed to challenge false narratives and reduce the spread of incendiary content, yet the need to establish regulatory bodies which can react immediately to disinformation and propaganda is of utmost importance. Independent fact-checking groups and media watchdogs play a significant role in debunking propaganda by providing accurate, verified information to the public. Additionally, local peace activists and community leaders use social media to respond to inflammatory rhetoric with messages of tolerance and reconciliation, helping to shift the discourse toward nonviolent solutions.

Social media has also been instrumental in mobilizing humanitarian aid and relief efforts in war-affected communities. Grassroots organizations use digital platforms to coordinate food distribution, medical assistance, and emergency response operations. Crowd fund campaigns launched on social media have successfully raised funds to support internally displaced persons and provide essential services like free food and medical care in conflict zones<sup>(1)</sup>. Through live updates, local humanitarian workers share real-time information about ongoing needs and response efforts, ensuring that aid reaches the most vulnerable populations.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Call for donations for Takayya (free food) in different regions  
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1A22Lbo6Ns/?mibextid=wwXlf>

Beyond direct aid and dialogue, social media plays a role in reshaping narratives around peace and coexistence. Digital storytelling initiatives, which highlight personal stories of reconciliation and resilience, have gained traction in Sudan's online space. By showcasing positive examples of interethnic cooperation, historical accounts of peaceful cohabitation, and testimonials from former combatants who have embraced nonviolence, these campaigns help counteract extremist rhetoric and promote a culture of peace. Social media influencers, artists, and poets have also contributed to this effort by using creative content to advocate for peace. During and after Sudan's internal conflicts, including those in Southern and Western Sudan. During the final years of the **Second Sudanese Civil War** and the implementation of the **Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)**, diaspora communities from Southern Sudan used blogs and online forums such as the *SPLM Diaspora Forum* and *Sudan Tribune* to share testimonies of survival, resilience, and reconciliation between Northerners and Southerners (Skjerdal and Hallelujah, 2009). These narratives challenged dominant war discourses and emphasized a shared desire for peace and dignity.

In **Darfur**, local peacebuilders and youth networks have used mobile phones and platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to document stories of intertribal cooperation between groups such as the Fur, Zaghawa, and Arab tribes (Mercy Corps, 2011). Projects like "Darfur Diaries" and "We Survived", both of which combined film and digital storytelling, captured the lived experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs), often from camps like Kalma and Abu Shouk, and brought global attention to stories of survival and forgiveness (Prendergast and Plattner, 2006). These platforms humanized the victims and offered alternative narratives beyond the politicized framing of the conflict.

Moreover, peacebuilding NGOs such as Search for Common Ground and Peace Direct launched community media programs in Western Sudan that trained local youth and ex-combatants to produce short videos and audio stories about reconciliation. These were later shared through social media to amplify messages of nonviolence and coexistence (Search for Common Ground, 2016). By showcasing real-life stories of those who chose peace over revenge—including interviews with former Janjaweed fighters and community mediators—these digital narratives helped to promote a restorative vision of Sudan's future.

However, grassroots peacebuilding efforts through social media face several challenges. Online hate speech, harassment, and algorithmic biases that favor sensational content often overshadow peace-oriented narratives. Social media, and the big companies behind these platforms, are investing on attention attraction and commodification, surveillance, interplay of engagement-driven design, data feedback, loops, and human psychological tendencies and commercialization. Those

working in digital peacebuilding are frequently targeted by both state and non-state actors, facing threats to their safety and credibility. Additionally, limited internet access and digital illiteracy among marginalized communities prevent some groups from fully participating in online peace initiatives.

### **8.1.7 Peace-building Strategies:**

To enhance the effectiveness of grassroots peacebuilding efforts through social media, several strategies can be adopted. Social media companies should invest in developing content moderation policies that prioritize conflict-sensitive approaches while protecting free expression. Digital literacy programs should be expanded to equip users with the skills to critically engage with online content. Grassroots organizations should also establish stronger networks with international peacebuilding institutions to amplify their reach and secure resources for long-term sustainability.

Ultimately, while social media has played a significant role in exacerbating Sudan's conflict, it also holds immense potential as a tool for peace. The efforts of grassroots organizations demonstrate that digital platforms can be harnessed not only to document violence but also to promote healing, reconciliation, and unity. By supporting and scaling up these peacebuilding initiatives, stakeholders can help transform Sudan's digital space from a battleground of division into a platform for sustainable peace.

## **8.2 Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that social media is a double-edged sword in Sudan's conflict landscape. While digital platforms have facilitated the spread of harmful propaganda, misinformation and online hate speech which generated more violence on the battlefield, they have also provided opportunities for peacebuilding and civic engagement through social media which will propagate for peace building, sustainable peace and investing in non-violent peace training. This discussion explores key implications:

### **8.2.1 Social Media as an Extension of the Battlefield**

The conflict in Sudan has extended beyond physical battlegrounds into the digital realm, where social media serves as a powerful tool for narrative control, psychological warfare, and mobilization. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) use digital platforms not only to disseminate propaganda but also to justify military actions, shape public perception, and undermine their adversaries. The online battle for legitimacy has intensified, with

each faction seeking to control the narrative by presenting itself as the defender of national interests while portraying opponents as aggressors or foreign-backed conspirators.

A key aspect of this digital warfare is the strategic dissemination of misinformation and manipulated content. Both state and non-state actors engage in the creation of fabricated news, deep-fake videos, and exaggerated reports of battlefield victories or enemy atrocities. The speed and reach of social media allow these narratives to gain traction before fact-checking mechanisms can intervene, resulting in widespread confusion and the entrenchment of false perceptions among the public. The circulation of graphic images and sensational content also fuels fear and hostility, leading to increased support for military actions and retaliatory violence.

Social media platforms have also become a space for psychological operations aimed at weakening the morale of opponents. Armed groups and affiliated online communities use digital spaces to intimidate rivals, spread disinformation, and create a sense of inevitability regarding their eventual victory. This is achieved through the amplification of battlefield successes, the dehumanization of adversaries, and the spread of fear-inducing narratives. The psychological impact of these tactics is profound, as communities caught in the crossfire of online warfare find themselves constantly exposed to divisive rhetoric that erodes trust and fosters an environment of paranoia.

Another dimension of social media as a digital battlefield is the role of cyber warfare and hacking. Rival factions engage in cyberattacks against each other, targeting government websites, online news platforms, and opposition social media accounts. Digital sabotage as an extension of digital warfare has become a significant component of modern conflict. Digital sabotage includes the hacking of communication channels; leaking of sensitive information; weaponizing the internet; shutting down or sabotaging telecommunication companies; and RSF introducing Star Links in areas under its control such as Al Gezira State in the absence of official channels of tele communication. Foreign intelligence agencies and proxy actors may also intervene, further complicating the digital battleground by injecting external narratives and manipulating online discourse for geopolitical gain<sup>(1)</sup>.

While social media has undeniably amplified the intensity of Sudan's conflict, it also presents opportunities for countering digital warfare through strategic interventions. Digital literacy campaigns can help citizens recognize and resist

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<sup>(1)</sup> The coordination-body of the democratic & civil forces (Tagadom)

<https://facebook.com/share/.15ovtay8FA/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

manipulation, while social media platforms must strengthen their efforts to detect and remove coordinated disinformation campaigns. A more concerted effort is required from international organizations, tech companies, and civil society groups to ensure that social media does not remain an unchecked weapon of war, but instead becomes a tool for truth, accountability, and peace.

### **8.2.2 Challenges in Regulating Social Media in Conflict Zones**

Regulating social media in conflict zones presents a complex challenge as the need to curb misinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence must be balanced against fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and access to information (article 19) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10 1948. It stipulates that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” In Sudan’s conflict, the absence of effective regulatory frameworks has allowed digital platforms to be exploited for harmful purposes, exacerbating tensions and fueling hostilities. The lack of accountability mechanisms for both state and non-state actors has further contributed to the weaponization of social media, making it difficult to discern truth from propaganda. The conference of Sudan media issues organized by Sudanese Journalists Syndicate from September 29 - October 1 2024 in Cairo, provided recommendations for a roadmap to media regulations to eradicate online hate speech and other manipulatory practices that prevail during the current war<sup>(1)</sup>. Other efforts to provide media regulation through the ministry of information ministerial committee for media reform in Sudan through the financial and technical support of UNESCO in 2021 were apportioned after October 25 2021 over the revolution of Dec. 2019 which ousted El Bashir regime in Sudan.

One of the primary challenges in regulating social media in Sudan is the weakness of institutional oversight. Government agencies tasked with monitoring digital content often lack the resources, expertise, or impartiality required to effectively combat online harm. In some cases, authorities have exploited regulatory gaps to silence dissenting voices rather than addressing misinformation objectively. The use of internet shutdowns, censorship, and the targeting of journalists and activists has raised concerns that efforts to regulate social media may serve political interests rather than promoting peace and stability. On August 21 2023 Facebook shut down the RSF official page along with its leader General Dagalo’s personal

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<sup>(1)</sup> Sudan syndicate website, the first conference on media issues in Sudan hate speech  
<https://www.facebook.com/share/.p/167SiHgEA3/>

page under the classification of dangerous people and organizations according to Aljazeera Instagram post<sup>(1)</sup>.

Another obstacle is the transnational nature of social media platforms. Social media companies including Facebook, (X) Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube operate globally, making it difficult for local governments to enforce content moderation policies tailored to Sudan's unique conflict dynamics. Although these platforms have community guidelines aimed at preventing hate speech and incitement to violence, enforcement remains inconsistent. Content moderation algorithms often struggle to detect inflammatory rhetoric in local dialects, and automated systems may fail to differentiate between legitimate political discourse and harmful incitement. The reliance on user-reported content also means that harmful material often remains online for extended periods before being addressed.

The challenge of regulating social media is further compounded by the role of anonymous and pseudonymous accounts in spreading harmful content. Troll farms, bot networks, and fake profiles are frequently used by RSF to amplify divisive narratives and manipulate public sentiment. The deliberate use of anonymous accounts allows bad actors to evade accountability, making it difficult to trace the origins of disinformation campaigns. The proliferation of encrypted messaging apps, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, also complicates regulatory efforts, as harmful content can spread rapidly in private groups beyond the reach of traditional content moderation tools. This was the case in Sudan where live streaming of For- War campaigners were shared heavily among individuals and groups, while anti-war campaign messages were not shared extensively as pro war campaign by media influencers on WhatsApp<sup>(2)</sup>.

The disproportionate spread of pro-war campaign content over anti-war messages on encrypted platforms like WhatsApp in Sudan can be attributed to a combination of technological, psychological, and sociopolitical factors. First, encrypted messaging apps facilitate the formation of private, unmoderated communication networks that are resistant to traditional content moderation tools

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<sup>(1)</sup> Ajazeera Net on Instagram reporting the shutdown of Dagalo's official pages on August12,2023  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cv1rabNsZuN/?igsh=MWVpaG9wNTczYW80MQ>

<sup>(2)</sup> Elinsrafi. link to daily life stream (both are social media influencers representing pro war campaign supporting SAF  
<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%81%9>

Basyouni link to daily life stream (both are social media influencers representing pro war campaign supporting SAF: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMDUD9hR/>

Abdulmoniem Al Rabea RSF activist daily life on Tiktok, You Tube  
<https://youtube.com/shorts/1NloJrOsylA?si=DT0u6Pxin4j0kO2m>

(Gorwa, 2019). In conflict contexts, these platforms often become echo chambers, where homophily and group loyalty reinforce dominant narratives, such as support for armed campaigns (Bradshaw and Howard, 2018). Secondly, pro-war actors frequently possess better digital infrastructure and strategic coordination, including access to influential media figures and organized dissemination networks, which accelerate the virality of their content (Aral and Walker, 2012; Bakshy et al., 2011). Third, the emotional content of pro-war narratives—especially those evoking fear, anger, or tribal identity—is more likely to go viral than neutral or rational anti-war appeals. Research in digital psychology confirms that content high in moral-emotional language is more likely to be shared (Brady et al., 2017; Berger and Milkman, 2012). Finally, in asymmetric media environments such as Sudan, pro-war campaigns are often backed by state-affiliated entities or armed groups with greater financial and organizational resources, enabling more effective digital mobilization (Tufekci, 2017; Starbird, 2017). Consequently, anti-war voices struggle to achieve comparable reach within encrypted networks.

Despite these challenges, there are potential pathways for improving the regulation of social media in Sudan's conflict. Collaborative efforts between governments, social media companies, and civil society organizations can help develop localized content moderation policies that reflect the realities of Sudan's digital landscape. Investment in artificial intelligence tools capable of detecting harmful content in local languages and dialects could enhance the effectiveness of platform regulations. Additionally, public education campaigns focused on digital literacy and responsible online engagement can empower users to critically assess content and reject inflammatory narratives.

Ultimately, addressing the challenges of social media regulation in conflict zones requires a balanced approach that prioritizes both security and human rights. Overly restrictive measures, such as blanket censorship or internet shutdowns, may do more harm than good by stifling legitimate discourse and cutting off access to crucial information. Instead, targeted interventions that promote transparency, accountability, and community-driven content moderation are more likely to foster a healthier digital environment. By strengthening regulatory mechanisms while preserving digital freedoms, stakeholders can help mitigate the harmful effects of social media while ensuring that it remains a platform for constructive dialogue and peacebuilding.

### **8.3 Future Prospects for Peacebuilding via Digital Platforms**

One of the most effective ways to combat the harmful effects of social media in Sudan's conflict is by strengthening digital literacy and promoting counter-messaging strategies. Digital literacy empowers users to critically evaluate online

content, recognize misinformation, and resist the manipulation of propaganda and hate speech. Meanwhile, counter-messaging involves creating and amplifying narratives that challenge divisive rhetoric, promote peace, and encourage responsible digital engagement. Together, these approaches form a crucial component of broader efforts to mitigate the negative impact of digital warfare.

A major issue in Sudan's digital landscape is the widespread lack of media literacy among social media users. Many individuals struggle to differentiate between credible sources and misleading content, making them more susceptible to misinformation and propaganda. This challenge is exacerbated by the algorithmic design of social media platforms, which prioritizes emotionally charged and sensationalist content over nuanced and verified information. As a result, users are often drawn into echo chambers where their existing biases are reinforced rather than challenged.

To address the growing challenges of misinformation and harmful digital content, comprehensive educational initiatives should be launched to enhance digital literacy across various sectors of Sudanese society. Schools, universities, and community organizations ought to incorporate digital literacy training into their curricula, equipping young people with the critical thinking skills necessary to assess the reliability of online information (Livingstone et al., 2017). Public awareness campaigns and workshops can further educate citizens on identifying fake news, verifying sources, and understanding how social media algorithms influence the content they encounter (Guess et al., 2020). Moreover, targeted training programs should be developed for journalists, civil society leaders, and activists to ensure that individuals shaping public discourse possess the necessary skills to engage responsibly and ethically in digital environments (UNESCO, 2021). Building these competencies is essential to fostering a more informed and resilient digital public sphere in Sudan.

Alongside digital literacy, counter-messaging strategies are essential for combating hate speech and extremist narratives. Counter-messaging involves crafting alternative narratives that challenge misinformation and divisive rhetoric while promoting unity and reconciliation which need further training for media practitioners. This approach requires collaboration between peace organizations, independent media, and social influencers who can reach large audiences with credible and engaging content.

One effective counter-messaging strategy is the use of storytelling to highlight stories of coexistence and reconciliation and the spread of non-violent peace tactics. By showcasing positive examples of communities overcoming conflict, these narratives serve as antidotes to hate-driven discourse. For instance,

sharing testimonials from individuals who have engaged in interethnic dialogue or former combatants who have chosen peace over violence can help reshape public attitudes. Digital campaigns featuring messages of tolerance, inclusion, and respect for diversity can also serve as powerful counterforces to divisive propaganda.

Art, music, and cultural expression can also be leveraged as part of counter-messaging efforts. In many societies, artistic mediums have been used to promote peace and heal collective wounds. Sudanese artists, musicians, and poets can use their creative platforms to spread messages of unity, challenging the culture of division perpetuated by social media propaganda. Digital spaces such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok can serve as platforms for disseminating cultural expressions that promote coexistence and historical memory.

Another key aspect of counter-messaging is community engagement. Social media should not just be used as a top-down tool for messaging but as a space for interactive discussions that allow users to actively participate in shaping the discourse. Peacebuilding organizations should host live discussions, Q&A sessions, and interactive debates that provide a platform for diverse perspectives to be heard. This participatory approach helps build trust and engagement, making counter-messaging efforts more effective.

However, challenges exist in implementing these strategies effectively. Counter-messaging campaigns often struggle to achieve the same level of visibility as divisive content, as social media algorithms favor sensationalism over moderation. Additionally, activists and peace advocates promoting counter-narratives frequently face online harassment, threats, and suppression from both state and non-state actors. To counter these risks, stronger protection for digital activists, increased support for fact-checking organizations, and partnerships between social media companies and peacebuilding groups are necessary.

In conclusion, strengthening digital literacy and advancing counter-messaging efforts are critical components of mitigating the harmful effects of social media in Sudan's conflict. These strategies empower users to critically engage with online content, resist manipulative narratives, and contribute to a more informed and responsible digital environment. By integrating digital education into broader peacebuilding initiatives and supporting content creators who promote positive messaging, social media can be transformed from a tool of division into an instrument for reconciliation and lasting peace.

## 9. Policy Direction and Implications

The rapid rise of social media as a key battleground in Sudan's April 15 war

presents significant policy challenges that require urgent and coordinated responses. The dual nature of social media as both a tool for spreading hate speech and misinformation and a platform for peace building necessitates a nuanced approach to regulation, digital governance, and counter-messaging strategies. Policymakers must develop targeted interventions that address the misuse of social media while also harnessing its potential for positive engagement. The following key policy implications emerge from this study. This section – under seven headings – provides an overview of the policy directions and implications. A list of policy recommendations can be found in section ten.

## 9.1. Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks for Digital Governance

One of the most pressing policy concerns is the **lack of effective digital governance in Sudan**. The absence of comprehensive regulations has allowed hate speech, incitement to violence, and misinformation to flourish unchecked. While Sudanese authorities have attempted to control online discourse through restrictive measures, such as internet shutdowns and social media bans, these approaches have proven counterproductive, limiting access to vital information and suppressing legitimate digital activism. Instead of broad censorship, policymakers should focus on **targeted regulatory measures** that curb harmful content while protecting freedom of expression.

A well-structured digital governance framework should include **legal definitions and accountability mechanisms** for online hate speech and incitement to violence. There should also be **clear guidelines for content moderation** that align with international human rights standards and **independent oversight bodies** that prevent the misuse of regulations for political repression. Finally, **protections for digital activists and journalists** who expose misinformation and counter hate speech are essential.

To be effective, these regulations should be developed in **consultation with civil society organizations, media professionals, and digital rights advocates** to ensure that they address online harm without stifling free speech. International best practices, such as those developed by the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) which was adopted by European Parliament on July 5, 2022 entered into force on November 16, 2022 provides strict obligations on Very Large Online Search Engines because of their significant influence on the digital ecosystem. (Europa.eu, 2022) or the **African Union's Declaration on Internet Governance**, (African Union, 2018) can serve as models for Sudan's approach to regulating social media.

## 9.2 Engaging Social Media Companies in Conflict-Sensitive Content Moderation

Major social media platforms such as **Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube, and WhatsApp** have been widely used to spread hate speech and misinformation in Sudan. According to the official statistics of Telecommunications and post regulatory authority, there are more than 20,194,655 mobile internet subscriptions in Sudan as of 2022. However, these platforms have been **slow to respond** to digital conflicts in non-Western countries, often failing to enforce their own policies in regions affected by political instability and armed violence.

Given the evidence that **algorithmic biases** contribute to the amplification of inflammatory content, social media companies must take greater responsibility for mitigating their role in Sudan's conflict. Policymakers should push for **localized content moderation** that includes **Sudanese dialects and languages**, ensuring that AI-based moderation tools can effectively detect hate speech in its various forms. They should also push for the **expansion of human moderation teams** with expertise in Sudan's socio-political landscape, preventing harmful content from slipping through automated filters. **Greater transparency in moderation decisions**, ensuring that takedown policies do not disproportionately target marginalized groups or suppress legitimate political discourse is needed. Finally, **stronger measures against coordinated disinformation campaigns**, including removing bot networks and state-sponsored propaganda accounts, would help to moderate content in an ongoing situation.

Governments and regional organizations like the **African Union and the United Nations** should advocate for **formalized partnerships between tech companies and Sudanese civil society groups**, ensuring that local perspectives shape the enforcement of digital policies.

## 9.3 Addressing the Role of External Actors in Sudan's Digital Conflict

The study reveals that Sudan's online conflict is influenced by external actors, including foreign intelligence agencies, diaspora groups, and international advocacy networks. While some foreign involvement is aimed at humanitarian awareness and diplomatic engagement, other actors deliberately fuel misinformation, support militant factions, or manipulate social media algorithms to push certain agendas. Some foreign entities engage in **coordinated disinformation campaigns**, manipulating social media algorithms to push certain narratives or incite tensions. Others use Sudan's digital landscape as a proxy battleground for geopolitical influence, further complicating efforts to de-escalate online hostilities. Policymakers must address this issue by advocating for **greater transparency in**

**foreign-sponsored digital campaigns**, ensuring that international actors are held accountable for spreading misleading content. It is also crucial to strengthen **cybersecurity measures** to prevent external interference in Sudanese online discourse. This can be done by working with **tech and social media companies to track and limit foreign manipulation of Sudan's digital space**, preventing external groups from exploiting Sudan's online conflict for political or economic gain.

While some external involvement - such as humanitarian awareness campaigns and diplomatic engagement - is constructive, unchecked **digital interference** from foreign actors can further destabilize Sudan's fragile political environment.

#### 9.4 Enhancing International Cooperation in Monitoring Online Conflict

Sudan's digital conflict is not an isolated issue but part of a broader trend where social media is used to influence civil unrest, political conflicts, and ethnic divisions. Given this, **international cooperation is essential** in monitoring and addressing the digital dimensions of Sudan's war. Organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, and tech policy institutions should collaborate to establish best practices for monitoring social media manipulation in conflict zones. This could be done through the creation of **regional task forces** dedicated to tracking and countering online hate speech and disinformation. Another important development could be to establish **information-sharing mechanisms** between governments, NGOs, and social media companies to detect and mitigate harmful online campaigns. Developing **early warning systems** that flag rising online tensions before they escalate into real-world violence is also crucial. By integrating Sudan's digital governance efforts into broader **regional and global strategies**, policymakers can leverage international expertise and resources to mitigate the negative impact of social media on conflict dynamics.

#### 9.5 Promoting Digital Literacy and Counter-Messaging Initiatives

The study's findings highlight the **urgent need for digital literacy programs** to equip Sudanese citizens with the skills to critically engage with online content. The rapid spread of misinformation and hate speech is exacerbated by **low media literacy levels**, making many users vulnerable to manipulation by propaganda campaigns and extremist rhetoric.

To address this, policymakers should **integrate digital literacy education into school and university curricula**, teaching students how to critically assess online sources, verify information, understand how algorithms shape their online

experience, and recognize manipulated content. They could also **launch nationwide public awareness campaigns** to educate social media users about the dangers of misinformation and the role of algorithms in shaping online interactions. To do this, policymakers should **collaborate with community-based organizations** to develop training workshops for journalists, activists, and media professionals on countering online hate speech.

Additionally, **counter-messaging initiatives** should be supported to proactively challenge the narratives of hate speech and misinformation. Governments, international organizations, and tech companies should work with civil society groups to **develop peace-oriented social media campaigns**, using **influencers, religious leaders, and community figures** to promote messages of unity and coexistence. Policymakers should **encourage cultural and artistic content** - such as poetry, storytelling, and music - that challenge divisive narratives and fosters social cohesion. By funding grassroots organizations that develop social media content aimed at fostering unity and reconciliation, policymakers could **support independent media initiatives** that provide fact-based reporting to counter propaganda and disinformation.

## 9.6 Developing Long-Term Digital Peacebuilding Strategies

Despite the harmful effects of social media in Sudan's conflict, digital platforms also offer **unique opportunities for peacebuilding and reconciliation**. To harness this potential, policymakers should **support online peace dialogues** that bring together opposing factions to discuss grievances and explore conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, they should **encourage Sudanese influencers, religious leaders, and civil society actors** to use social media for peace-oriented messaging. Finally, there needs to be **investment in digital storytelling initiatives** that highlight personal experiences of reconciliation, coexistence, and resilience.

By **integrating digital peacebuilding into broader conflict resolution efforts**, policymakers can help transform Sudan's digital landscape from a space of division into a platform for meaningful dialogue and healing.

## 9.7 Developing Digital Peacebuilding Strategies

Despite the harmful effects of social media in Sudan's conflict, digital platforms also offer opportunities for **peacebuilding and reconciliation**. Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should integrate digital peacebuilding strategies into broader conflict resolution efforts. This could involve supporting **virtual dialogues** that bring together opposing factions to discuss grievances and seek common ground. Additionally, they could encourage **local**

**influencers and community leaders** to use social media for peace messaging. Finally, developing **online educational campaigns** that emphasize conflict resolution, tolerance, and co-existence would be critical in these efforts.

## 10. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings and policy implications, the following recommendations are proposed to address the role of social media in Sudan's conflict and enhance its potential as a tool for peacebuilding:

### 10.1. Strengthening Digital Regulation and Governance

- Develop a clear and balanced regulatory framework that combats online hate speech and disinformation while protecting freedom of expression.
- Establish an independent oversight body to ensure digital governance policies are implemented fairly and transparently.
- Collaborate with international organizations to align Sudan's digital policies with global best practices for conflict-sensitive content moderation.

### 10.2. Enhancing Social Media Platform Accountability

- Work with major social media companies to improve content moderation in Sudanese languages and dialects.
- Advocate for transparency in algorithmic decisions that amplify or suppress content in conflict settings.
- Encourage tech firms to support digital literacy and counter-messaging initiatives by funding grassroots organizations.

### 10.3. Promoting Digital Literacy and Counter-Messaging Initiatives

- Integrate digital literacy programs into educational institutions to help individuals critically assess online information.
- Support community-based initiatives that promote peace narratives and fact-based discourse.
- Empower civil society groups to create engaging, culturally relevant counter-speech content that challenges misinformation and extremist rhetoric.

### 10.4. Strengthening International Cooperation and Cybersecurity

- Establish regional collaborations to monitor and address cross-border digital threats influencing Sudan's conflict.

- Increase cooperation with global cybersecurity institutions to detect and combat foreign digital interference.
- Encourage diplomatic engagement to prevent the exploitation of Sudan's digital space for geopolitical conflicts.

## 10.5. Leveraging Social Media for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

- Support online initiatives that encourage intergroup dialogue and conflict resolution.
- Invest in social media-based storytelling campaigns that highlight stories of coexistence and resilience.
- Promote partnerships between peace organizations and digital influencers to spread messages of unity and tolerance.

These recommendations provide a structured approach to mitigating the negative impacts of social media on Sudan's conflict while leveraging its potential for peace and reconciliation. Implementation will require collaboration among government authorities, social media platforms, international organizations, and civil society actors to ensure sustainable and impactful digital interventions.

## 11. Conclusion:

This study offers a pioneering analysis of social media's role in Sudan's conflict landscape, uniquely integrating qualitative mixed-methods—content analysis, trend analysis, and stakeholder interviews—to examine the interplay of hate speech and peacebuilding post-April 15 2023. By focusing on Sudan-specific digital dynamics, it fills a critical gap in research on digital warfare in non-Western contexts, demonstrating how platforms serve as both enablers of division and tools for reconciliation. The findings highlight the urgent need for regulatory interventions to curb misinformation and hate speech while protecting freedom of expression.

The role of social media in Sudan's conflict landscape is a complex and evolving phenomenon that reflects broader trends in digital warfare, misinformation, and online mobilization. This study has demonstrated that social media functions both as an instrument for inciting violence and spreading misinformation, and as a tool for countering hate speech, facilitating peacebuilding, and promoting dialogue. The findings emphasize that while digital platforms have been widely exploited by conflict actors to amplify divisive narratives, they also offer opportunities for civil society organizations, activists, and policymakers to push back against harmful rhetoric and foster digital resilience.

A key takeaway from this research is the **urgent need for regulatory**

**interventions** that address the spread of misinformation and hate speech while protecting freedom of expression. Existing gaps in digital governance in Sudan have allowed social media to be weaponized by both state and non-state actors, contributing to political instability and violence. Strengthening digital regulations through transparent, well-structured policies can help curb the misuse of online platforms without infringing on fundamental rights.

Furthermore, the study underscores the **responsibility of social media companies** in mitigating online harm. The delayed response of major tech firms to digital conflicts in non-Western regions has allowed hate speech and propaganda to flourish. Improved content moderation, AI-driven hate speech detection tools, and partnerships with local organizations can help ensure that Sudan's digital landscape is not dominated by harmful narratives.

Equally important is the **role of digital literacy and counter-messaging initiatives** in shaping public discourse. Education programs that equip Sudanese citizens with the ability to critically assess online information can help reduce susceptibility to misinformation. Additionally, counter-speech campaigns led by trusted local voices including religious leaders, community influencers, and peace activists can provide alternative narratives that challenge online extremism. A list of influential social media pages, people, and websites are attached as Appendix, those can contribute to the media literacy on hate speech and other malpractices.

This study also highlights the need for **international cooperation** in monitoring and addressing digital threats in conflict zones. Cross-border collaborations between governments, tech firms, and international organizations can enhance efforts to detect and disrupt coordinated disinformation campaigns, prevent foreign manipulation of Sudan's online space, and support localized peace initiatives.

While social media has been a significant driver of Sudan's conflict, this research demonstrates that it can also be repurposed as a tool for peace. By integrating digital peacebuilding strategies with regulatory measures and literacy programs, stakeholders can transform Sudan's digital landscape from one of division and violence into a space for constructive dialogue and reconciliation. Moving forward, continued research and policy innovation will be essential in ensuring that digital technologies serve as catalysts for stability rather than instruments of conflict.

Social media has transformed Sudan's conflict landscape, serving both as an enabler of division and a potential tool for peace. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive digital governance policies, increased investment in digital literacy, and stronger collaboration between stakeholders to create safer online spaces.

Moving forward, an interdisciplinary approach that balances security measures with the protection of civil liberties will be crucial in shaping Sudan's digital future.

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## Appendix 1.

Social Media Classification July 2024 by Sudanese Journalists Syndicate released during Sudanese Media Issues Conference. Cairo/Egypt Spt. 29-Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>. 2024. Available online <http://www.facebook.com/share/p/167SiHgEA3/> in Arabic

### **High Rank Websites for Sudan News**

**1. www.sudanakhbar.com**

**Sudan News on Facebook**

[./https://m.facebook.com/sudanakhbar](https://m.facebook.com/sudanakhbar)

**3. Alrakoba Electronic Newspaper**

[Alrakoba.net](http://Alrakoba.net)

**4. Altaghyeer Electronic Newspaper**

[www.altaghyeer.info](http://www.altaghyeer.info)

**5. Sudan News on Twitter (X)**

[@Sudan\\_news12@](https://twitter.com/Sudan_news12)

**6. AsharqNews-Sudan**

<https://m.facebook.com/AsharqNewsSUD>

**7. Tasamuh News**

<https://tasamuhnews.com>

**8. SudaNews**

[Suda.news](http://Suda.news)

**9. Sudanese News on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@SudaneseNews>

**10. Tagpress**

[Tagpress.net](http://Tagpress.net)

**11. Sudanese Newspapers Headlines on Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.phpid=100069049780156>

**12. Dabanga Sudan**

[Dabangasudan.org](http://Dabangasudan.org)

**13. Sudan Tribune**

[Sudantribune.net](http://Sudantribune.net)

**14. Alrid Net**

[/https://alrid.net](https://alrid.net)

**15. Nabd El Sudan**

[Nabdsudan.net](http://Nabdsudan.net)

**16. Almashhad El Sudani**

[Almashhadalsudani.com](http://Almashhadalsudani.com)

**17. Alahd Online**

[/https://alahdonline.net](https://alahdonline.net)

**18. Tayba Channel on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/channel/UCXzqL0tyxeTd01QgLOTdekA>

**19. Sudan Today**

[Alsudantoday.com](http://Alsudantoday.com)

**20. Rasha El Rasheed on Instagram**

[rasha\\_alrashid@](mailto:rasha_alrashid@)

**21. Sudan News Agency**

[Suna-sd.net](http://Suna-sd.net)

**22. Alnilin . Com**

[Alnilin.com](http://Alnilin.com)

**23. Alsudani Newspaper Online**

[Alsudaninews.com](http://Alsudaninews.com)

**24. Baj News**

[Bajnews.net](http://Bajnews.net)

**25. Sudanile News**

[Sudanile.com](http://Sudanile.com)

**26. Sudan Aray**

[Sudaray.com](http://Sudaray.com)

**27. Tasamuh News**

[Tasamuhnews.com](http://Tasamuhnews.com)

**28. <https://alakhbar-alsudan.com/?p=14805>**

**29. New Vision on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@NewVisionSD>

**29. Yousra Elbagir on Twitter**

[YousraElbagir@](mailto:YousraElbagir@)

**30. Sudan Times on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%B2%>

**31. Thwar Channel on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@thwarchannel>

**32. Sudan News Briefing on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@sud20>

**33. Alzool on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@alzoolsd>

**34. Sudan Events on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@Sudanevent>

**35. Ozone on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%86>

**36. Sudan News on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86>

**37. MSHAELEN on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@MSHAELETV>

**38. Naji Mustafa on YouTube**

<https://m.youtube.com/@user-cv9cn7vs5p>

### 39. El Inssirafi on YouTube

<https://m.youtube.com/@%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%B1>

### **2. Most Popular Websites" last update 31 Oct 2021"**

#### **1. youtube.com**

151.8 M (Total monthly visit)

#### **2. Facebook.com**

(79.36 M)

#### **3. Twitter.com**

( 26.46 M)

#### **4. whatsapp.com**

(15.38 M)

#### **5. Live.com**

(13.06 M)

#### **6. Tiktok.com**

(12.39 M)

#### **7. MSN.Com**

(7.23 M)

#### **8. opensooq.com**

(6.34 M)

#### **9. onmarshtompor.com**

(5.28 M)

#### **10. microsoft.com**

(5.22 M)

#### **11. t.me**

(5.09 M)

#### **12. pinterest.com**

(3.97 M)

#### **13. aliexpress.com**

(3.56 M)

#### **14. skynewsarabia.com**

(3.53 M)

#### **15. github.com**

(3.27 M)

#### **16. gameforge.com**

(2.87 M)

#### **17. Sudanakhbar.com**

(2.7 M)

#### **18. suna-sd.net**

(2.11 M)

#### **19. thaqfny.com**

(2.07 M)

**20.doubleclick.net**

(2.06 M)

**21.rt.com**

(2.03 M)

**22.haraj.com.sa**

(1.66 M)

**23.subscene.com**

(1.56 M)

**24.argaam.com**

(1.56 M)

**25.islamweb.net**

(1.55 M)

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