Article

Digitizing Community Building and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Communities: A Case of *#Let'sTalkUganda* in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This research examines the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs; social media) as a tool that fosters community building and reconciliation in post-conflict regions, in particular Northern Uganda. Using Twitter data collected over 27 months (12 June 2016–9 September 2018), we found that information technology (IT) increased social actors' (Justice and Reconciliation Project [JRP]-Uganda) advocacy for transitional justice in post-conflict communities. Interview findings evidenced the effectiveness of using social media (SM) to connect post-conflict communities to share and discuss reconciliatory ideas. This study connotes that well-thought-out SM use by social actors to share information used in resolving conflict results in socio-political stability and harmonious coexistence.

Keywords

ICTs, reconciliation and community building, post-conflict societies, LRA and Northern Uganda

Introduction

Existing studies on the use of information technologies (ITs) evidence their effectiveness in fostering socio-political activities globally (Kasadha, 2020; Skoric & Zhu, 2016). In Africa, the region characterized by political instability, IT is currently the fastest growing sector and digital media use is rapidly expanding (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2012; Kasadha, 2018). Yet, there are relatively few studies that examine IT use in fostering reconciliation in post-conflict communities in Africa.

This study, examining how Africa's increased online engagement may foster reconciliatory processes in post-conflict communities, relies on the premise that digital media use will lead to collective online deliberations (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005). Such deliberations are expected to be balanced, informed, conscientious, substantive, and comprehensive (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005). As a result, post-conflict communities can thoughtfully discuss issues affecting them at both individual and collective (organizational) levels.

Based on theoretical assumptions of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), post-conflict communities can share and discuss ideas that result in collective actions such as community (re)building and reconciliation. This study aims to contribute to scholarly understanding of how new technologies, in particular, social media (SM) (a) increase citizens' involvement in discussing reconciliatory messages in post-conflict communities; (b) shape social actors' influence in reconciliation and community building through connection; and (c) increase citizens' willingness to engage in deliberations about reconciliation in post-conflict communities. These processes take place at both individual or organizational levels, as SM users become social actors in community building and reconciliation.

According to Bennett and Segerberg (2012), SM users choose to form and adopt self-changing social identities in which they personalize action frames to realize a common cause. The personalization of action frames by both individual and organizational users results in the creation of social actors. Following Burt (1992, 2005), it is expected that these social actors form and establish influential positions in the local networks where they then help connect other actors that would otherwise remain unconnected. In this study, social

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actors are identified as individuals and organizations that use SM platforms as socialization tools (White, 2010) to connect and engage citizens across ethnic and tribal divides and help them engage in sharing and discussion of reconciliatory messages in the context of Northern Uganda's post-conflict community.

Northern Uganda Conflicts, Social Actors, and Reconciliation Initiatives

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP-Uganda), a not-for-profit organization, was founded in Northern Uganda in 2005 as a partnership between the Gulu District NGO Forum (GDNF), the Liu Institute for Global Issues (LIGI), and the University of British Columbia (UBC). The established JRP-Uganda works with and engages local communities in Northern Uganda to document traditional justice practices and contribute to national and global debates on reconciliation in post-conflict societies. In particular, JRP-Uganda promotes dialogue and conflict resolution through digital interactions in a campaign dubbed *#Let'sTalkUganda* (Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2018b). The campaign enabled JRP-Uganda to advocate for transitional justice and forgiveness for and among victims of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war.

The two-decade LRA war led by Joseph Kony inflicted suffering, torture, and displacement to different communities in Northern Uganda (Saucier et al., 2009). Hundreds of thousands were displaced (Uganda Radio Network, 2008), more than a 100,00 killed, and 60,000 children were abducted (AFP, 2018c; Smith, 2015). After the war, several reconciliatory programs were initiated by both individual activists and civic organizations, advocating that LRA war victims and perpetrators have to try forgiving each other (McLaughlin, 2006) and attempt to (re)build trust (Smyth & Best, 2013).

In Northern Uganda, several organizations have used SM platforms to initiate reconciliatory processes, including the International Criminal Court (ICC); Refugee Law Project (empowering asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, refugees, host communities, and deportees to enjoy their rights and lead respectable lives in Uganda); International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), NTV-Uganda (a national television broadcaster); the Justice, Law & Order Sector-Uganda (JLOS-Uganda), which ensures people in Uganda live in a safe and just society; FIDA-Uganda (Uganda Association of Women Lawyers) that aims at advocacy and law reform to empower and improve the status of women and children; and finally the United Nations (UN).

The above organizations have used their Twitter accounts to share ideas aimed at advocating justice (reconciliation) for victims of the LRA conflict in Northern Uganda. These organizations acted as bridges promoting information access, information sharing, and deliberations aimed at community building and reconciliation. Theoretically, bridges in a network enable a positioned social actor (individual or organization using SM platforms) to access and control information resource brokerage (Burt, 1992). These social actors are able to connect the disconnected based on their attractive relationship patterns, structural positions, and other advantages (Burt, 1992). Therefore, in rebuilding the once war-torn Northern Uganda, social actors such as JRP-Uganda act as bridges helping efforts geared toward reconciliation.

More specifically, JRP-Uganda acted as a bridge connecting different SM users at individual and organizational levels. For instance, the organization generated and shared talking points for digitally connected Ugandans through its Twitter account, and provided live feeds from affected communities and from those that suffered the LRA war atrocities.

The JRP-Uganda's #LetsTalkUganda Campaign

The 2016 campaign dubbed *#Let'sTalkUganda* engaged people of Northern Uganda in dialogue on issues faced by post-conflict societies to initiate and promote reconciliatory measures. The campaign was started after the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) successfully advocated truth-seeking, reparations, and formal criminal and civil measures against perpetrators of human rights violations such as Dominic Ongwen (ICC-CPI-20,170,717-PR1323, 2017; Kasande & Meritxell, 2015).

After the criminal charges against indicted warlords were formalized, JRP-Uganda started the *#Let'sTalkUganda* to engage communities in Northern Uganda, sharing evidence-based stories on the atrocities committed during the LRA war (Ladisch, 2015). The formalized charges against the LRA warlords, in particular, Dominic Ongwen fostered reconciliation through which social actors advocated material and symbolic reparations for the affected communities in Northern Uganda (Otim & Kasande, 2015). The affected communities shared, discussed, and engaged the rest of the world on the LRA committed atrocities using the *#Let'sTalkUganda* campaign. The campaign supported digital interactions and storytelling among the affected individuals' communities who sought justice, reparations, and above all reconciliation (Kasande & Meritxell, 2015; Otim & Kasande, 2015).

Although other digital platforms were also utilized in the campaign, this study primarily looks at *#Let'sTalkUganda* Twitter interactions aimed at fostering reconciliation and community building in Northern Uganda.

Literature Review

Reconciliation and SM Use

The term reconciliation remains a broad concept among scholars globally. In South Africa, Gibson (2006) defined reconciliation as the citizens' ability to reject interracial stereotypes and prejudice. Whereas among the Nepalians

reconciliation offered reparation (Adhikari et al., 2012), in Peru, reconciliation was defined as a multidimensional approach. The multidimensional approach embraced an individual's beliefs: members of a community with one another, between communities or states, between the individual and his or her gods, and between civil society sectors and the state (Theidon, 2006).

Reconciliation also encompasses the idea of transitional justice, which is characterized by truth-telling processes and institutional reforms as evidenced in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide (Brounéus, 2010; National Service of Gacaca Courts in Rwanda, 2006; Ingelaere, 2008). In theorizing transitional justice, Buckley-Zistel et al. (2014) deduced it as a concept centered on dealing with the aftermath of violent conflict or dictatorial regimes. Transitional justice is also characterized by processes that transform the incompatible relations between the parties to the conflict and build sustainable peace, and pay attention to the psychosocial processes, socioeconomic conditions, and political contexts (Lambourne, 2014). In particular, processes that support both direct and indirect interactions between former enemies during which as many of the conditional and contextual conditions of positive contact as possible can be met (Aiken, 2014).

A number of studies have examined the role of digital platforms as effective platforms for civic activism (Kasadha, 2018, 2020; Skoric & Zhu, 2016); however, there are relatively few studies that examine the use of digital media as tools for promoting reconciliation in post-conflict communities.

SM are effective platforms for information sharing and campaigning (Yamamoto et al., 2018) and they can provide post-conflict communities with new opportunities for interaction across ethnic and tribal divides and help citizens engage in sharing and discussions of reconciliatory messages. For instance, in Serbia, Croatia, and Cyprus, digital interactions between members of ethnic groups helped reduce intergroup prejudice (Zezelj et al., 2017). In the context of Africa, digital interactions have been shown to help reduce prejudice (Best et al., 2011; Smyth & Best, 2013).

In Uganda, individual activists and civic organizations initiated numerous reconciliatory programs advocating that LRA war victims and perpetrators have to try forgiving each other (McLaughlin, 2006) and attempt to (re)build trust (Smyth & Best, 2013). As Zezelj et al. (2017) explain, online interactions reduce prejudice compared to face-face interactions and promote social harmony (Davison, 2017). Given that, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: SM interactions will increase citizens' involvement in discussing reconciliatory messages in post-conflict communities.

The use of SM in conflict resolution still faces challenges that generally stem from the user-side rather than from

technologies, and it is thus important to determine whether these platforms bridge the divides, or actually create them (United States Institute of Peace, 2011). A number of studies have shown that digital media enable their users to share knowledge and ideas on different conflict prevention methods (Oatley, 2011). For example, in Kenya and Nigeria, SM supported information crowdsourcing in conflict-prone areas as part of conflict prevention measures (Best, 2013; Smyth et al., 2013).

In the context of this study, the aforementioned organizations generated talking points for digitally connected Ugandans through their Twitter accounts, and shared live feeds from affected communities and from those that suffered the LRA war atrocities. These actions are expected to foster social capital and improve psychological wellbeing among citizens, and thus aid the post-conflict recovery (Baytiyeh, 2019). Therefore, the use of SM at either organizational or individual level enables users to act as intermediaries in resolving or lessening an existing or emerging conflict. Thus:

H2: SM use will improve social actors' influence among post-conflict communities.

As a result of digital connectedness, organizations can influence the discussion of issues which either escalate or deescalate a conflict (Converse, 2000). This is based on the assertion that organizational authority relations and status play vital roles in diffusing a conflict and reconciling any aggrieved parties or groups within a society (Fiske, 2010). Existing studies (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Wright, 2009) evidence that enriched relationships between or among conflicting groups enhance interpersonal relationships that boost efforts of reconciliation. In particular, the established relational contact that reduces bias between the most popular and the least popular members of a group. Acording to Whitley and Kite (2010), relational contact deescalates a conflict and enables conflicting parties to reach a point of shared commonality.

The shared commonality leads to collective online deliberations (Fishkin et al., 2005) through which post-conflict communities are able to connect and engage in deliberatave discussions and processes. For example, using digital platforms to monitor and evaluate different peace-building initiatives increased levels of literateness and leadership relations (Költzow, 2013). Consequently, high-status groups using SM platforms can influence sharing of reconciliatory messages that bring together the conflicting parties to deliberate upon and resolve existing or emerging conflicts.

In Northern Uganda, individuals and communities that identified strongly with their own group were more sensitive to threats to their distinctiveness or to the value of their group's identity (Voci, 2006). However, through digital interactions, communities that once lost their identities as a result of conflict learn their shared identity, and connect and

reconcile through institutional interventions (Spears et al., 1997). Institutional interventions help to deescalate or avoid occurrence of conflicts (Jetten et al., 2004).

Interventions aimed at resolving or lessening conflicts are designed to involve discussions and ruminations (Fishkin et al., 2005). These are based on five considerations. These include being knowledgeable, which was supported with accurate claims, balanced to accommodate those with contradictory views willing to listen and discuss among each other in a civil and respectful manner (referred to as a conscientious approach) substantiveness, which considered the merits, not how they are made or who made them, and finally, comprehensiveness in which all ideas shared by the community were equally shared. It is assumed that with the help of SM platforms, aforementioned deliberation considerations would be easier to achieve. It is thus proposed that:

> H3: SM use increases citizens' willingness to engage in talk about reconciliation in post-conflict communities?

SM Use in Uganda

Similar to other countries, citizens in Uganda use SM platforms for political activism (Kasadha, 2020; Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2020) and community mobilization (Kasadha, 2018). Although SM platforms have been accused of promoting political polarizations in the United States (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) and destabilizing political situation in Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan (Aday et al., 2012; Bior, 2019; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), they also have been used to reinvigorate youth participation in Australia and New Zealand (Macnamara et al., 2012).

In Uganda, citizens use SM platforms to hold the government accountable for its election campaign promises (Kasadha, 2018) and increase their involvement in political activities such as persuading others to vote (Kasadha, 2020). The increased use of SM for political-related activities is the result of an expanding internet penetration in the country. According to the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2017), the current penetration rate stands at 61.7%.

The proliferation of the internet has helped Northern Ugandans to digitally connect and engage in reconciliatory initiatives coming from different not-for-profit organizations, such as JRP-Uganda. In context of this study, JRP-Uganda generated talking points for digitally connected Ugandans through its Twitter account, and shared live feeds from affected communities. The use of Twitter facilitated digital connectivity and interactions aimed at reconciling the once war-ravaged Northern Uganda through a campaign dubbed #*Let'sTalkUganda*.

Social Network Analysis

The sharing and discussion of reconciliatory initiatives largely happened on Twitter, including the JRP-Uganda's #*Let'sTalkUganda* campaign. In context of this study, the campaign discussions generated Twitter data resulting from online interactions in which citizens shared stories of war atrocities and sought redress through collective actions at either individual or organization levels (Bennett et al., 2012).

For this study, NodeXL was used to collect, analyze, and visualize Twitter data. To harvest the tweets, a Boolean search query was conducted using a set of selected words (M. Smith et al., 2010). The query searched for words that evidenced discussion on different aspects of reconciliation such as transitional justice, human rights, justice, and reparation. An extended analysis was done to ensure that a second pass on the collected harvested tweets captured all retweets and all retweeted IDs were correct.

The tweets were then clustered using Clauset–Newman–Moore, a mathematical algorithm that assigns nodes (identified SM users) to subgroups of more connected user groups within the network (Clauset et al., 2004). The data were further analyzed using words and the word-pairs approach to identify the different sub-conversations the different groupings shared on the platform. The betweenness centrality of the words explain how given words were used in the discussions. These wordings were later used in discussing the implication of SM platforms in reconciliation and community building. These included,

> #transitionaljustice OR #Ongwen OR #DominicOngwen OR #Ongwentrial OR @IntlCrimCourt-@ICC OR @JRP_Uganda OR #LRAviolence OR "LetsTalkUganda" OR "Transitional justice in Northern Uganda" OR #ThomasKwoyelo OR "Northern Uganda conflict" OR #NorthernUganda OR #Abok OR #Lukodi OR #justicematters.

Theoretical Framework

Espoused on theoretical assumptions of connectivity and collectivity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), we assume that the use of digital platforms in post-conflict Northern Uganda will foster collective actions of community building and reconciliation. According to Bennett et al. (2012), digitally connected actions will help the realization of common goals, in particular, reconciliation and community building. SM users at both individual and organizational levels, made difficult choices to form and adopt self-changing social identities on which they based their personalized action frames to realize a common cause, a reconciliation in post-conflict Northern Uganda.

Theoretically, this study contributes to scholarly understanding of how digital connectivity promote reconciliatory processes in post-conflict communities through sharing and discussing ideas that result in collective actions that are balanced, informed, conscientious, substantive, and comprehensive (Fishkin et al., 2005). This study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge on how organizations can effectively bridge and connect both the connected and

unconnected into taking part in reconciliatory initiatives at both the individual and organizational levels.

Method

The data for this study were collected in two separate phases. The first stage involved collecting data derived from the *#LetsTalkUganda* campaign from Twitter. The Twitter data for 27 months (June 12, 2016 to September 9, 2018) were harvested, analyzed, interpreted, and visualized using NodeXL. The selected period constitutes dates in which (a) ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen was started and (b) the *#LetsTalkUganda* campaign was promulgated to engage communities in Northern Uganda on the ongoing ICC trials and in reconciliatory processes.

In the second phase the researcher interviewed policymakers, not-for-profit organizations, and individual SM users regarding the impact of *#LetsTalkUganda*. A total of 21 participants were interviewed. Identities of those interviewed were not disclosed, unless they were policymakers whose views were already known to the public through the country's different media reports. Interviewees associated with the Justice and Reconciliation Project were identified as JRP-Uganda. Concealment of respondent identities was done to protect them from any government "arrests" or intimidation after the study.

The second phase was conducted for a period of 7 days (July 23–29, 2018) in three selected districts of Northern Uganda. In particular, Yumbe district, a home to the world's largest refugee settlement area (Barker, 2017; Pilling, 2017); Gulu and Lira districts, respectively. Interviewed participants were selected via snowball technique among acquaintances in Uganda who provided contact details and helped in arranging for interview meetings. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted for about 45 min. Participants were not compensated for taking part in the study.

Findings and Discussion

First Phase: SM Analysis

The study first analyzed the total number of users/nodes (N) that were present in the harvested data's general metrics. A total $N = 1,625$ users were present; interconnectedness of users at 0.00103 and modularity (Q) evidencing the separation of clusters at $Q = 0.681$. Modularity measured the strength of community partition by considering the degree distribution to determine the interconnectedness among different SM users, especially aforementioned organizations (identified as social actors). The interconnectedness and modularity evidence that the use of Twitter platform in the *#Let'sTalkUganda* enabled SM users to engage in discussions about reconciliation such as advocacy for justice and transitional justice during the International Criminal Court trial of Dominic Ongwen.

H1 stated that SM interactions will increase citizens' involvement in discussing reconciliatory messages in post-conflict communities was tested through a semantic network analysis. The analysis helped in mapping the relationships between concepts created using word pairs from the edge sheet of the clustered data. Findings show that online interactions evidenced the possibility of users to interact or share words attributable to reconciliation. The wordings such as LRA, transitional justice, justice, human rights, rights, ICC and JRP-Uganda were observed in the analyzed data. High level of betweenness centrality of the most commonly used wordings that evidence the differences in group discussions were observed. This is based on the type and nature of tweets organizational users posted. The wordings in a tweet shaped and guided the type of discussions that henceforth followed among SM users as shown in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, SM users were engaged in discussions related to aspects of transitional justice in the form of legal and other measures aimed at redressing occurrences of human rights violations such as truth-seeking commissions, compensation programs and criminal trials. The discussions depended on the type of tweets posted. Through its live feeds, JRP-Uganda posted a tweet that evidenced community forgiveness to war crime perpetrators such as Dominic Ongwen whereas NTV-Uganda's tweet showed the need the establishment of a peace and reconciliation commission. The semantic network analysis captured different wordings used in the aforementioned tweets (see Figure 1) to determine whether citizens' involvement was shaped or guided based on SM interactions posted in the tweets.

According to Himelboim et al. (2013), the betweenness centrality defined the number of connections in the network. They further connote that higher levels of betweenness centrality evidenced increased chances for the SM user to be more connected and impactful in shaping what others did or said. Therefore, the higher the betweenness centrality of a word in a discussion evidenced that such words formed or were part of the discussions across different Twitter sub-conversations. In the case of discussions about reconciliation in post-conflict communities in the Northern region of Uganda; transitional justice, an identified variable for reconciliation, was highly used with the highest level of betweenness centrality at 1,856,524.389. This indicates that Twitter users shared and discussed ideas related to transitional justice, an earlier mentioned reconciliation variable.

The findings show that other commonly used wordings that shaped discussions were ICC, justice matters, justice, Uganda, Ongwen, victims, ICTJ, human rights, criminals, LRA, rights, perpetrators and JRP-Uganda, as shown in Table 1. Therefore, H1 that SM interactions would increase citizens' involvement in discussing reconciliatory messages in post-conflict communities was supported by the available data. Especially, words such as justice matters, justice, victims, human rights, LRA all evidence the need for reconciliation in the post-conflict Northern Uganda
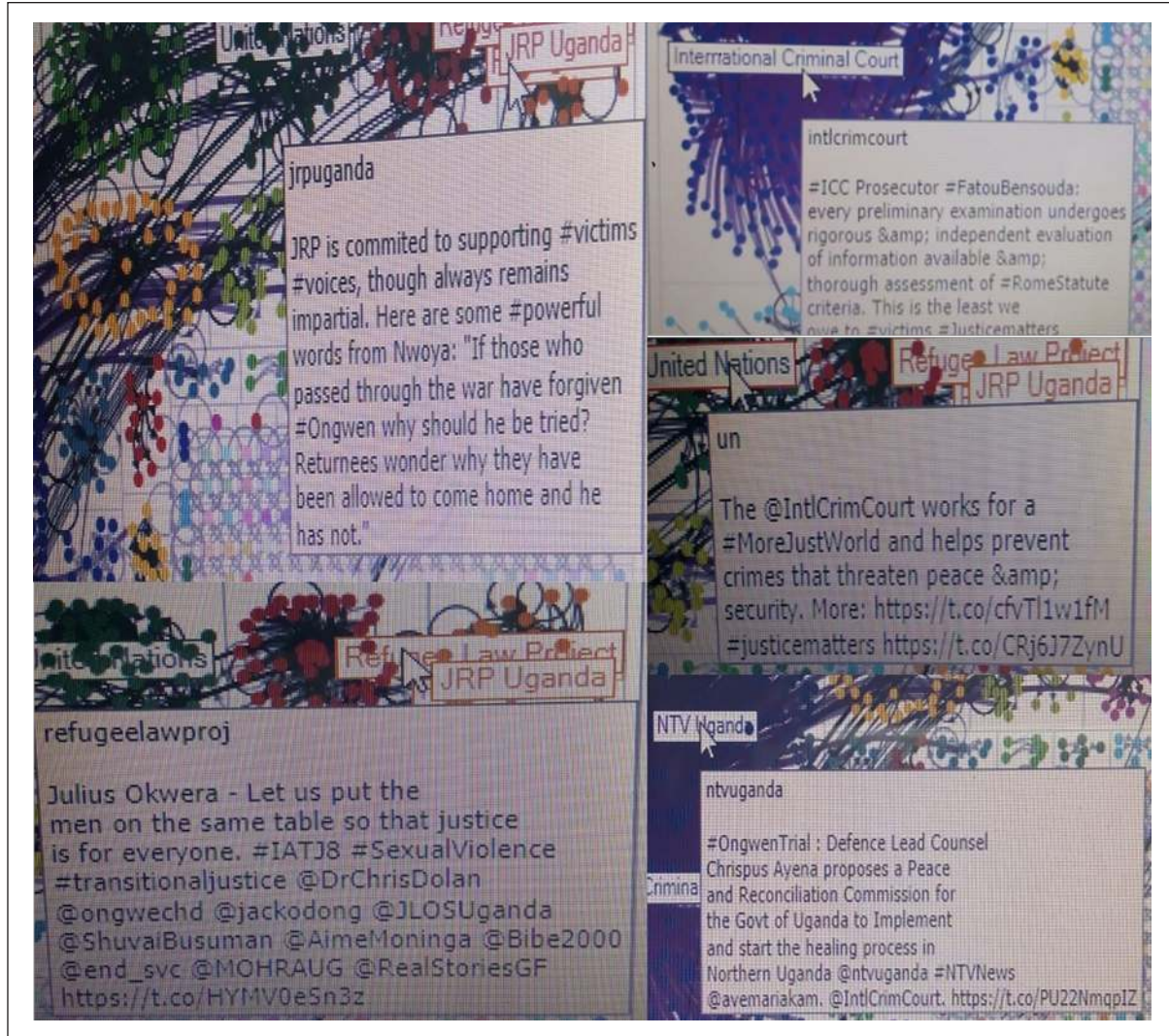
Figure 1. Some of the tweets posted by the different organizations (social actors) operating in Northern Uganda during the campaign period June 12, 2016–September 9, 2018. On the left are tweets from the JRP-Uganda and Refugee Law Project. On the right are tweets from the International Criminal Court, UN & NTV-Uganda.

based on the sub-conversations users engaged in (see Figure 2).

As shown in Figure 2, discussions were shaped by the sub-conversations observed in each and across the different groupings. In group one, discussions evidenced citizens' sub-conversations consisted of discussions on the need for transitional justice. In other group sub-conversations citizens discussed different aspects related to efforts aimed at reconciliation and community (re)building post-conflict Northern Uganda. Observed sub-group conversations were themed on wordings such as criminal, ICC, rights, LRA, Ongwen, perpetrators and discussions about Uganda.

H2, which stated that SM use will improve social actors' influence among post-conflict communities, was measured using SM data collected from the Justice and Reconciliation Project's (JRP-Uganda) campaign *#LetsTalkUganda*. To

measure how using digital means contributed to or supported a social actor's influence in reconciliatory initiatives in post-conflict Northern Uganda, their betweenness centrality was considered. SM users (social actors) that registered a higher betweenness centrality signified that their influence toward reconciliation was supported by their being digitally connected to the targeted audiences (SM users), in this case the post-conflict communities. Scholars (Clauset et al., 2004; Himelboim et al., 2013, 2014) deduce that the more SM users depended on a social actor such as JRP-Uganda to make connections with others, the more it increased an actor's betweenness centrality value. Using Clauset–Newman–Moore algorithm, social actors were mapped based on their betweenness centrality as shown in Figure 3. The identified social actors included the International Criminal Court, Refugee Law Project, International Center

Table 1. Shows Betweenness Centrality of Wordings in Subgroup Conversations on Social Media About Reconciliation.

Commonly used words in discussions	Betweenness
Transitional justice	1,856,524.389[a]
ICC	1,136,571.596
Justice matters	638,982.877
Justice	393,080.418
Uganda	350,589.805
Ongwen	344,739.275
Intlcrimcourt	208,494.876
Victims	182,260.863
Theictj	158,070.130
Human rights	153,425.138
Criminal	100,817.966
Lra	67,937.887
Rights	54,895.574
Perpetrators	35,080.529
Jrp	23,760.746

[a]Most or commonly used wording that shaped social media discussions, evidencing talks on reconciliation. Transitional justice is characterized by the truth telling process and institutional reforms (Brounéus, 2010; Ingelaere, 2008).

for Transitional Justice, NTV-Uganda, JLOS-Uganda, JRP-Uganda and FIDA-Uganda respectively. They served as bridges for justice advocacy and shaped discussions aimed at reconciliation.

Table 2 shows that digital connectedness supported the above identified social actors' influence in reconciling post-conflict communities. In the case of Northern Uganda, it was observed that users with high betweenness centrality played a key role in reaching out to users that do not interact directly with the organization. For instance, the ICC, where the trial of Dominic Ongwen was taking place, registered the highest degree of betweenness centrality, followed by ICTJ, the UN, and then this study's focus, JRP, which initiated the *#LetsTalkUganda*. These were subsequently followed by Refugee Law Project, NTV-Uganda that broadcast the Ongwen ICC trial, JLOS-Uganda, and finally FIDA-Uganda.

The degree of betweenness centrality indicates that JRP-Uganda, a not-for-profit organization was supported through digitized connections to share, engage, and influence post-conflict communities in Northern Uganda into discussions on reconciliation (Table 2). Based on its high degree of
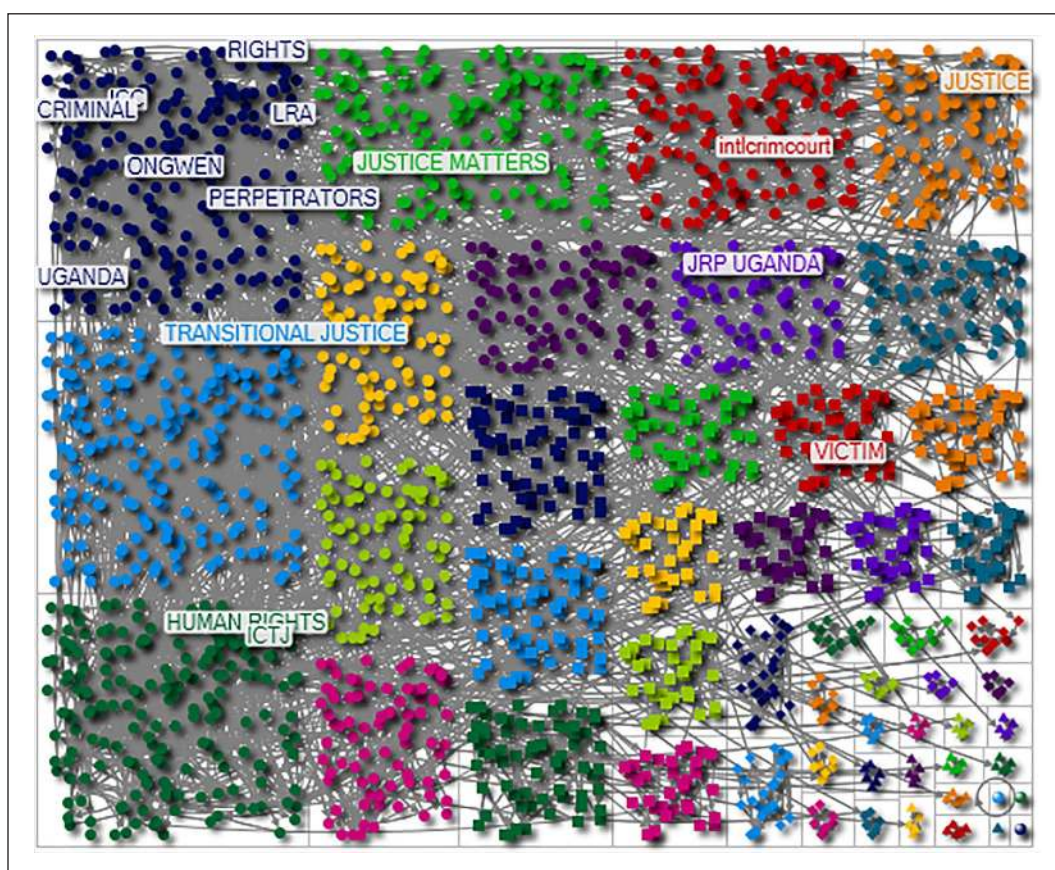

Figure 2. The Social Network map shows sub-conversations resulting from the tweets SM users posted or shared. These users were clustered together using Clauset–Newman–Moore, a mathematical algorithm that assigns nodes (users) to subgroups of more connected user groups within the network. Word-pairs approach was used to identify the different sub-conversations the different groupings shared on the platform. The most shared wordings evidenced transitional justice as an aspect of reconciliation. These words are interactions of the identified social actors during the #LetsTalkUganda campaign (June 12, 2016–September 9, 2018).
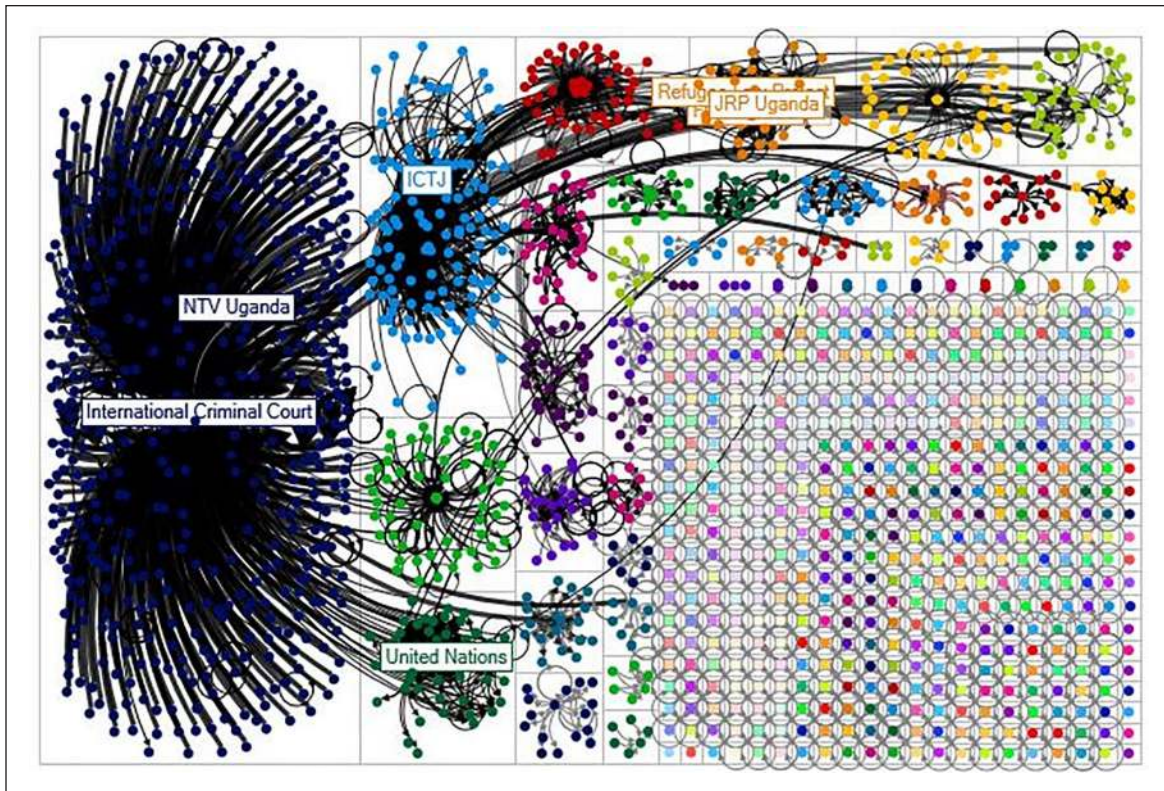
Figure 3. The Social Network of identified social actors of the #LetsTalkUganda (June 12, 2016–September 9, 2018) mapped based on their betweenness centrality. The identified social actors served as bridges for justice advocacy. On the left is the International Criminal Court and NTV; in the center is ICTJ and the UN, and on the right is JRP-Uganda, Refugee Law Project, JLOS-Uganda and FIDA-Uganda.

Table 2. Showing Betweenness and In-Degree Centrality Values of Bridges.

Nodes	Betweenness	In-degree
International Criminal Court	877,676.384	496
ICTJ	379,095.990	126
United Nations	87,351.645	28
Justice & Reconcil' Project-Uganda	11,700.045[a]	30[a]
Refugee Law Project	7,973.305	21
NTV Uganda	4,216.509	20
Justice, Law & Order Sector-Uganda	903.522	19
Fida-Uganda	57.760	21

[a]Justice and Reconciliation Project betweenness and in-degree.

betweenness centrality, JRP-Uganda was observed as a lead bridge in the Ongwen trial, with the exception of ICC, ICTJ, and the UN that registered high betweenness, respectively. As a result, digital connectedness of JRP-Uganda shows that digitally connected social actors play a critical role in influencing reconciliation patterns in post-conflict communities. For example, JRP-Uganda connected the post-conflict communities in Northern Uganda to follow the Ongwen trial at ICC. This enabled JRP-Uganda as a social actor to register the highest betweenness centrality among identified Ugandan-based social actors, which is important as it signals its capacity to connect citizens who would otherwise either be disconnected or less connected.

In addition, JRP-Uganda's betweenness centrality measured the magnitude to which a node (social actor) played the bridging role in the network through its digital connectedness, thus lending evidence that supports H2 of the study. H2 was further supported in evidence observed in the betweenness centrality of other social actors in Uganda, such as the Refugee Law Project; NTV-Uganda, JLOS-Uganda, and FIDA-Uganda.

In line with Granovetter (1973), social actors often filled the brokerage position and formed ties among weak connections that would be less connected. JRP-Uganda provided the directionality of connections through which communities discussed and contributed in the ongoing debates of the ICC Ongwen trial, through the use of live feeds, and shared stories from the affected communities. Thus, digital connectedness enables social actors such as JRP-Uganda to become bridges that connect the less connected people (Burt, 1992, 2005).

Therefore, in a digitally connected world, social actors such as JRP-Uganda facilitate organizational interactions with the different publics using digital platforms (Himelboim et al., 2014). Findings of the study lend evidence that support both H1 and H2.

Second Phase: Impact of Digital Media on Community Building and Reconciliation in Uganda

H3, which stated that SM use increases citizens' willingness to engage in talk about reconciliation in post-conflict communities, was tested using interview data. Findings support Fishkin and Luskin's (2005) assertions that deliberations are informed, conscientious, substantive, balanced, and comprehensive. First, it was observed that being knowledgable (informed) guided and encouraged SM users into sharing and discussing on characteristics of reconciliation. A respondent from JRP-Uganda observed that

> [s]ocial media is used to promote active involvement of war-affected communities to discuss justice.

Second, citizens exhibited conscientiousness in the way they interacted and shared ideas, knowledge, and concepts among each other. At either individual or organizational level, the willingness to promote active involvement of war-affected communities to talk and listen with civility and respect was observed. This enabled those who were tormented during the war to narrate their ordeals through live feeds on SM platforms.

The interviewed JRP-Uganda respondent further said that SM played a vital role in sensitizing the affected communities in Northern Uganda, especially the Acholi-Lango subregion, to reconciliatory processes that fostered transitional justice and trial of the perpetrators of crimes committed during the LRA insurgency. Subsequently, the third substantive component of deliberations was observed. The users engaged each other based on the sincerity and merits of any aspect under discussion to avoid conflict.

In interviews with related not-for-profit organizations based in Gulu district, they observed that

> *#LetsTalkUganda* bridged the gap between the rest of the world and the Northern Uganda community. Many social media users accessed and shared narrated experiences about the war and how the war victims hoped the Ongwen ICC trial would contribute to victims' healing process and decrease stigma through social inclusion.

Uganda's internet penetration accounting for 61.7% mobile internet subscription (Kasadha, 2020; UCC, 2017) increased the ability of people to talk about reconciliatory initiatives. It was observed that organizations (social actors) such as NTV-Uganda engaged citizens to talk about reconciliatory initiatives. An NTV-Uganda respondent said,

> Besides the live streaming of the ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen, NTV-Uganda runs several news stories in regards reconciliatory efforts initiated by the government and the different not-for-profit organizations based in Northern Uganda. Most importantly, during aired news segments, comments posted on

NTV-Uganda Twitter and Facebook pages are often read. These reflect what the audiences expect should be done in re-building the once war-ravaged Northern Uganda. As they are based on the day's topical discussions such as the aftermath of LRA war in Northern Uganda.

One of the interviewees observed that

> [s]ocial media networks enable Ugandans to learn more about the LRA war that killed many in Northern Uganda. To-date communities use social media platforms to advocate for justice, in particular a fight against human rights violation by the Police.

As a result, the deliberative aspect of balance and comprehensiveness was attested to by the different SM users in Northern Uganda. As mentioned above, the users' ability to learn more embodies what Fishkin et al. (2005) deduced as comprehensiveness, which enabled them to engage in discussions with the ability to hold all points of view by significant portions and ensuring that all aspects are given equal attention. And finally, the ability to strike a balance by embracing all contrary arguments.

Another participant observed that

> [s]ocial media gives users access to information and allows people to make decisions through which they make dictatorial governments accountable to its people directly and indirectly.

The use of digital platforms to hold a government accountable is evidenced in Rohwerder (2015) and Kasadha (2018, 2020). The increased use of digital media to hold the government accountable resulted in the Ugandan government labeling them as gossip tools (AFP, 2018b) and imposed an SM tax to limit its use (Kasadha et al., 2019; Mugerwa & Malaba, 2018). However, different not-for-profit organizations in Northern Uganda shared fear over the introduced SM tax as the one that would impact citizens' willingness to engage in reconciliatory and community building discussions. In Yumbe district, hosting one of the world's largest refugee settlements, a member of not-for-profit organization observed that

> [t]axing social media platforms would be a good venture if government had done due diligence in examining its impact on the lives of those in refugee settlements. Almost all field activities are largely coordinated using the different social media platforms; these will be affected since refugees that often tipped us on probable conflicts will stop due to their inability to pay the tax.

Among policymakers, the taxation of SM that requires Ugandans to pay an estimated US$0.05 daily was protested against. According to Kyagulanyi, a Ugandan Member of Parliament told media that

> [i]t goes against the internet's fundamental principle as a universally open platform for freedom of speech, access to

information and public participation. The tax also suffocates the digital economy . . . (Monitor Reporter, 2018)

Based on the above findings, H3, which stated that SM use increases citizens' willingness to engage in talk about reconciliation in post-conflict communities, was supported, especially among not-for-profit organizations that coordinated and engaged communities such as the refugee settlers in Yumbe district. It was further observed that SM users fostered the five-deliberation consideration of balanced, informed, conscientious, substantive, and comprehensive (Fishkin et al., 2005).

Limitations

However, there are some limitations to the study. First, this study does not permit casual inferences related to the relationship between SM and procedures followed in initiating conciliatory programs. Second, a convenience sample (snowball) was used for this study, and the results may be vulnerable to selection bias and findings may not be representative of how post-conflict communities used digital platforms for reconciliation purposes. Third, the interviews were done at a time when the Ugandan government had passed into legislation an SM tax law that necessitated SM users to pay an Over-The-Top (OTT) tax before accessing SM platforms (AFP, 2018a; VOA, 2018). Although the introduced tax did not affect the data collection process, it may limit the generalizability of results among those interviewed, since it was a heightened period in which interviewees feared government repercussions.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The study mainly depends on Twitter data analysis and partially on interviews with SM users in Uganda. There is a need for the identified eight social actors: ICC, ICTJ, UN, JRP-Uganda, Refugee Law Project, NTV-Uganda, JLOS-Uganda, and FIDA-Uganda to fund research that investigates digital community building and reconciliation in Uganda's post-conflict communities. Based on the findings, the use of IT in Uganda's judicial service system would help reduce the reported cases that remain unresolved in areas affected by the LRA insurgency (Okiror, 2018). According to the Uganda Police (2017) report, Lira and Gulu districts in Northern Uganda reported the highest crime rates at 7,872 and 4,731 cases, respectively. The reported cases are widely attributed to ongoing land disputes, gender-based violence, and conflicts resulting from stigmatization faced by those who return from IDP camps (Justice and reconciliation Project, 2012; 2018a, 2018b).

Africa's fast-growing IT sector, characterized by fast increasing levels of adoption (ITU, 2012; Kasadha, 2018, 2020), necessitates the need for African post-conflict

societies to invest in research that examines digital media use in reconciliation and community building initiatives. The use of digital media would boost individual and collective deliberations based on being informed, conscientious, substantive, and comprehensive (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005).

Conclusively, H1, H2, and H3 were all supported using the available data. There is eminent need for different sector players or social actors to embrace digital media use in post-conflict communities. According to Griffin-Nolan (1991), the presence of activists, advocating for peace during the 1980s war resulted in processes of reconciliation and reconstruction. Therefore, use of digital media in post-conflict communities would enable citizens to become activists who can hear victims' cries and convert their sorrow and outrage into strong support for reconciliation.

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