Peace Revolution's Online Social Platform: From Inner Revolution to Global Evolution of Ethical Media Production

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Abstract

This paper describes a project called Peace Revolution [http://peacerevolution.net], which provides an opportunity for young people from around the world to learn and share positive messages and activities relating to peace. The Peace Revolution project aims to empower young people via a unique process related to youth development, helping young people to make informed and moral choices about how they live their lives and actively participate in society. Through its online social platform, Peace Revolution aims to promote the practice of inner peace as a common denominator for people throughout the world, build cross-cultural partnerships and ultimately, through individual change and cooperation with others, establish an international network of active agents for change.

In an increasingly globalised world, mass media and popular culture have significant potential for both positive and negative impact on young people. Unfortunately, it is often the media's potential to negatively impact on youth that gets the most airplay. A large amount of literature exists on the relationship between media and conflict; however, very little evidence is available that explores the role of media in contributing to peace-building. While media literacy education provides a variety of strategies to analyze mass media and explore potentially harmful effects on media consumers (Hogan and Bar-on 1999), another appealing way is to use media production to help young people create media that has a positive impact on ethical and personal development. Given the rapid change of world politics and world security, understanding the power of the media, the impact the media has on influencing public perception and how it could contribute to assisting audiences to become more culturally fluent is of particular importance.

This paper describes a project called Peace Revolution, which provides an opportunity for young people from around the world to learn and share positive messages and activities relating to peace. As part of the larger project, Peace Revolution also offered a fellowship program specifically for media professionals in 2011 that aimed to provide an opportunity for those who work as journalists, film producers, scriptwriters, art directors, independent producers, media educators or any field related to media to experience peace media and journalism (sometimes known as conflict-sensitive journalism (Howard 2010).

The information age is characterized by an ever-growing number of connections between people around the world resulting in communication across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Professionals in this field ought to have responsibilities to be accurate and honest. They ought not to incite prejudice, hatred, or violence. More importantly, they have the opportunity to promote peace and reconciliation. This concept of peace media and journalism is an important ingredient in creating a superior standard of the media (World Peace Initative 2011). It is important that we find ways to develop connections between peace theory, intercultural communication, cultural fluency and the media industry whose written words and broadcasts help shape popular ideas about culture.

The research literature on media effects shows that the power of the media can influence beliefs, opinions and attitudes of people, which can eventually translate into action (Bratic 2006). The Peace Revolution project aims to empower young people via a unique process related to youth development (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman 2004), helping young people to make informed and moral choices about how they live their lives and actively participate in society.

Evidence from cognitive behavioural research and social learning theory suggests that people can acquire both information and attitudes from the media (Bratic 2006). The media can be a powerful tool in communicating cultural awareness and is an important source of cultural production and information. Journalism can therefore play a vital role in furthering our understanding of ourselves and our own culture in relation to others. Through its online social platform, Peace Revolution aims to promote the practice of inner peace as a common denominator for people throughout the world, build cross-cultural partnerships and ultimately, through individual change and cooperation with others, establish an international network of active agents for change.

What is Peace Revolution?

Established in 2008, Peace Revolution [http://peacerevolution.net] is a global program that strives to bring peace to the world through supporting individuals to find peace within: Peace In Peace Out. The World Peace Initiative, based in Hong Kong, runs the program but the main activities take place in Thailand and are supported by the Dhammakaya Foundation. Founded by Dhammajayo Bhikkhu, Phrarajbhavanavisudh (born as Chaiyaboon Suthipol in Thailand), he has spent decades devoted to promoting world peace and youth development. The project is ongoing and involves participants from all over the world. The project is staffed by a core team of eight, and supported by a large team of volunteers and interns from around the globe. The project is aimed at youth between the ages of 18 and 30.

The core principle of the program is that it is only when individuals experience inner peace (Peace In) that sustainable world peace can happen (Peace Out). The program therefore aims to promote personal and moral development. Participants of the program denoted as Peace Rebels are inspired and trained to create a transformation for themselves and then society. In order to achieve this mission, a social network platform has been launched to create an interactive, Internet-based self-development program that will help people understand themselves more fully.

The Peace Revolution program includes an online interactive platform to educate Peace Rebels about inner peace using a meditation technique; provide an environment for sharing their inner peace practice; engage participants in self-development and reflection;

and allow Peace Rebels to continue to network and engage with each other in relation to their future peace work. There is an offline component in which Peace Rebels develop peace projects, denoted as Special Ops, to undertake in their own location. A face-to-face component includes a meditation retreat to educate Peace Rebels in advanced inner peace techniques; an opportunity to experience inter-culture and observe some Thai Buddhist events; and an opportunity to engage in collaborative peace building activities. The online interactive platform encourages Peace Rebels to share their positive experiences and publish stories of their offline Special Ops to inspire others and stimulate similar peace projects around the world.

In 2011, the face-to-face component incorporated a new program that provides in-depth workshops related to ethical media production to selected media professionals worldwide. This program develops Peace Rebels' media literacy by motivating and assisting young people to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms (Aufderheide 1993), inspiring a peace journalism approach through media that is oriented to peace and truth, with a people-centered and solution-centered orientation (McGoldrick 2008, 86).

The information age is characterized by an ever-growing number of connections between people around the world resulting in communication across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The program connects journalists together online from around the globe and aims to utilize the online medium to create and share inner peace with the world. It also highlights what previous authors have described as an "essential and influential aspect of these programs: positive youth development" (Young 2011). Peace Rebels develop a sense of group identity by interacting and identifying with other young peace activists; they also develop relationships with influential and positive role models through their interactions with volunteering human assistants denoted as Peace Coaches. Finally, they develop a positive sense of themselves after critically analyzing the messages provided to them by the broader society.

Today with the rise of computer-mediated communication and global interactions, possessing the skills that constitute cultural fluency are essential in order to achieve understanding and acceptance of other cultures. By connecting with likeminded people online, sharing stories, and receiving feedback from
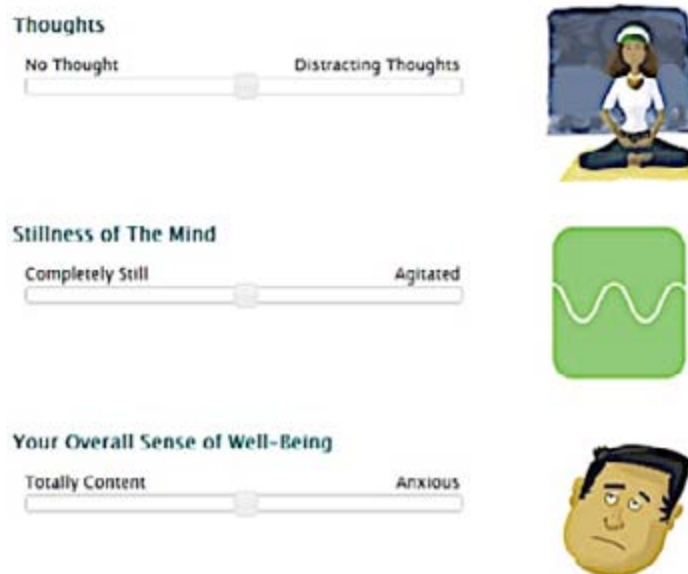
coaches, participants are learning to experience inner-peace and developing new ways to shape their everyday relationships with family, friends, and the community.

The Youth Development Process

The Peace Revolution's Youth Development Process is centered on the following key terms: inner peace education, self-development program, Special Ops, fellowship program and peace coach training. Inner peace education is based on the premise that for Peace Rebels to attain peace at both the individual and community levels they must start with the transformation of one's self. They are provided with a range of resources to assist them to learn how to practice Inner Peace Time (abbreviated as IPT) such as guided meditation videos and sound files in six different languages and different styles to appeal to the different preferences of the rebels, and other peace related media such as regular live guided meditation broadcasts on an Internet-based channel.

Peace Rebels are asked to practice their IPT skills every day and complete an online meditation journal. While it can be relatively difficult for Peace Rebels to indicate their meditation progress (especially those who have never meditated before) the system provides a simple visual IPT Tracking Scale (Figure 1) to assist Peace Rebels to mark their progress. As the Peace Rebels move the button along the scale the image changes to represent visually the rebel's state of mind. The objective of using this IPT Tracking Scale is not for participants to compare their meditation results with others; rather, it is intended to focus Peace Rebels on evaluating their own results and therefore to develop better concentration in their everyday life. Peace Rebels can also describe their meditation experience daily on an IPT Journal and they may choose to share their positive messages on the website, which can be subsequently shared on Facebook, Twitter or other social network sites by other Peace Rebels. This sub-process allows Peace Rebels to provide positive messages and activities relating to their personal IPT experience.

Figure 1: IPT Tracking Scale

Self Development

In media, journalists often bring many biases, hidden and unintentional, to their coverage. Journalists are said to approach their work 'tabula rasa' checking their personal, political, moral and religious convictions at the newsroom door. The Peace Revolution Self-development program encourages Peace Rebels to explore these aspects of themselves in their peace activist work and in their media production. The self-development program includes three sections: inner peace education previously mentioned, self-discipline, and daily entry. Peace Rebels are asked to maintain the five acts of self-discipline during the 42-day program. These acts of self-discipline correlate to the five precepts in the Buddhist philosophy: (1) not killing; (2) not stealing; (3) not engaging in sexual misconduct; (4) not lying; and (5) not taking intoxicants. In the self-discipline section, Peace Rebels complete a daily checklist to record whether or not they have maintained each of the five acts of self-discipline for that day. They also have the opportunity to comment on any issues that they had in relation to maintaining the acts of self-discipline. Peace Rebels receive feedback and advice from their Peace Coaches in order to encourage deeper self-reflection and continuous improvement.

The Daily Entry section consists of a set of questions (shown in Table 1) to encourage peace rebels to look more closely at themselves, their behavior and their relationships with others. The length of the self-development program is based on the conventional wisdom that a new habit can be developed when a certain behavior is repeated for 21 days. The Peace Revolution self-development program focuses Peace Rebels' attention on positive habits for at least 21 days in relation to self, family, friends and society.

Table 1: Question Types of the Self-Development Program

Type	Purposes
Self Questions	For creating good habits and removing bad habits related to time management, personal healthcare and self-esteem.
Family Questions	For assisting Peace Rebels to improve their relationship with their families.
Friend Questions	For helping strengthen the rebels' relationships with friends and colleagues and reduce conflicts that possibly happen in human interaction.
Society Questions	For encouraging the Peace Rebels to consider their role in society and how they might encourage peace in their communities.

Each Peace Rebel is allocated a group of Peace Coaches, who are experienced meditators who follow the rebel's progress throughout the program and provide regular encouragement and support. Peace Rebels can ask their Peace Coaches any questions they have through the online platform. This sub-process enables Peace Rebels to learn more about proper ethical conduct and help them have a better understanding about consequences of having respect for others' life, property, family, sincerity and integrity, which is considered a basic human value.

Special Ops

Peace Rebels in the online program are encouraged and guided to share inner peace with their families, friends, and community through various offline activities. The idea is for the participants to find a way to combine Peace In with other Peace Out activities in their society. Some examples of Special Ops are holding a group meditation for family, friends, or people in the community, creative activities, peace journalism, or volunteering. A completed Special Ops

must be posted online on the Peace Revolution website along side with various form of media that Peace Rebels learn to produce by themselves such as photos, videos, and reports, as well as feedback forms from participants denoted as "Special Ops Enforcer Forms." A Special Ops Directory (World Peace Initiative 2011) contains Special Ops posted by other Peace Rebels (some outstanding examples, such as the meditation for refugees, are shown in Figure 2). Peace Rebels learn how to publish their activities by combining photos, videos, and a report that describes their inner peace activities.

Figure 2: Fraide Emmanuel Kikibi used what he learned from the website to provide Inner Peace Education along side with humanitarian relief to the children in the Nakivaleand Kisura refugee camp in Uganda

Identifying with others is an important theme in developing cultural fluency. Special Ops encourages participants to share their experiences with others by publishing their experiences in the Special Ops directory. These stories are written for an extremely diverse international audience, and as such need to be constructed so listeners find common ground with others unlike themselves. Peace coaches can assist peace rebels in telling their story and reflecting on their experiences. This reflective practice and constructive feedback allows rebels to develop their communication skills and capacity to convey messages through popular media in a way that can inspire and influence others.

A new challenge for cultural fluency as a guide to effective intercultural communication is, "to generate approaches of investigation on how people from different cultures and speaking different languages actually influence each other in specific intercultural contexts" (McGoldrick 2008, 86). When participants from different cultures communicate they often

don't share the same ground rules of communication and interaction. At the most fundamental level each individual's interpretation of the world is different. Today with the rise of computer-mediated communication and global interactions, possessing the skills that constitute cultural fluency are essential in order to achieve understanding and acceptance of other cultures.

The Fellowship Program

Peace Rebels who have completed the online program and are committed to the cause of peace are invited to join offline fellowship to attend one of the meditation retreats in Thailand. The meditation retreat provides Peace Rebels with an opportunity to experience a deepening of their Inner Peace, particularly by interacting with very experienced meditators and teaching monks who can provide them with individual support and advice about their meditation practice. At the conference, Peace Rebels also have the opportunity to participate in interactive workshops with other Peace Rebels, to network and to develop ideas for future peace activities. The highlighted topics include meditation and mediation, community-based peace projects and promoting peace campaigns through media and IT.

Some Peace Rebels who benefit from the self-development program might want to contribute to the future of the project. While there are many ways to contribute, being a Peace Coach can be a way that they can do from home or any places that has an Internet connection. This process makes sure that the system will always have enough Peace Coaches to give positive advice to new joining Peace Rebels. The training process provides know-how for potential Peace Coaches on how to encourage new Peace Rebels to continue and complete their self-development. A Peace Coach quiz must be completed for any Peace Rebel to be qualified as a Peace Coach. As illustrated in Figure 3, the first fellowship was organized for seven days in January 2011. There were media professionals from India, Pakistan, England, Zimbabwe and the United States. The program included a meditation retreat and workshops that emphasized how to truly discover oneself and the world through the unbiased mind, which is trained using a meditation technique.

Figure 3: The Peace Revolution Fellowship for Media Professionals in January 2011

One participant is Emma Brewin, age 26 from England. She is working as a writer and multimedia producer for The Sunday Times newspaper. Emma experienced a lot of changes after joining the online self-development program. She wrote, "Through meditation I have managed to observe myself in ways I have never done before. It has given me a perspective on myself, like holding a mirror up to myself. Stilling my mind has helped me develop my thoughts, feelings, and consciousness. Peace in is so relevant to journalists and the media. People in the media industry have immense responsibility, so building their ethics and consciousness is very important. I have shared the philosophy of this program on my blog. In addition, I have a website that I was previously using for gossip. However, I now want to switch it from a gossip website to a media responsibility one or perhaps a meditation site for media professionals." She also completed a Special Ops project by writing an article describing her experience in the self-development after following it for about two months (Brewin 2010).

After joining the seven-day fellowship program, Emma has developed a viewpoint towards peace media and journalism. She wrote, "Why not take the opportunity to create new content that's relevant to more people, that's unbiased, that's constructive? Quite a lot of news is negative - you know bomb blast, war and murders, child abuse. Why not take the time to look at the world more constructively and also I think it's time to really assess media responsibility?"

Another participant, Olga Muhwati, works as a media and communication liaison of African Arts Journalists' Network in Zimbabwe. She acknowledged the benefits of the online self-development program and the offline fellowship program. She said, "It was gradual, it was happening while I was doing the online

course (self-development program), but the difference is with the online course I was still in my world. In my profession, the five acts of discipline are very important just on a day-to-day basis for better health and a better state of mind. I think journalists live in a world where they are condemned a lot. You know if you are calmer, and you are not affected by what you are reporting on, your work will probably just speak for itself."

Peace Revolution is a project that aims to empower young people via a youth development process to make informed and ethical choices about how they live their lives and actively participate in society. The process allows Peace Rebels to provide positive messages and activities relating to their personal IPT experience. The self-development program enables Peace Rebels to learn more about proper ethical conduct and help them have a better understanding about consequences of having respect in others' life, property, family, sincerity and integrity, which is considered a basic human value. While media alone is not sufficient to achieve peaceful outcomes to conflicts, it has the potential to be a great aid in addressing problems of communication. The media can be a productive institution in the pursuit of peace-building.

The Special Ops process provides a way for participants to communicate their initiatives by including descriptive writing, videos and photos of their inner peace activities (World Peace Initiative 2011). The fellowship experience for media professionals lets Peace Rebels explore peace media and journalism and discuss challenges that media professionals experience when reporting promotes prejudice, hatred, or violence. The peace coaching training helps coaches encourage new Peace Rebels to continue and complete their self-development and provides contemporary guidance on the implementation of peace-promoting media projects. Although the process is clearly a form of youth development, it can be relevant to media professionals in any age range.

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