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CURBING EMERGING CIVIL UNREST THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES: THE ROLES OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY, RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS, ETHICS, AND SOCIAL ETIQUETTE IN BUILDING A PEACEFUL SOCIETY

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Abstract

The increasing incidence of civil unrest, social tension, communal conflict, political polarization, religious intolerance, violent protests, hate speech, and other forms of collective disorder presents significant challenges to peaceful coexistence and sustainable national development. Although civil unrest is frequently approached from political, economic, legal, and security perspectives, its psychological and behavioural foundations deserve equally serious attention. Human behaviour develops through socialization, observational learning, group identification, emotional experiences, perceptions of injustice, interpersonal relationships, and learned responses to disagreement (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consequently, sustainable prevention of civil unrest requires interventions that extend beyond security responses to address the psychological processes through which hostility, prejudice, aggression, intolerance, and social distrust develop.

Drawing upon Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Social Identity Theory, Frustration–Aggression perspectives, Contact Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, emotional intelligence, moral development, social capital, and procedural justice, this article examines the interconnected roles of the family, community, educational and religious institutions, political leadership, traditional institutions, entertainment, and digital media in peacebuilding. It proposes a Psychological–Ethical Social Peace Model (PESPM) and introduces the concepts of the Social Modelling Environment (SME) and Social Modelling Consistency Principle (SMCP). The article argues that sustainable peace cannot depend solely upon controlling unrest after it emerges. Rather, societies must cultivate psychologically competent, ethically responsible, socially tolerant, and institutionally supported citizens capable of managing grievances and differences without transforming them into destructive conflict.

Keywords: Civil unrest, psychology, social cohesion, family, community, religious organizations, ethics, social etiquette, peacebuilding, digital influence, national development.

INTRODUCTION

Civil unrest rarely begins suddenly. Before violence becomes publicly visible, societies may experience accumulated grievances, perceptions of injustice, frustration, fear, prejudice, mistrust, exclusion, identity conflicts, inflammatory narratives, economic hardship, political polarization, and deteriorating relationships among individuals and groups. Research on aggression, social identity, prejudice, and procedural justice demonstrates that perceptions and interpretations of social conditions can significantly influence behavioural responses to conflict and authority (Allport, 1954; Berkowitz, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tyler, 2006). Civil unrest should therefore not be understood exclusively as a security problem. It is simultaneously a psychological, social, moral, political, economic, and institutional problem.

Police, military personnel, laws, surveillance, and other security mechanisms may sometimes be necessary for protecting lives and property. Nevertheless, such interventions principally respond to visible manifestations of unrest. Sustainable peace requires deeper attention to the psychological, relational, ethical, social, and institutional conditions that precede destructive collective behaviour.

The central proposition of this article is therefore:

A peaceful society is not created merely by suppressing violence; it is created by developing people, relationships, institutions, and social environments that make peaceful coexistence psychologically and morally sustainable.

This proposition is consistent with Galtung's (1969) influential distinction between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace refers principally to the absence of direct violence, whereas positive peace requires attention to the social and structural conditions associated with injustice, inequality, exclusion, and deprivation.

Security intervention may therefore stop immediate violence without necessarily resolving the grievances, mistrust, humiliation, exclusion, or perceived injustice underlying the conflict.

Thus:

Suppressing violence may produce silence, but silence should not always be mistaken for peace.

This psychological conception of sustainable peace is also reflected in the Constitution of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1945), which famously declares:

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

This proposition has profound psychological significance. Violence is often preceded by cognitive, emotional, social, and moral processes. Prejudice may be learned, stereotypes internalized, grievances interpreted, group enemies psychologically constructed, and aggression legitimized before collective violence becomes behaviourally expressed (Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1977; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Peacebuilding must therefore operate within the human mind as well as within political and security institutions.

Societies must cultivate empathy where prejudice exists, emotional regulation where anger develops, dialogue where misunderstanding persists, social trust where suspicion dominates, and ethical responsibility where selfish or sectional interests threaten collective welfare.

UNDERSTANDING CIVIL UNREST

Civil unrest may broadly be conceptualized as collective expressions of dissatisfaction, tension, resistance, confrontation, or disorder emerging from perceived social, economic, political, religious, ethnic, or institutional grievances.

An important distinction must nevertheless be maintained between legitimate peaceful civic expression and destructive civil unrest. Peaceful protest, advocacy, criticism, political disagreement, and demands for accountability constitute important forms of civic participation and should not automatically be equated with disorder.

The concern of the present article is principally with situations in which grievances become transformed into destructive hostility, intimidation, hate speech, mob violence, communal confrontation, destruction of property, retaliatory violence, or widespread breakdown of peaceful social relationships.

Civil unrest can consequently be examined through two interconnected dimensions.

Structural Conditions

These may include injustice, unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, political exclusion, discrimination, insecurity, and institutional weakness.

Psychological Conditions

These may include frustration, anger, hopelessness, fear, prejudice, resentment, social distrust, perceived humiliation, identity threat, conformity, misinformation, and aggressive group norms (Berkowitz, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Neither dimension should be considered independently. Structural conditions influence psychological experience, while psychological processes influence how structural realities are perceived, interpreted, communicated, and acted upon.

FRUSTRATION, DEPRIVATION, AND AGGRESSION

The frustration–aggression tradition proposed by Dollard et al. (1939) and subsequently reformulated by Berkowitz (1989) provides an important psychological perspective for understanding aggression.

The classical formulation associated frustration with increased likelihood of aggression. Later formulations emphasized that frustration does not automatically or inevitably produce violence. Rather, aversive experiences may generate negative affect and aggressive tendencies whose eventual behavioural expression depends upon cognitive, situational, social, and environmental factors (Berkowitz, 1989).

At societal level, repeated experiences of unemployment, insecurity, corruption, discrimination, deprivation, institutional neglect, or perceived political exclusion may contribute to accumulated frustration and resentment.

A possible psychological progression may therefore be represented as:

Unaddressed Grievance → Frustration → Resentment → Collective Anger → Mobilization → Possible Civil Unrest

This sequence is not deterministic. Many individuals experience frustration without becoming violent. Nevertheless, it illustrates why prevention must include credible avenues for hearing and addressing legitimate grievances before frustration becomes available for destructive mobilization.

SOCIAL LEARNING: How Societies Teach Peace or Violence

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory demonstrates that considerable human behaviour is acquired through observing models and the consequences associated with their actions. Social Cognitive Theory subsequently developed this position further by emphasizing reciprocal relationships among behaviour, personal factors, and environments (Bandura, 1986).

Children observe parents. Citizens observe political leaders. Congregants observe religious leaders. Young people observe celebrities, community leaders, entertainers, athletes, activists, and social-media personalities.

Observational learning involves attention to models, retention of observed behaviour, behavioural reproduction, and motivational processes (Bandura, 1977).

Consequently, socially visible behaviour itself constitutes a form of education.

When aggression appears socially rewarded, it may be perceived as effective. When corruption generates status without consequences, corruption may become normalized. When ethnic intolerance attracts public approval, prejudice may acquire social reinforcement. When provocative online behaviour produces attention, popularity, and influence, younger observers may learn that provocation is socially rewarding.

The opposite process is equally possible.

When integrity receives recognition, integrity becomes aspirational. When tolerance is respected, tolerance acquires social value. When leaders admit mistakes and accept accountability, responsible behaviour becomes observable. When parents manage conflicts peacefully, children encounter alternatives to aggression.

This leads to a foundational proposition:

People learn not only from what society formally teaches but also from what society repeatedly demonstrates, rewards, excuses, permits, and celebrates.

Peace is therefore not only negotiated.

Peace is learned, modelled, reinforced, practised, and transmitted.

The Social Modelling Environment

Building upon Bandura's social learning framework and Bronfenbrenner's ecological understanding of human development, the present article proposes the concept of the Social Modelling Environment (SME).

The SME is defined in this article as:

The interconnected social institutions, relationships, leaders, cultural systems, and communication platforms through which individuals continually observe, learn, interpret, imitate, reinforce, and transmit behavioural norms within society.

This is a conceptual contribution of the present article rather than an established theory attributed to Bandura or Bronfenbrenner.

Bandura's (1986) concept of reciprocal determinism nevertheless provides an important theoretical foundation. Personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour interact reciprocally. People affect their environments, while environments simultaneously shape attitudes and behaviour.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provides another foundation. Human development occurs within interacting environmental systems involving families, schools, peers, neighbourhoods, social organizations, cultural environments, and broader institutional structures.

Applied to peacebuilding, these perspectives suggest that behavioural lessons learned within one institution may be reinforced or contradicted by another.

A child may be taught tolerance at school but repeatedly hear ethnic hatred at home. A young person may hear sermons promoting coexistence but continuously encounter inflammatory political content online. Citizens may be instructed to respect the law while observing powerful individuals apparently escaping accountability.

Such contradictions create competing social models.

Peace education should therefore seek coherence among major social institutions.

Peace education becomes psychologically more powerful when the major environments surrounding individuals communicate compatible values of justice, tolerance, dignity, dialogue, responsibility, civility, and nonviolence.

The Family as the First School of Peace

The family is one of the earliest and most influential socialization environments.

Long before children possess sophisticated intellectual understandings of justice, ethics, tolerance, civility, equality, or social responsibility, they observe how significant adults behave. Observational-learning research demonstrates the importance of models in children's acquisition of behavioural patterns (Bandura, 1977).

Children observe how parents manage anger, resolve disagreements, exercise authority, respond to wrongdoing, speak about strangers, and relate to people belonging to different ethnic, religious, political, or socioeconomic groups.

Parents who resolve disagreement without violence teach nonviolent disagreement.

Parents who apologize teach accountability.

Parents who listen before judging teach deliberation.

Parents who demonstrate respect across social differences teach tolerance.

Conversely, family environments characterized by humiliation, aggression, intolerance, prejudice, dishonesty, or violence may contribute to the normalization of destructive interpersonal patterns.

Thus:

The psychological foundations of national peace may begin around the family table long before they are discussed around the political negotiating table.

The family does not merely raise children; it contributes to the earliest psychological templates through which future citizens interpret authority, relationships, difference, justice, and conflict.

Family-based peace formation should therefore cultivate emotional regulation, empathy, respectful disagreement, tolerance, responsibility, nonviolent conflict resolution, discipline without humiliation, and appreciation of human dignity.

Social Identity and the Psychology of “Us” and “Them”

Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive important dimensions of their self-concept from membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Such identities may include ethnicity, religion, nationality, political affiliation, language, community, social class, profession, or region.

Group belonging is not inherently problematic. Social identities provide psychological meaning, belonging, solidarity, and emotional security. Difficulties emerge when group identities become associated with rigid or hostile distinctions between “us” and “them.”

Under such circumstances, disagreements may become identity conflicts. The psychological question may cease to be:

What is right?

and become:

Who is one of us?

Strong in-group identification may under certain circumstances encourage preferential treatment of one's own group and negative perceptions of outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Leadership therefore possesses profound identity-forming implications.

A political leader can describe another ethnic community as a threat or as fellow citizens.

A religious leader can portray another faith community as enemies or neighbours.

A traditional leader can present another community as a rival or development partner.

A digital influencer can portray critics as enemies deserving collective hostility or as legitimate participants in public debate.

Peacebuilding therefore requires leaders capable of enlarging rather than continually narrowing the psychological category of “us.”

A desirable progression is:

My Family → My Community → My Religion/Ethnicity → My Nation → Our Common Humanity

These identities do not necessarily contradict one another. Healthy social identity permits legitimate subgroup identification while recognizing a broader national and human identity.

Contact Theory and Intergroup Relationships

Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis provides another important psychological basis for peacebuilding.

Prejudice can survive where people encounter stereotypes about outsiders more frequently than they encounter actual members of those groups within constructive relationships. Under appropriate conditions, meaningful intergroup contact can contribute to reducing prejudice (Allport, 1954).

Communities, schools, workplaces, universities, sporting organizations, religious institutions, and governments should therefore create opportunities for cooperative interaction across ethnic, religious, political, and cultural boundaries.

Christian and Muslim youths working together on environmental sanitation are not merely cleaning their community. They are encountering one another through cooperative relationships.

Young people from different ethnic groups participating jointly in entrepreneurship or educational programmes are not merely acquiring economic skills. Such encounters may also weaken stereotypes and humanize people previously known principally through group labels.

Thus:

Peace is strengthened when the person previously known only as “one of them” becomes personally known as a neighbour, colleague, classmate, teammate, or friend.

Social Capital and Networks of Trust

Putnam's (2000) submissions on social capital provides a useful sociological complement to these psychological perspectives.

Social networks can create strong bonds within particular groups while also creating bridges between different groups. Both forms of connection may be socially valuable, but divided societies particularly require bridging social capital—relationships extending beyond familiar identity boundaries (Putnam, 2000).

Strong solidarity within an ethnic, religious, political, or community group may provide belonging and mutual assistance. However, where strong internal solidarity exists alongside extremely weak cross-group relationships, social fragmentation may persist.

Peacebuilding should therefore deliberately construct bridges.

Religious organizations can create interfaith partnerships.

Traditional institutions can cooperate across community boundaries.

Youth associations can conduct cross-cultural programmes.

Universities can encourage intercultural engagement.

Digital platforms can promote civil dialogue across ideological differences.

Hence:

Social cohesion requires not only strong bonds among people who resemble one another but also strong bridges among people who differ.

Emotional Intelligence as a Peacebuilding Resource

Civil unrest possesses an important emotional dimension. Anger, fear, humiliation, frustration, resentment, anxiety, and perceived disrespect can influence both individual and collective behaviour.

Goleman (1995) popularized emotional intelligence as involving competencies related to emotional self-awareness, regulation, motivation, empathy, and interpersonal relationships.

An emotionally intelligent citizen may experience anger without automatically converting anger into aggression.

An emotionally intelligent political leader recognizes that inflammatory statements can intensify existing tensions.

An emotionally intelligent religious leader understands that a sermon may heal social divisions or deepen them.

An emotionally intelligent community leader appreciates that humiliating disputants may intensify conflict rather than resolve it.

Political, religious, community, traditional, and digital leaders consequently require what may be described in this article as collective emotional intelligence: sensitivity to the emotional climate of the groups they influence and an ability to communicate without unnecessarily intensifying hostility.

Thus:

Responsible leadership includes the capacity to prevent one's words from becoming weapons in the minds of one's followers.

Emotional-intelligence education should therefore be incorporated into schools, leadership formation, religious education, family counselling, community development, conflict-resolution programmes, and public-service training.

Moral Development, Ethics, and Social Etiquette

Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development emphasizes development in moral reasoning, including movement from orientations focused mainly upon punishment or personal advantage toward broader concerns with social obligations, justice, and moral principles.

This perspective has important implications for sustainable peace.

There is a meaningful psychological distinction between:

"I will not attack my neighbour because the police may arrest me."

and:

"I will not attack my neighbour because my neighbour possesses dignity and rights even when we disagree."

The first is primarily dependent upon external control.

The second reflects internalized moral restraint.

Sustainable peace therefore requires more than behavioural compliance. It requires moral internalization.

Ethics and etiquette contribute complementary dimensions.

Ethics addresses morally responsible conduct, including justice, integrity, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and respect for human dignity.

Etiquette concerns socially appropriate ways of interacting, including courtesy, respectful communication, listening, consideration, and civility.

Ethics asks:

"Is what I am doing right?"

Etiquette asks:

"Am I relating to others respectfully?"

Freedom of expression should not eliminate moral responsibility. Legitimate criticism can be forceful without descending into ethnic abuse, religious mockery, deliberate humiliation, dehumanization, intimidation, or incitement.

Social etiquette therefore does not mean suppressing dissent. It provides civilized behavioural norms through which disagreement can take place without unnecessarily destroying relationships.

Religious Organizations as Psychological Agents of Peace

Religious organizations occupy influential social and psychological positions in many African societies.

Religious leaders may function simultaneously as spiritual teachers, community leaders, behavioural models, moral authorities, and opinion leaders.

Followers do not merely hear what religious leaders preach; they also observe how they behave. This principle is consistent with Bandura's (1977) observational-learning framework.

Congregants observe how religious leaders speak about other traditions, respond to criticism, address political disagreement, condemn or excuse violence, and demonstrate forgiveness, compassion, justice, humility, and tolerance.

Oman and Thoresen (2003) similarly emphasize the potential importance of spiritual modelling in religious and spiritual development.

Thus:

Religious leaders preach twice: first through their words and again through their behaviour; the behavioural sermon may sometimes be the more influential.

Allport's (1954) analysis also demonstrates that religion and prejudice can have complex relationships. Religious commitments may provide resources for compassion and brotherhood, yet religious identities may also become entangled with exclusionary attitudes.

Religious organizations should therefore deliberately cultivate interfaith dialogue, peace education, responsible preaching, forgiveness, reconciliation, respect for human dignity, responsible citizenship, and consistent condemnation of violence irrespective of the religious or political identity of perpetrators.

Thus:

Religious institutions can either sacralize social divisions or sanctify peaceful coexistence.

Ethical Political Leadership and Responsible Citizenship

Political leadership constitutes another powerful component of the Social Modelling Environment.

Citizens observe whether political leaders respect laws, tolerate criticism, accept legitimate opposition, treat political competitors with dignity, condemn violence consistently, and submit themselves to institutional accountability.

Bandura's (1977, 1986) modelling principles suggest that highly visible leaders provide behavioural information regarding conduct that is rewarded, tolerated, discouraged, or punished.

When political intimidation repeatedly produces success without meaningful consequences, aggression may appear effective.

When corruption appears socially rewarded, corrupt conduct may become normalized.

When political actors use ethnic or religious stereotypes, followers may perceive such prejudices as legitimate political discourse.

Conversely, leaders who demonstrate accountability, restraint, transparency, respect for opposition, and obedience to the law make ethical citizenship publicly observable.

Therefore:

Leadership is not merely the administration of society; it is the public modelling of what society considers acceptable behaviour.

Justice, Procedural Fairness, and Institutional Trust

Psychology cannot substitute for justice.

Citizens cannot indefinitely be instructed to remain peaceful while institutions appear corrupt, exclusionary, discriminatory, inaccessible, or selectively punitive.

Tyler's (2006) work on procedural justice and legitimacy demonstrates that people's willingness to cooperate with legal authorities is strongly influenced by their perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of institutional procedures.

Where citizens believe laws are selectively enforced, powerful individuals receive preferential treatment, or institutions systematically disregard particular populations, confidence in legitimate avenues of redress can deteriorate.

Government therefore possesses a psychological as well as legal responsibility to create institutions citizens experience as credible, impartial, accessible, and fair.

Peacebuilding consequently requires ethical leadership, rule of law, accountability, transparency, inclusion, responsive administration, credible grievance mechanisms, and meaningful participation.

Hence:

Where people trust justice, they are more likely to pursue redress through institutions; where confidence in justice collapses, alternative and potentially disruptive avenues of redress may become more attractive.

The objective should therefore not merely be peace through control, but peace through justice, trust, participation, and legitimacy.

Dialogue as Preventive Psychological Intervention

Dialogue is sometimes mistakenly interpreted as weakness. Psychologically, however, constructive dialogue allows grievances to be verbalized before they become behaviourally expressed.

Dialogue can expose participants to perspectives beyond their own group narratives, reduce uncertainty, correct misinformation, humanize opponents, provide opportunities for emotional expression, and create possibilities for negotiated compromise.

Families, communities, religious institutions, schools, universities, workplaces, and governments should consequently institutionalize dialogue before crises arise rather than improvising communication only after violence has begun.

A preventive peacebuilding sequence may therefore be represented as:

Listening → Early Identification → Dialogue → Justice → Psychological Intervention → Reconciliation → Social Cohesion → Sustainable Peace

This is preferable to:

Neglect → Frustration → Anger → Mobilization → Violence → Suppression → Temporary Calm → Recurrence

Entertainment and Digital Media as Contemporary Socialization Institutions

Socialization in the twenty-first century extends substantially beyond families, schools, communities, and religious organizations.

Young people now encounter musicians, actors, athletes, comedians, activists, entrepreneurs, celebrities, political commentators, and social-media influencers continuously through digitally mediated environments.

Social Cognitive Theory provides a useful basis for understanding such influence because repeated observation of socially rewarded behaviour may affect perceptions of desirable or normative conduct (Bandura, 1986).

This development can be described as digital observational learning.

The smartphone has effectively become a portable socialization environment.

Research indicates that social-media influencers can significantly affect young people's attitudes, choices, perceptions, and behaviours. Lajnef's (2023) study of teenagers in Tunisia, for example, demonstrated interconnected relationships between characteristics of social-media influencers and teenagers' behavioural responses.

Similarly, Engel et al. (2024), in a scoping review of 51 studies, concluded that social-media influencers have become important sources of information for adolescents, while drawing attention to challenges including lack of expertise, commercial interests, unhealthy behavioural models, and misinformation.

Digital social influence is therefore psychologically double-edged.

Influential personalities may model tolerance, empathy, civic responsibility, fact-checking, constructive disagreement, and peaceful participation.

Conversely, they may normalize humiliation, misinformation, aggressive rhetoric, prejudice, cyberbullying, or hostility.

The process may be represented as:

Attention → Repeated Exposure → Perceived Normality → Identification → Possible Imitation

Accordingly:

What attracts attention becomes visible; what becomes repeatedly visible may appear common; what appears common may gradually appear normal; and what appears normal may become easier to imitate.

Digital peacebuilding should therefore address not merely misinformation but the behavioural norms communicated and rewarded through online interaction.

A useful principle for responsible digital citizenship is:

Pause → Verify → Reflect → Respect → Then Share

VeryDarkMan as a Nigerian Case Study in Digital Social Influence

The prominence of Martins Vincent Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan (VDM), provides a contemporary Nigerian case study for examining changing patterns of digital social influence.

The scholarly purpose of this case is neither to endorse nor condemn the individual. Rather, it is to examine the psychological significance of a social-media personality who, without occupying elected political office or conventional institutional authority, can attract substantial public attention and influence discussions around accountability, justice, public grievances, and civic action.

Filibus et al. (2025), examining popular resistance and political conformity in Nigeria, discuss VeryDarkMan within the post-EndSARS environment as part of the emergence of alternative digital voices using social media to challenge governance and amplify civic demands.

The phenomenon demonstrates an important transformation in contemporary social influence:

Formal office is no longer the only pathway to social power.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory provides a useful psychological lens. Models who command attention and appear relevant or credible may become sources of observational learning.

When young Nigerians repeatedly observe an influencer challenging perceived injustice, asking institutions for explanations, publicizing grievances, or mobilizing an audience around social concerns, observers may encounter a model of citizen agency.

A possible psychological message is:

“Ordinary citizens are not necessarily powerless.”

This perception relates conceptually to Bandura's (1997) construct of self-efficacy, which concerns beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute actions necessary to attain desired outcomes.

At group level, shared perceptions of efficacy may contribute to collective beliefs about the possibility of influencing social conditions.

Influence, however, should not be measured only by audience size. Identification matters.

Followers may identify with a digital personality whom they perceive as courageous, authentic, relatable, independent, accessible, willing to challenge powerful actors, or capable of articulating grievances they themselves experience.

Digital influence may consequently develop through a sequence such as:

Digital Message → Attention → Identification → Emotional Engagement → Shared Identity → Mobilization → Collective Action

Social Identity Theory is particularly relevant when followers begin to understand themselves as members of a recognizable community organized around a leader, grievance, cause, label, or shared mission (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Collective identity can generate courage, belonging, solidarity, community service, philanthropy, civic participation, and accountability.

It can also become dangerous when group solidarity develops into rigid intolerance of criticism, harassment, cyberbullying, mob judgment, or hostility toward perceived outsiders.

Digital influence is therefore psychologically double-edged.

The relevant peacebuilding question is not simply:

“How influential is VeryDarkMan?”

The more important question is:

“Toward what behavioural outcomes is such influence being directed, and what ethical principles regulate the relationship between the influencer and the influenced?”

The broader implication extends far beyond one individual.

Nigeria's contemporary peace architecture should recognize that social-media influencers, online activists, entertainers, celebrities, and other digitally visible personalities participate in the social environment within which younger citizens develop attitudes concerning justice, authority, identity, success, dissent, and social responsibility.

Such personalities may therefore become useful partners in peace education, responsible citizenship, community service, mental-health awareness, interethnic and interreligious tolerance, fact-checking, anti-corruption awareness, and peaceful mechanisms for demanding accountability.

However, greater influence carries greater responsibility.

An ethical digital influencer should distinguish:

- **allegation from established fact;**
- **criticism from humiliation;**
- **accountability from persecution;**
- **mobilization from incitement;**
- **advocacy from mob action;** and
- **freedom of expression from irresponsible communication.**

This principle applies not only to VeryDarkMan but to any influential activist, politician, religious leader, journalist, celebrity, entertainer, or social-media personality.

Ultimately:

When millions listen to an individual, that individual is no longer merely producing content; consciously or unconsciously, he or she is participating in the socialization of a generation.

The Social Modelling Consistency Principle

Drawing upon Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this article further proposes the **Social Modelling Consistency Principle (SMCP)**.

The SMCP states that:

The probability that peaceful behaviour becomes socially internalized increases when the major institutions surrounding individuals consistently model, reinforce, and reward compatible norms of justice, empathy, tolerance, civility, dialogue, and nonviolent conflict resolution.

This principle is proposed by the present article and should not be attributed directly to Bandura or Bronfenbrenner.

Conversely, inconsistent social modelling may weaken peace education.

Consider the following contradictions:

Family: “Respect everybody.”

Political environment: “Destroy your opponents.”

School: “Do not bully.”

Social media: Humiliation receives millions of engagements.

Church/Mosque: “Love your neighbour.”

Community: Distrust people from another religion.

Government: “Obey the law.”

Citizens observe: Powerful individuals apparently avoiding accountability.

Such contradictions may generate what the present article terms **ethical cognitive dissonance within the social environment**: society teaches one standard verbally while appearing to reward another behaviourally.

A coherent peacebuilding environment can therefore be represented as:

Peaceful Family

↓

Peace-Oriented School

↓

Tolerant Religious Institution

↓

Inclusive Community

↓

Ethical Political Leadership

↓

Responsible Entertainment and Digital Media

↓

Fair and Accountable Institutions

↓

Ethically Socialized Citizen

↓

Social Trust and Cohesion

↓

Reduced Propensity for Civil Unrest

↓

Sustainable Peace

Mental Health, Trauma, and Peacebuilding

Civil conflict does not merely damage physical infrastructure. It also affects psychological well-being.

Exposure to violence, displacement, insecurity, bereavement, traumatic experiences, and prolonged fear may contribute to psychological distress. Peacebuilding efforts therefore increasingly recognize the value of integrating mental-health and psychosocial support with community interventions.

A particularly relevant Nigerian example is the Counselling on Wheels programme implemented by the NEEM Foundation in Borno State, North-East Nigeria.

Paphitis et al. (2023) examined an integrated intervention incorporating mental-health and psychosocial support with peace education, advocacy, community partnerships, and peacebuilding activities.

Their analysis included 1,550 adults who provided data before and after participating in the intervention. The study reported reductions in several measured psychological symptoms and vulnerability-to-violent-extremism scores following participation. Because the study employed a single-arm pre-post observational design, the findings should appropriately be regarded as promising preliminary outcomes rather than definitive proof of causality (Paphitis et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the programme demonstrates the practical possibility of connecting psychological care with community peacebuilding.

This is important because unaddressed trauma, persistent fear, distrust, and emotional distress may complicate reconciliation and social reintegration.

Psychological support should consequently become part of both preventive and post-conflict peacebuilding.

The Psychological–Ethical Social Peace Model (PESPM)

Drawing together the theoretical perspectives developed throughout this article, the author proposes the Psychological–Ethical Social Peace Model (PESPM) as an integrated conceptual framework for preventing emerging civil unrest.

PESPM is proposed by the present article rather than attributed to an existing scholar.

The model recognizes six interconnected levels.

Level One: Individual Psychological Transformation

Self-Awareness → Emotional Regulation → Empathy → Critical Thinking → Tolerance → Peaceful Behaviour

The individual level draws particularly upon emotional intelligence, social-cognitive learning, and moral development (Bandura, 1986; Goleman, 1995; Kohlberg, 1981).

Level Two: Family Ethical Socialization

Responsible Parenting → Positive Behavioural Modelling → Respectful Communication → Moral Education → Nonviolent Conflict Resolution

This level reflects the importance of observational learning and early developmental environments (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Level Three: Community Social Cohesion

Community Dialogue → Intergroup Contact → Cultural Tolerance → Mediation → Cooperative Development → Bridging Social Capital

This level is supported particularly by Allport's (1954) intergroup-contact perspective and Putnam's (2000) analysis of social capital.

Level Four: Religious and Educational Formation

Peace Education → Ethical Teaching → Interfaith Dialogue → Moral Modelling → Reconciliation → Responsible Citizenship

Religious and educational institutions become spaces for shaping values, attitudes, identities, interpersonal behaviour, and understandings of outsiders.

Level Five: Leadership and Institutional Justice

Ethical Governance → Inclusion → Accountability → Rule of Law → Participatory Leadership → Institutional Trust

This level recognizes the significance of leadership modelling and perceptions of procedural justice and legitimacy (Bandura, 1986; Tyler, 2006).

Level Six: Responsible Digital Social Influence

Digital Literacy → Verification → Ethical Communication → Responsible Influencing → Nonviolent Mobilization → Constructive Civic Participation

This addition recognizes the expanding role of digitally mediated models in contemporary socialization (Engel et al., 2024; Filibus et al., 2025; Lajnef, 2023).

The integrated proposition can therefore be expressed as:

Psychological Competence + Ethical Formation + Healthy Relationships + Social Cohesion + Responsible Digital Influence + Institutional Justice + Inclusive Governance = Sustainable Social Peace

PESPM proposes that sustainable peace emerges most effectively when these environments reinforce rather than contradict one another.

Practical Recommendations

Based upon the preceding analysis, the following interventions are recommended.

Family Peace Education

Family and parenting programmes should promote emotional regulation, empathy, tolerance, responsible discipline, respectful communication, behavioural modelling, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Peace Psychology in Education

Schools, colleges, seminaries, and universities should incorporate social-emotional learning, peace psychology, civic responsibility, intercultural competence, critical thinking, conflict resolution, and digital citizenship into relevant educational programmes.

Community Peace and Early-Warning Structures

Communities should establish multidisciplinary structures involving traditional rulers, psychologists, counsellors, religious leaders, women, youth representatives, educators, community associations, and appropriate security representatives.

Their work should include early identification of tension, mediation, dialogue, reconciliation, and referral for psychological support where appropriate.

Interfaith Peace Councils

Christian, Muslim, traditional-religious, and other faith leaders should maintain permanent structures for communication and collaborative community activities rather than meeting only after crises arise.

Ethical Leadership Formation

Political, traditional, religious, community, and organizational leaders should receive training in emotional intelligence, conflict-sensitive communication, ethical decision-making, diversity management, negotiation, responsible public rhetoric, and accountability.

Responsible Digital Influence

Journalists, activists, celebrities, entertainers, social-media influencers, and content creators should be encouraged to adopt fact-checking, conflict-sensitive communication, digital ethics, responsible mobilization, and respect for human dignity.

Mental-Health and Psychosocial Support

Mental-health and psychosocial services should be integrated into peacebuilding strategies, particularly within communities affected by violence, displacement, insecurity, and prolonged social conflict (Paphitis et al., 2023).

National Social-Etiquette and Civility Education

Public education should encourage courtesy, dignity, respectful speech, listening, tolerance of differences, responsible disagreement, and respect across social boundaries.

Youth Inclusion and Empowerment

Young people should participate meaningfully in governance, entrepreneurship, community development, peacebuilding, civic engagement, and national decision-making.

Justice and Accountability

Psychological interventions cannot compensate indefinitely for persistent structural injustice.

Peace education must therefore operate alongside credible governance, impartial institutions, rule of law, accountability, fairness, and legitimate mechanisms through which grievances can be addressed (Tyler, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Civil unrest is frequently confronted only after it becomes visible—when people are already fighting, property is being destroyed, collective anger has intensified, relationships have deteriorated, and security institutions are struggling to restore order.

At that point, society may already be treating symptoms rather than causes.

psychology scholars demonstrates that aggression, prejudice, identity, empathy, cooperation, morality, emotional regulation, and peaceful behaviour are influenced by learning, relationships, social environments, group memberships, leadership, and institutional

experiences (Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1977, 1986; Berkowitz, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The family must therefore become the first school of peace.

The community must become the laboratory of coexistence.

Educational institutions must become training grounds for psychologically and emotionally intelligent citizenship.

Religious organizations must become bridges of reconciliation rather than instruments of division.

Political leaders must become visible models of ethical citizenship.

Digital influencers must recognize themselves as important participants in contemporary socialization.

Government must establish institutions through which citizens can pursue justice and express grievances without resorting to destructive violence.

The concept of the Social Modelling Environment (SME) advanced in this article highlights the interconnectedness of these institutions. Their messages do not operate independently.

When families teach tolerance, schools reinforce it, religious leaders model it, political leaders practise it, digital personalities normalize it, communities reward it, and institutions administer justice fairly, peaceful citizenship becomes psychologically more credible.

The reverse is equally significant.

Aggressive family environments, intolerant religious leadership, divisive political rhetoric, prejudiced community structures, irresponsible digital influence, and unjust institutions may collectively create an environment in which hostility becomes socially learned and psychologically normalized.

Thus:

Society teaches peace or violence not merely through what it says, but through what it repeatedly models, rewards, tolerates, and celebrates.

Sustainable peace is consequently more than the absence of civil unrest.

It is the psychological capacity, ethical commitment, relational competence, social discipline, and institutional willingness to live with differences without converting those differences into hatred and violence.

The ultimate task of peacebuilding is therefore not merely to control violent behaviour after it has emerged but to develop social environments that continually cultivate peaceful citizens.

In this sense:

Peace must first become a psychological disposition, then an ethical value, then a relational practice, then a social norm, and ultimately an institutional culture.

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