



## DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED IT IT FACULTY

# Linking for Peace

An affordance perspective of LinkedIn as an instrument for peace professionals to advance constructive conflict resolution and transformative efforts

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Essay/Thesis:	30 hp
Programme:	Master in Communication
Level:	Second Cycle
Year:	2023
Supervisor:	Charu Uppal
Examiner:	Ylva Hård af Segerstad & Davide Girardelli
Report no:	2023:108
Word count:	11000

## **Abstract**

Has LinkedIn become the platform for a global community of practice for peace professionals? Does it have the potential to be? An inductive approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following Braun and Clarke's six-phase methodology was used as an analytic instrument on empirical data from 13 semi-structured interviews with professionals in peace mediation, using the theoretical lens of affordances.

The participants in the study were found to use LinkedIn to create and sustain meaningful connections globally and across sectors, learn from empirical knowledge, stories and insights from others and explore economic opportunities. However, the extent of engagement with LinkedIn varied depending on the socio-cultural context of the individual actor. The research also underscored the existence of a digital divide, which disproportionately excludes key actors, in particular middle-range actors, from accessing and benefiting from LinkedIn's capacity as a digital platform advancing constructive conflict resolution and transformative efforts among peace professionals.

Based on these findings, the thesis argues that for LinkedIn to rightly realise its potential as an instrument for sustainable peace, the field of human-computer-interaction (HCI) must work alongside peace, conflict and security actors to improve connectivity, digital literacy and inclusivity in regions experiencing ongoing armed violence and war. By intentionally working towards bridging the digital divide, LinkedIn can effectively support peace action and empower a broader range of stakeholders in peace processes.

Keywords: Affordances, Human Computer Interaction (HCI), Peace and Conflict Research

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the peace mediation professionals who participated in this study, for your commitment to peace and taking your time to share your lessons and experiences. Thank you to my mama Irmeli for having the answers to *everything* and always supporting me.

Thank you to my Creator, for your presence and guidance.

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# Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have transformed the social, economic and cultural life in modern societies, causing an end to the industrial age and entering society into what Castells (1996) calls the “information age”. A time of humanity increasingly organised around digital networks in a global economic system understood as *information capitalism*, in which the control and management of information is a key source of power and wealth. As a result, ICT can no longer be understood as a neutral tool but an integral aspect where violence, wars and conflicts, and subsequently conflict resolution also occur (Larrauri & Morrison, 2022).

Old wars were mainly focused on territorial bounds between two or more states. Interestingly, countries are not natural entities but rather human creations shaped by various factors, including political, social, and historical circumstances and “the concept of *nation* is often understood as a uniquely modern and unprecedented form of political community, endowed with a collective consciousness” (Ting, 2008: p. 454). New wars however, are characterised mostly by intra-state conflicts and often involve organised armed groups fighting over identity politics, disintegration of the state, or competition over natural resources and illegal commerce (Kaldor, 2013). Armed conflicts have thus moved deeper within societies, which can partly be explained by the growth of new technology and in particular, weaponry.

In 2017, one billion firearms were estimated to be circulating in the global community, most of which are in civilian hands (Small Arms Survey, 2020) a number that has risen in the past six years, also considering the ease of which a gun can be made using a 3D-printer at home (Berkowitz, 2018). Russia and the United States currently own 89% of the estimated

12.500 total inventory of nuclear weapons, most of which are active and ready to be used in military attacks (Kristensen et al., 2023). In 2021, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 170 conflicts in 60 countries (UCDP, 2023). The global climate is also rapidly getting warmer as a result of human-made activities, especially burning fossil fuels and deforestation, which experts predict will create new conflicts over resource scarcity and inhabitable ground in the near future (IPPC, 2021).

Considering this, professionals working with war, conflicts and peace are continuously working toward new strategies, practices and innovations for creating sustainable peace. The field of peace research is merely 70 years old, and is still finding its footing in today's globalised world (Gleditsch, et al. 2014). International diplomacy and negotiations play a crucial role in managing conflicts, mitigating tensions, and finding common ground among geopolitical powers and in recent years, the field has grown substantially, with experts recognising the need for a comprehensive framework and a larger number of actors and experts in the field (Turner and Wälsih, 2021). Peace processes have also begun incorporating new technologies, including digital conflict analyses, strategic communications on social media, messaging and video conferencing tools, and online platforms for communities of practice and coordination (Lantz et al. 2017; Varela, 2021).

Considering online platforms for communities of practice and coordination, this thesis looks at LinkedIn, the world's largest professional social networking site, as a platform for peace professionals to foster constructive conflict resolution and transformative efforts. LinkedIn is designed to "connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful" (LinkedIn, 2023). Various features on the site are aligned to this purpose such as job features, making new connections and posting articles. Although LinkedIn was initially designed to connect the world's professionals, this thesis examines whether it can be

leveraged by peace professionals to create meaningful opportunities that can transform divided societies.

In research examining human-computer-interaction (HCI), a fundamental framework for understanding the mutually reinforcing relationship between humans and technology is *affordances*. It is a socio-cultural perspective of technology that recognizes the relationship between perception and action, and can be applied to social networking sites to examine the interaction between the design of a platform and the individuals engaging with it (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012).

The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore the potential of LinkedIn for peace mediation professionals through an affordance perspective. In particular, 13 semi-structured interviews with peace mediation professionals across a number of geographical locations and professional backgrounds were conducted and analysed using an inductive approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) according to Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase methodology.

The *theoretical framework* merges the two disciplines of peace and communication research, first exploring conflict resolution and mediation both in practice and in theory, before diving into the latest research exploring social media, the digital divide and affordances. At the end of the chapter, the purpose of the study is outlined alongside the guiding research question. The following chapter, *method*, details the choice of research design, data collection, sampling and ethical considerations. The chapter ends with a guide of the six-phase process of RTA. Following this, the findings from the analysis are presented and discussed critically in the chapter *findings and discussion*. Finally, the thesis is summarised in the *conclusion* with recommendations for future research and action.

# Literature Review

## Conflict Resolution and Mediation

In his first address to the Security Council after taking office in 2017, the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres underlined that the most serious shortcoming of the international community is the inability to prevent crises, and emphasised the importance of activities enhancing mediation and conflict prevention.

Mediation is a communicative practice in which a neutral third party is introduced into a conflict dynamic with the aim of managing or resolving a conflict. It requires the consent of the disputing parties and is a practice as old as the nation state itself, used across all levels of the human spectrum from the interpersonal to the governmental (Bush & Folger, 2005). In international relations, mediation is one type of conflict resolution and includes a number of activities aimed at providing an enabling environment for mediation such as dialogue processes, workshops and training, facilitation and operational support, policy debates and research (IMSD, 2017).

Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, the field was pushed toward standardisation and institutionalism in the international community (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2013). In the early 2000, mediation support structures were established across peace and security organisations across the globe, recognising the important role of a comprehensive framework and a larger number of actors and experts in the field, as opposed to the sole high-profile mediator performing mediation mainly ad hoc. Experts have specifically emphasised the need for a multi-actor approach to solve the complex conflicts in the 21st century (Kastner, 2021). This points to the critical role of civil society and “national



mediation teams, local partners, and insider mediators, especially in light of their local knowledge, insights, networks, and influence” (Waldman, 2022: p. 14).

There is a growing acknowledgement in the field that mediation organisations rarely mediate. Instead, the more complex conflicts of today require peace mediation actors to provide activities aimed at creating an enabling environment for mediation, such as capacity-building at the regional, national and local levels, partnership and coordination, inclusivity, preparedness and resources (Lantz et al., 2017). Turner and Wälsih (2021) describes contemporary peace mediation, stating that:

[It] now includes a wide range of activities ranging from high-level diplomacy to grassroots peacebuilding, reflecting a much greater interest in the idea of multi-track diplomacy and the contribution that mediation can make at all levels of a conflicted society” (p. 1).

In line with the rise of actors in the field, a substantial number of international mediation networks has emerged. Bramble and Paffenholz (2019) note that these networks are a “manifestation of the growing global recognition of the need to go beyond approaches aimed only at “stopping the guns” towards processes that can help foster positive inclusive peace” (p. 1). The aim of the networks varies depending on their specific mission. For women’s mediation networks the aim is often to increase the meaningful participation of women. For other networks, increasing local or regional ownership may be the primary aim. The common ground for all these networks are the opportunities for exchanging information, coordinating efforts and supporting each other in resolving or transforming contemporary conflicts (Bramble and Paffenholz, 2019).

A larger network can be understood as a community of practice (CoP), defined by Wenger-Trayner (2021) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something

they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 2). CoPs are a phenomenon as old as human cognition itself but have gained popularity in organisational research, as it is a useful approach to understand learning. Specifically, actors in CoPs are practitioners that share a domain of interest and interact with each other which results in a development of practice, through for example problem solving, receiving experience, coordination and confidence-building practices (Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

## The Gap Between Practise and Research

The task of peacebuilding is enormous, as a result, strategically and methodologically conceptualising the ways towards peace are needed to transform divided societies fueled by fear, violence, anger and hatred. Peace research developed during the 1950s, marking the start of the systematic investigation of the conditions of conflicts and peace as an academic discipline (Gleditsch, et al. 2014). John Paul Lederach’s development of conflict transformation (CT) has been especially impactful in the field to address conflicts beyond conflict resolution or management at the state level. It challenges the traditional view in international relations and preventive diplomacy which aims to find a solution to a conflicts’ immediate issues and instead sees conflict as a natural condition of the human experience and seeks to create deep-rooted and sustainable changes by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and transforming relationships, structures, and systems that sustain violence.

Conflict transformation takes on a broader long-term perspective, recognising that conflicts can be an opportunity to “to build constructive change out of the energy created by conflict” (Lederach, 2003). Through encountering and acknowledging challenges, conflict

actors and peace workers are prompted to seek a deeper understanding of themselves and the nature of reality. In particular, conflict is unsustainable and requires change, CT therefore looks at four modes in which conflicts induce change: the personal, the relational, the structural and the cultural. When addressing conflict, peace actors must use self-inquiry and self-awareness to understand and strategically consider the changes the conflict is causing, and their own underlying values and intentions. The model of conflict transformation can be applied to a wide range of social conflicts, from the personal to the structural. It is particularly useful as it creates a way to engage with the complexity of conflict through multiple avenues of response by looking beyond the content and the substance of the dispute (Lederach, 2015).

Another important contribution to the study of conflict is Lederach's (1997) distinction between three levels of actors and approaches to building peace. The "Pyramid of Peacebuilding" is a practical framework that provides guidance for peacebuilding interventions which illustrates the interplay of various levels of peacebuilding, including personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions. Starting with the top leadership involving military and political leaders with high visibility, peace action is often emphasising cease-fires at high-level negotiations with a high-profile mediator. The next level is middle-range leadership: respected actors including but not limited to NGOs, religious leaders, academics or professors. Action on this level involves problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training, peace commissions and insider-partial teams. Particularly, this group of people are a key ingredient in creating an infrastructure for achieving sustainable peace because of their networks that cut across the lines of conflict and can establish productive relationships. The third level is grassroots leadership, local leaders. The grassroots represent the masses of society, and leaders at this level operate together with the affected

population, conducting local peace commissions, prejudice reduction and psychosocial work in post-war trauma (Maiese, 2003).

The disconnection between the knowledge and insights generated through academic research and the application of that knowledge in practical peace mediation efforts has made many actors in the field deeply critical of the perceived gap between academic research and practice (Waldman, 2022). On one side, practitioners contend that conflict management skills cannot be taught but are acquired through hands-on experience. On the other side, researchers that analyse conflict, mediation and related areas are using concepts that lack practical applicability and are not accessible to practitioners (Zartman, 2003). Lehmann-Larsen argues that the knowledge management cycle in peace mediation is closed as “the lessons identified and emerging best practices are not being properly applied” (2014: p. 14). A disconnect between analysis and practice remains widespread, as research practice is not sufficiently implemented. However, considering the connectivity that social media has brought to the world, can LinkedIn be a bridge to close or at least narrow this gap?

## Social Media

Social media (SM) used by 4.76 billion users worldwide (Kemp, 2023) exploded in the years following the launch of Facebook in 2004 (McCay-Peet & Quan-Hase, 2016). Several social networking platforms with various features have since been established. Although social networking sites are by their nature social media, the two concepts should not be understood unanimously (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Within communication research, there is no universally accepted definition of what SM are and the definitional challenges can be explained by the multitude of SM products and services that are continuously changing and

evolving as technology keeps developing (McCay-Peet & Quan-Hase 2017). Obar and Wildman (2015) however, discuss the common grounds of social media services, arguing that SM are currently web 2.0 internet based applications, sustained by user-generated content, requiring user-specific profiles for individuals or groups to identify themselves and are facilitating the development of online networks by connecting profiles together. Social networking is a SM subcategory, focusing specifically on platforms enabling networking.

Considering the transformational changes that ICT has brought to all aspects of human life in the past three decades, the digital world must be considered when discussing contemporary peace processes. Social media and peace mediation research so far, has focused on how SM can enable deeper engagement with conflict analyses, easier interaction with conflict parties, inclusivity and public support for peace processes (Jenny et al., 2018; Lantz et al. 2021; MSU, 2019).

Conflict analyses are instrumental to the mediation process, as it provides the foundation for effective action. In line with the rise of social media, it is now important to consider the distinct digital ecosystem of the conflict context. Some relevant questions to be asked are, which SM platforms are the most prevalent and how they are used in different regions, the degree of state control of the internet and national regulatory SM frameworks, and what past instances of conflict have been influenced by SM (Lantz et al. 2021).

SM can also be used to communicate with conflict parties, as it can be a safe, easy and cheap option. Mediation teams can increase their work capacity based on the speed and ease in which communicating is possible and the more frequent dialogue may help to build trust and relationships (Jenny et al. 2018). However, confidentiality and security is an important issue and if confidential information is leaked, this may undermine the process (Lantz et al. 2021).

Mediation teams can also use SM strategically to communicate to relevant stakeholders and the public (MSU, 2019). Communicating to the public is becoming increasingly more important, yet increasingly more difficult as narratives surrounding peace processes are being conducted more and more on social media. Using SM in public communications may enable more support and legitimacy for the peace agreement, if made, which may contribute to a longer lasting peace (Jenny et al. 2018). SM communication may also enhance the inclusivity of the process by reaching traditionally underrepresented and hard to reach groups, such as women and youth. Provided that these groups have access to the internet, social media may extend the possibility of a more inclusive environment of stakeholders (MSU, 2019).

## Affordances

The term 'affordances' was first conceptualised by psychologist Gibson in 1979, as an ecological approach to visual perception, referring to the role of the environment and what it can offer the individual. It was a radical concept, emphasising the role of perception and action, as opposed to the traditional view that the objects of the environment have inherent properties. In essence, affordances are "the properties an object possesses that communicate possible actions to a user" (Chong & Proctor, 2020: p. 3). The affordance of a sofa is sitting for a tired person and the affordance of a staircase would be climbing, but for a really tired person the affordance of a sofa is sleeping and a staircase it is sitting, because affordances are dynamic and do not look the same for everyone (Gaver, 1991).

The theory has since been developed and adapted in several sectors including human-computer-interaction (HCI), architectural design, information and communication technology (ICT) and artificial intelligence (AI) because it presents a lens to understand and

examine the socio-cultural relationship between humans and technology. In social media and digital communication research, it can provide a powerful tool for analysing the “character” of social media sites or how the design and features of a site shape users' perceptions, actions, and interactions over time and how users interaction shape the site. Ronzhyn et al. (2022) defines social media affordances as “the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms” (p: 14).

Affordance theory views perception and action as connected. Because the features of a social media site are relational they may prompt a specific action based on how the user perceives the possibilities for action in the context of the user's goal, expertise, cultural background and social setting (Bernhard et al., 2013). As a result, the same technology, or social media site, may provide different affordances to different users. How individuals engage with technology is mediated by socio-cultural factors (Kaptelini & Nardi, 2012), including but not limited to technological competence, motivation and goals, track of mediation engagement, organisational mandates and socio-cultural norms (Bernhard et al., 2013).

## Digital Divide

The field of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) asks what role ICT can have in promoting human development including in health, income, education, participation and empowerment (Hamel, 2010). The field also recognises the digital divide and its consequences. The digital divide is a “simplistic phrase used to explain

the gap between people who can easily use and access technology, and those who cannot” (Sanders & Scanlon, 2021: p. 131).

Recent data show that 46.4% of the global population do not have access to the Internet. The top of the list of countries with internet usage among the total population were located in northern Europe, notably Ireland and Norway had the most Internet usage of the total population, with respective countries having 99% connectivity. At the other end of the list is North Korea with virtually no Internet usage, considering that the general population is still blocked from using the internet, followed by South Sudan and Somalia with only 10% of the population having access to the internet (Kemp, 2023). These statistics present the problem of the digital divide, where people who don't have access to the Internet are put at a socio-economic disadvantage, losing out on social, economic and political opportunities presented by ICTs, especially considering the rise of the knowledge economy and information capitalism (Park, 2017).

Henry (2019) found that the main issues preventing access to ICTs are: lack of electricity as 15% of the world's population are without it, literacy as an estimated 13% of the world's population cannot read or write, gender inequalities, poverty, the high cost of broadbands in many countries, language barriers and low network coverage. Actors working to close this gap are integrating both technical expertise in information systems and infrastructure to ensure connectivity, policy-making and education to improve digital literacy (Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2021).

In the context of LinkedIn, Keipos' analysis of LinkedIn statistics also shows an unequal balance of geographical use. Northern America has the most registered LinkedIn users, with 222.1 million users, followed by Southern Asia with 120 million and Southern America with 112 million users. On the other hand, Central Asia has only 2.1 million users and Middle



Africa 2.8 million users (Kemp, 2023). Considering these statistics, the digital divide again presents itself, where access to the Internet is unequally distributed across the globe, with social, cultural and economic inequalities as a result.

## Purpose of the Study

Much of the literature concerning social media in peace mediation has focused on how conflict actors use social media or how social media can enhance or derail the mediation process. However, little attention has been brought to how peace professionals use social media or how it can be used as a platform to enhance their work. In addition, no existing social media or affordances research has examined LinkedIn in the context of peace.

Considering the recent developments both in the field of peace and ICT, the purpose of this study is to explore how peace mediation professionals use and understand the affordances of LinkedIn, and what the potential of LinkedIn is for this specific field. Therefore, the research question that is guiding this thesis is:

*How do peace mediation professionals use the affordances of LinkedIn and how can these affordances be leveraged to enhance the capacity for constructive conflict engagement?*

Investigating how peace professionals can leverage LinkedIn's affordances can reveal new opportunities and possibilities for utilising LinkedIn as a platform to enhance their capacity for constructive conflict engagement. This knowledge can in turn help professionals optimise their use of LinkedIn and explore its untapped potential.

# Method

## Research Design

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) are designed to explore the subjective responses of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon they have experienced, which in this study is engaging with LinkedIn as a peace mediation professional. It requires an interview guide (Appendix 2) that is based on the objective knowledge about the phenomenon before conducting the interviews. The objective knowledge was obtained by examining the features of LinkedIn, and considering these in light of the peace mediation profession. In SSI, the interview questions are open-ended and the participants are encouraged to answer them as they wish according to their subjective experience, and the researcher can ask follow-up questions (McIntosh & Moore, 2015). This flexibility is a strength of the method, as it allows for a deep investigation of the subjective experiences of the participants. The researcher can follow the interview guide and remain close to the topic but still remain responsive to the participants.

The interview guide is a key ingredient in SSI because it will fundamentally influence the results of the study. If the interview guide is not grounded in knowledge of the phenomenon or systematically reviewed, this will affect the results of the study, diminishing the trustworthiness of the whole study. To counter this weakness of the method, Kallio et al. (2016) developed a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide involving five phases to ensure objectivity and trustworthiness. In particular, it requires the researcher to consider whether the research question can be answered using SSI, using previous knowledge as a basis for the guide, formulating a preliminary guide, pilot testing and finally, presenting the guide. All five steps were completed to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

## Data Collection

The empirical data was collected using semi-structured interviews, through Zoom and Whatsapp, between March and May 2023 in Swedish and English, with 13 peace mediation professionals with a diverse geographical and professional background. Considering that the use of LinkedIn by peace mediation actors is unexplored, interviews were the most appropriate method for collecting the data to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject. Interviews are an especially useful approach to data collection in social sciences, as it allows for examination of the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants (Jamshed, 2014). In particular, semi-structured interviews allow for elaboration and an in-depth exploration of a topic since it is based on an interview guide with a preconceived set of guiding questions but is open in the sense that the interviewer can ask follow-up questions (Alsaawi, 2014). The reason for conducting the interviews online was because many of the participants were in geographically different locations. De Villiers et al. (2021) found that for video-based research to work, both the interviewer and the participant must have an adequate understanding of the technology, and a high-speed internet connection. In some cases, the interview was conducted over WhatsApp phone calls, when Zoom required more high-speed Internet than what was available. In those cases, information may have been lost since there was no way to read face or body language. However, it was still deemed sufficient for the data collection, since we could hear each other, and the voice recording could be transcribed. The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft 365 Word's transcription tool, and edited manually.

## Sampling

The 13 participants of the study are all professionals working with mediation, with varying experience from Track One mediation processes to middle-range and local level conflict resolution, and between one to 51 years of experience. Although the participants have various geographical and professional backgrounds, their line of work and professional commitments makes them a united group of peace mediation professionals working in many different ways to achieve what Lederach (2015) refers to as conflict transformation, or conflict resolution.

The participants were selected by combining purposive and snowball sampling. The two fold process used was: asking my existing network for referrals and searching for 'peace mediation', 'conflict resolution' and 'conflict transformation' on LinkedIn. The profiles that matched the key search words were examined to confirm that they are professionals in the field of peace mediation before contacting them. Purposive sampling is a common technique of finding participants in qualitative research and involves identifying and selecting individuals that have knowledge in regard to the subject phenomenon, and are willing and available for an interview (Palinkas et al., 2016).

There is much debate about the sample size in a qualitative study. Many argue that saturation is an important factor to think about in the quality of a qualitative research. Thus, the point in which data collection no longer draws new information to the necessary conclusions (Dworkin, 2012). However, Braun and Clarke (2021) whose Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) methodology I employ, argue that saturation cannot be a taken-for-granted means of conducting a trustworthy qualitative research in RTA because the analysis is never 'fixed' but interpretive and latent. The reflexivity in RTA points to the researcher as a central instrument in coding and theme formation, and she herself must make "a situated,

interpretative judgement about when to stop coding and move to theme generation, and when to stop theme generation and mapping thematic relationships to finalise the written report” (Braun & Clarke, 2021: p. 2010). Instead, theoretical sufficiency or sampling adequacy can be explored as an alternative to saturation, pointing to the importance of capturing the richness, depth, diversity and complexity in the data, to build a narrative in the final stages of RTA, as opposed to only focusing on the quantity of the data.

Below is a list of the pseudo name, nationality and years active as a peace mediation professional of each participant in the study. The names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Years active</b>
Maria	Sweden	25
Adrian	Cameroon	5
Emilia	Sweden	14
Chioma	Nigeria	8
Jack	Northern Ireland	51
Wisam	Lebanon	15
Johan	Sweden	5
Rebecca	England	1
Ellinore	Sweden	3
Rita	Sweden	5
Alice	England	8
Sade	Nigeria	4
Dina	Egypt	10

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, “what is fair, just and responsible in a given context” (Markham & Buchanan, 2015: 1) must be considered during every stage of the research process (Ciuk & Latusek, 2017) and is fundamental to qualitative research. Considering that mediation is very sensitive in nature it was important to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and that no sensitive or case-specific information was leaked. The participants' identities were therefore anonymised using pseudonyms and identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Each participant received an information and consent sheet (Appendix 3) according to the CODEX rules and guidelines for research, explaining that the participation is voluntary and that the results of the study will only be used for the purpose of this study.

To ensure transparency and trustworthiness of the analysis, this thesis uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The reflexive position recognises the researcher as a key instrument in generating the findings of the thesis and requires continuous transparent self-reflection, critical thinking and descriptions of the analytic process (Leurs, 2017). It is thus important to openly acknowledge all steps of the process (Gawlewicz, 2019). Some of the interviews were conducted in Swedish and were translated during the data analysis. Therefore, to ensure trustworthiness, the translated data is presented in Appendix 1, both in the original language and in English.

## Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a form of analysis concerned with constructing themes or patterns in the collected data. It can be understood both as an umbrella term for a variety of methods as well as a stand alone method in its own right (Nowell et al. 2017). In this thesis,

Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase process of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is utilised. RTA is a “method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: p. 6), and the six-phase process can be used as a guide for engaging with the data, coding and developing themes. Although it should be noted that RTA is a recursive process and the researcher moves between the phases continuously throughout the research (Byrne, 2022).

RTA recognises the researcher as an instrument in conducting the analysis. The *reflexivity* underlines the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic resource in the engagement with the material. A common misconception in RTA is the notion of bias and ‘coding reliability’. Although neo-positivist approaches to thematic analysis should use a codebook and multiple coders to ensure coding reliability, the reflexive approach to thematic analysis views knowledge as contextual and the subjectivity of the researcher as a resource as opposed to a problem of bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Whereas quantitative research mainly is concerned with validity and reliability, qualitative research aims at ensuring trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is concerned with ensuring that the research process is logical and traceable, that the findings are clearly derived from the data, and that the researcher’s representation fits with the respondents’ views. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher can document evidence of the process in a reflexive journal to record methodological decisions and rationales. In particular, and in line with RTA and the researcher as an instrument of the analysis, a reflexivity journal records “the researcher’s personal reflections of their values, interests, and insights information about self” (Nowell et al., 2017: 3).

One of strengths of thematic analysis is its flexibility, as it can accommodate a large range of theoretical perspectives. It can be conducted both inductively or deductively. As

opposed to other popular qualitative analytic approaches such as grounded theory, discourse analysis or narrative analysis, thematic analysis does not have an inbuilt guiding theory. However, as will be discussed below, this does not imply that TA can be conducted without theoretically informed assumptions about what constitutes knowledge (epistemology), what can be claimed on the basis of the data (ontology) and what level of understanding the data represent (explicit or interpretive). If these assumptions are not made explicit and the subjectivity of the researcher cannot not be understood by the reader, the lack of coherence when developing themes will weaken the trustworthiness and thus, the result of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

### **Addressing Theoretical Assumptions**

Reflexive thematic analysis requires transparency from the researcher, how the researcher understands knowledge and the world must therefore be clearly stated. The epistemological and ontological stand of this research is constructivist. This paradigm denies the existence of an objective external reality independent of the perceiver and instead views knowledge and reality as socially constructed based on various discourses (Lee, 2012). This is also in line with RTA which views knowledge as contextual (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The analysis is conducted inductively. Inductive research allows for coding and theme formation driven from the data as opposed to the deductive approach which derives the codes and themes from a preconceived theoretical framework. No research has yet explored LinkedIn in the context of peace actors which limits the construction of a coding framework. Instead, the inductive approach, similarly to grounded theory, allows for coding and theme formation that is closely related to the collected data and allows a rich description of the overall data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).



In line with the thesis constructivist position, the level of which the data is coded and constructed into themes is done both semantically and latently. On the semantic, or the explicit level, the data is analysed explicitly. What is said is what is coded. On the other hand, at the latent, or interpretive level, the development of the themes involves interpretation and the socio-cultural and structural contexts of the participants. The coding and theme formation is thus concerned with the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations of the semantic content, which allows for a deeper engagement of the inductive findings of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **Clarke and Braun's Six-phase Methodology**

#### **Phase 1 - Data familiarisation**

The first step in the six-phase methodology of reflexive thematic analysis is to familiarise oneself with the data, read through each data extract and take notes of meaning and patterns that may form the codes and themes in the next phases. This step is important because it sets the foundation for the rest of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Since I interviewed the participants myself and kept notes during the interview process with each participant, I was quite familiar with the data from the beginning. During transcription, I became more immersed with the data and identified some significant meanings and patterns. Specifically Identified some characteristics of the mediation profession that was relevant to this study of LinkedIn. Several interviewees acknowledged that LinkedIn has a large potential in the field considering that it is a professional networking platform and peace mediation is a majorly relational based profession. At the same time, this potential is not explicitly leveraged. This points to a prevalent gap, where LinkedIn presents

an opportunity, which has been empirically unexplored, for professionals in peace mediation to enhance their work using LinkedIn.

I also became aware that LinkedIn's features have more affordances than I was initially aware about when constructing the interview guide. For example, privacy and confidentiality is an important aspect of the mediation field, and hiding your profile from the public is one feature that may contribute to the affordance of privacy and confidentiality. However, because I was not aware of this connection when I constructed the interview guide, this aspect has not been explored. The semi-structured framework of the interviews allowed for a more open-ended nature, resulting in the discovering of aspects that were not initially considered. This delimitation will affect the ending result of the analysis, it is thus impossible to assume that all the affordances of LinkedIn for peace mediation actors have been explored.

## Phase 2 - Generating initial codes

In RTA, the codes represent the researcher's interpretation of the patterns of meaning in relation to the phenomenon of the study and the research question (Byrne, 2021). The codes are the most basic segment of the data that will eventually become themes. In this step, the data should be analysed systematically, and categorised into as many codes as possible that connect to the phenomenon of the study. It is not necessary to code each line of the data set if the information is not relevant to the research question, and one data extract may be collected into different codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process is iterative and flexible, and while this step is the generation of initial codes, coding can still be done later in the process as well (Terry et al., 2017).

I used the qualitative analysis computer software programme NVivo to code the data. Each interview transcript was systematically worked through, with equal attention being brought to the entire set. When coding, I searched for accounts of opportunities with LinkedIn for the participants. Interpretation was used when coding the data because the data was coded both latently and semantically. In total, 28 codes were identified.

### Phase 3 - Generating initial themes

When all the data has been coded, this step moves the focus from each individual code to the broader level of themes. This step involves “sorting the codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: p. 19). The codes are thus analysed considering how they may combine an overarching theme and the sub themes within them. It is important here to understand that the themes are not hidden in the data waiting to be discovered. Instead, the themes are generated by the researcher’s own interpretation of the coded data (Byrne, 2021). The research question acts as a guide in this process, helping to identify what counts as a theme and what does not. Themes are formed by the researcher’s consideration of the codes, to see how they form an overarching theme. If a code explains the data in a rich and meaningful way, it can be ‘promoted’ to a theme and other codes may form a miscellaneous theme if they do not clearly fit anywhere (Terry et al., 2017).

Using NVivo, I organised the codes according to most references. At the top, with all 13 participants mentioning it and 71 collected interview extracts, was the code *connecting with others*. Considering that LinkedIn is a social networking site, frequent mention of connectivity is unsurprising. The second most referenced code was *exchanging information*

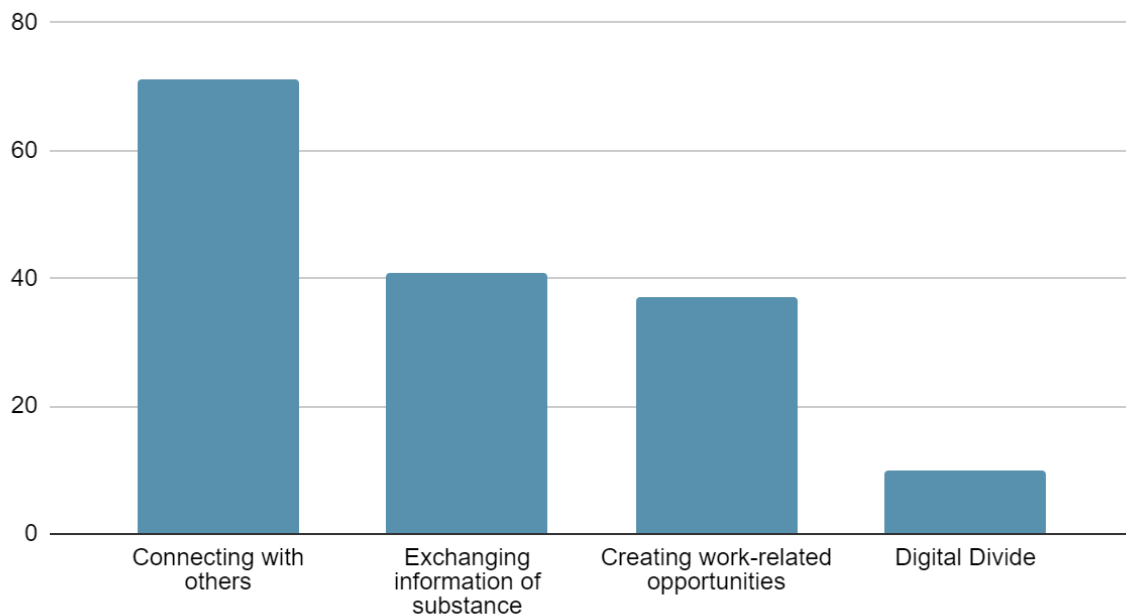
*of substance* considering the access and willingness to share relevant and important information on LinkedIn, with 41 references. The third most reference code was to promote *your work to relevant actors*, with 37 references. The digital divide was referenced only 10 times by three participants, but I deemed it very important for the holistic understanding of the results of the study and made it into a theme. Some codes were merged into each other, others were not considered relevant. Finally, all codes were collated into four themes. Below is a candidate thematic map, presenting how each individual code formed the themes and a graph visualising the amount of references within the four overarching themes.

### Candidate Map

Codes	Themes
Expand personal network	Connecting with others
Create new contacts	
Large reach	
Maintain personal network	
Reach outside of field	
Same level playing ground	
Exchange knowledge	Exchanging information of substance
Exchange experience	
Learn/Access new information	
Keep up with the latest trends	
Engage in discussions	
Find new jobs	Create work-related opportunities
Personal branding	
Promote your work	

Digital divide	Digital divide
Language barriers	

### Graph of the amount of references per theme



### Phase 4 - Reviewing themes

In phase four the researcher ensures that the themes represent both the dataset as a whole and inform the research question, and involves two levels of refining the themes. The first level is to ensure that the themes coheres with the data in a meaningful way and that there are clear and identifiable distinctions between the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All the collected data extracts should be re-read to ensure that they are clearly related to the central theme (Terry et al., 2017). If there is not enough data to support the themes, some may be disregarded or collapsed into each other and form new themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) constructed a list of five questions to ask when reviewing the themes: Is it a theme or just a code? Does it tell you something useful about the data set and research question? Is

there enough meaningful data to support the theme? Is it clear what it includes and discludes?

Once all the themes have been reviewed, the second level of refining the themes then considers whether the reviewed thematic map is accurately reflecting the meanings of the data set as a whole. In this phase, the entire data set should be re-read to assert that the themes are representing the data set and to code any additional data that has been missed in previous stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Using Google Docs, the collected data extracts for was organised into each theme. The first three themes, about connecting with others, sharing information of substance, and creating work-related opportunities were all clearly represented in the data extracts and did answer the research question. The fourth theme however, was not as referenced as the other themes. However, because I regarded it as important to understand the data as a whole, and had enough data extracts and codes to form a theme, I decided to keep it in the analysis. The data extracts in Swedish were also translated to English (Appendix 1).

## Phase 5 - Defining and naming themes

The separation between phase five and six is usually not clear, as these steps involve writing the findings section of the thesis. Phase five is about identifying and analysing the essence of each theme, by deciding which of the collected data extracts will be presented and analysed in the findings chapter. The chosen data should “provide a vivid, compelling example that clearly illustrates the analytic points you are making” (Braun & Clarke, 2012: p. 67). When presenting the findings the extracts should help to inform the researcher’s interpretation, not explain the data in itself. The analytic narrative explains what is

interesting about the extracts and why. When defining and naming the themes, they should be considered both by themselves and in relation to the other themes, as the themes together should create a coherent narrative about the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A good thematic analysis has themes that are unique and specific, are related but do not overlap and directly address the research question. The names of the themes should also be informative, concise and catchy.

Since the aim of the findings & discussion chapter is to produce an analytic narrative in relation to the research question, choosing which data extracts to present in the theme was a recursive process, meaning that I chose which data extract to present alongside writing the analytic narrative and often went back and forth between the themes. I renamed the first theme, *connecting with others*, to *linking peace actors* and considered which extracts would be presented in the theme. I also renamed the third theme from *creating work-related opportunities* to *making revenue*. In both instances of renaming the themes, I found the new names more catchy. At this stage, I also made the choice to remove any extra words that were in the transcription but did not add any real value to the narrative, such as stuttering or filler words such as “like” or “also”. I also removed any identified information about the participants' work, by replacing the information with [hidden].

## Phase 6 - Producing the report

The final phase of RTA is to present the data in a meaningful and coherent way. This phase will be illustrated in the next chapter of the study, Findings and Discussion. In essence, the aim of this chapter is to “tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: p. 23). The

findings goes beyond just explaining the data and produces an analytic narrative that makes an argument in relation to the research question and the analytical framework. This is the reason for merging the findings and the discussion chapters together, and it also avoids repetition had they been separate. The order in which the themes are presented needs to be considered, as they should build on each other and tell a coherent narrative about the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

An important aspect that was considered when writing up the report is the western hegemony in the fields of conflict resolution and mediation. As the dominant power in the field, the western worldview of conflicts, society and peace can undermine other worldviews (Walker, 2004) about what constitutes conflict and how to resolve them. It is thus important to critically consider the findings of the research and not uncritically assume the western discourse without addressing other cultures and other worldviews.



## Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis according to the sixth phase of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006) alongside a critical discussion in relation to the literature review.

### Linking Peace Actors

LinkedIn allows professionals to connect with like-minded individuals from around the world. By joining relevant groups, participating in discussions, and engaging with others in the field, peace practitioners can establish valuable relationships and expand their network. It is the first theme because it is the basis of which all other themes become possible and is divided into two subthemes: *networking* and *connecting beyond boundaries*.

#### **Networking**

With 900 million users worldwide, LinkedIn (2023) has become an online meeting ground for professionals and experts in several fields across the globe. Alice, who has eight years of experience working with peace mediation in England, explained her reason for using LinkedIn:

LinkedIn is probably apart from my [hidden] work, the main platform I use to deal with connections. So I think it's a good platform, I think that it is good because it's sort of where everybody goes. You know, you don't have to create another standalone platform.

As the world's largest professional social network, LinkedIn is unique from any other mediation network or social media. Whereas many international mediation networks exist in the peace mediation field, with focuses from gender to regional-specific diversities, LinkedIn is an open platform for everyone who has access to the Internet and a basic understanding of the platform. Maria, who is based in Sweden with 25 years of experience in mediation, expressed this view:

I've often thought about what you do best with LinkedIn because you have so terribly many contacts there. It's contacts from many years back, to contacts that you don't have on a daily basis and people that you have meetings or conferences with or something like that.

Affordances are relational, depending on the goal of the individual and the socio-cultural context in which they are in. For Jack, who has worked with mediation for 51 years, the connecting affordance on LinkedIn is not something he is actively pursuing, he explained:

I have no interest in expanding to a relatively meaningless, large diaspora of people. Because I could say connect, connect, connect, but I am just not interested.

Similarly, Johan with five years of experience explained his view of networking on LinkedIn:

I know of many who send out requests to people they don't know and then they get 500+ connections. It looks good that you have a very large network, but in reality it doesn't mean anything if you don't actually have relationships, that it's not actually a network.

LinkedIn offers real potential to build and maintain a network. By mindfully considering one's network on LinkedIn, these relationships can provide support, inspiration and collaboration opportunities. Ellinore, who is new in the field, and has only worked for one year, explained that she uses LinkedIn's connection affordance to find new people that could be relevant to her career:

I am interested in working in East Africa and I haven't had very many contacts there, but somehow I've now started to find people within those countries who work with similar stuff. It's something that you might have to actively search for, or you find someone, check their contact network, then it continues to roll like that for a while.

The actors in the peace mediation field are not unanimous, as their experience, expertise, motivations and goals will vary. When examining how Jack, Johan and Ellinore are making

use of LinkedIn's networking affordance, it becomes clear that LinkedIn is better used to maintain a network for some while for others best used for growing.

### **Connecting Beyond Boundaries**

The large (although unequally distributed) reach of LinkedIn presents a potential for peace actors to connect across geographic and professional boundaries. In particular, it gives the actors on the site a sort of 'same-level playing ground', opening doors that would otherwise have been harder to open. Sade, who have four years of mediation experience in Nigeria, explained:

I think it gives everyone a level playing ground, and various opportunities are open. It is just for you to dive in and take on the opportunities.

LinkedIn is a platform open for many to explore. Rebecca, who has been working with mediation and conflict resolution research for one year, expressed:

Without LinkedIn, a lot of the time, you kind of just get clamped into your own field, and you don't really engage with people in different fields, unless they're your friends because you're working every day, and you're with the same people. So I think LinkedIn is really good for that because you can talk to people from all sorts of different fields.

In particular, LinkedIn presents an opportunity to bridge the research-practising gap in the peace profession. Connecting actors from different universities, organisations and companies presents an opportunity for the individuals on the site to expand their reach and holistically address the complex issues. Jack, for example, explained how LinkedIn allowed crossovers between conflict resolution and the environmental field:

If you look at our LinkedIn, there's a guy called [hidden] and there's a messaging out there about how this should now move, and not just be about the peacebuilding side of things, to the environmental side of things for young leaders who are going to face this like you in the future.

Just like LinkedIn affords connection across fields, practices and professional levels, it also presents a potential for experts and actors in the field to connect across geographical bounds. Adrian, who is both as a professor in peace and conflict and a mediator, expressed how he uses LinkedIn differently for local and international connections:

For my local audience, I share for them to also have an understanding of what is happening in the conflict [the Anglophone crisis]. For other scholars who are international it is to discuss, probably they may have their own idea when it comes to mediation but for us to discuss different ideas. Is there a particular format process that targets a particular conflict situation or can the process be applied to any other conflict in the world?

For Adrian, who is using LinkedIn from a country with a civil war, LinkedIn presents an affordance to share information about the conflict and discuss potential solutions with international experts, especially considering his expertise in the area.

## Meaningful Information Exchange

LinkedIn provides a platform for sharing insights, research, and best practices related to peace mediation. Considering that the field of peace is still developing and that experts and actors are continuously developing new strategies, methodologies and lessons learned to transform social conflicts, professionals can contribute by posting articles, sharing reports, and discussing emerging trends and challenges. This knowledge exchange fosters both learning and professional development within the community. As a natural continuation to

the potential of LinkedIn to connect a large diaspora of people, this theme is about meaningful information exchange. It is divided into two subthemes: knowledge and best practices, and experience and storytelling.

### **Knowledge and Best Practises**

As discussed above, LinkedIn is a platform for experts and professionals in peace mediation to connect and network. One potential of this is the exchange of knowledge and best practices within the field. Emilia, with 14 years of experience with local peacebuilding and mediation in Sweden, explained her view about this:

I think that if you genuinely work with peacebuilding and mediation to want to make a change in the world, you shouldn't see an obstacle in sharing, regardless of whether it's a business plan or something else because it is for the greater good.

In particular, because the field is continuously developing, LinkedIn has a potential to be a platform for its members to share recent knowledge and help each other. Rebecca explained that she has noticed a difference between knowledge sharing in different fields:

People I know on a personal level who are in a different field, I've noticed that they definitely are less active on LinkedIn. It's mainly just for saying oh, i'm looking for work or oh, there's a job here and there, rather than actually sharing that knowledge or that expertise. So yeah, it's definitely unique to our field.

LinkedIn's focus on professionalism also grants that the information available is of substance. Johan explained his view on the difference between Twitter and LinkedIn:

Twitter is very concise and there are small comments here and there, but it is interesting to be able to take part in reports and take part in new trends. It's definitely a feature of LinkedIn.

Having access to resources such as new reports and research is an important feature that is unique to LinkedIn, when compared to other popular social media. Similarly, Sade compared her experience to Instagram:

I think I spend more time on Instagram but when I go to LinkedIn I spend quality time. Even if it may look like I opened my Instagram app more times in a day, when I open LinkedIn, I spend quality time there because when I open it I see articles that I want to read and most of the time I have to click on links to read articles that I like.

Not only is knowledge and best practises shared on LinkedIn, it is also a platform that affords sharing experiences and stories.

### **Experience and Storytelling**

Rebecca, who is a researcher in conflict resolution, finds LinkedIn to be very beneficial to bridge the gap between research and practise in the field. She explained:

I think LinkedIn really does provide that space for me to read their stories and be able to understand their emotions within the field, and for them to look at the research and kind of understand more the hard data facts and that sort of thing.

Chioma, with 8 years of mediation experience, explained that she was deployed in South Sudan and wanted to share her experience to provide people with another side of the country, that may be missed in reporting of the conflict:

When I was deployed to South Sudan, a lot of people were scared because they are fighting, there's a lot of war, but it's a beautiful country. In fact, they're doing better than what I thought, considering that they are quite a young country and they've brought through so much conflict, you know, and they're quite friendly people, very friendly people. So also try to project that side that people don't see, or people will never really get to know.

Considering that only 10% of the population in South Sudan has access to the Internet, Chioma's sharing of her experience can help give a voice to those who would otherwise struggle to get heard. Wisam, who is retired, also explained that LinkedIn provides him with new experiences:

One year ago I retired from [hidden] and that's why it gave me more time to look into more new contacts that will give me more experiences or additional experiences. For me, LinkedIn is a serious platform.

LinkedIn can provide rich information on the field, intersecting both knowledge and storytelling. Emilia viewed this as a unique feature to LinkedIn:

I see a lot of posts that are like, first it's inspiration and they share a tool or reflections and then perhaps they try to sell or connect with others. So it feels like it's a merge of a lot in one post.

LinkedIn is a platform that allows its users to be creative, and merge personal stories with knowledge and marketing. With this in mind, another potential of LinkedIn reveals itself: making revenue.

## Making Revenue

LinkedIn is commonly known as a platform for finding work or to act as an addition to the traditional CV. However, for peace mediation practitioners, the platform offers more opportunities for making revenue. Therefore, the third theme is about the potential of LinkedIn to help actors in the field make an income. It is divided into two subcategories: job-hunting and visibility.

## Seeking Employment

Many of the participants stated that seeking employment was the main reason for deciding to join the network originally. Rebecca explained:

I didn't really want to join it at first, because I wasn't sure, I wasn't too familiar with it. I felt it wouldn't really be helpful. But everyone kind of said, because I was job hunting at the time, everyone said it was really good for putting yourself out there and getting people to notice your profile a bit more, and all the jobs in your field will pop up.

Neither did Jack see the potential of LinkedIn aside from the affordance of job-hunting when joining, especially considering his professional background:

When I was the executive director of [hidden], when I was running this other organisation, LinkedIn showed up and people had that sort of 'Oh, you should join LinkedIn'. So I technically joined but I never invested any time really into it because it wasn't for employment, I was already the executive director.

Although job-hunting and personal branding is a key affordance of LinkedIn that is well known to many, LinkedIn provides more hidden affordances such as the ability to reinvent yourself. Rita, with five years of experience with mediation and peacebuilding in Sweden for example, explained that she uses her LinkedIn profile to consider and reinvent herself:

It helps me figure out where my actual field is and genuine interest lies. I can go back and think that's not exactly who I am, but I am this. It's a bit like that in my industry because you kind of don't have a title, you're not a lawyer, instead it's more like inventing your own niche.

Considering that the peace mediation field is so vast and often overlaps with other fields, LinkedIn presents an opportunity to establish who you are, and what you can do in the field. This also presents the potential of LinkedIn to market your value and products to make revenue on LinkedIn.



## Visibility

LinkedIn can be a platform to market and showcase your value to potential sponsors and stakeholders. Chioma, who is the founder of a women-based mediation network explained that part of her audience on LinkedIn are potential sponsors:

[We] try to see if we can be of interest to potential project sponsors, you know. So those are the persons I try to communicate with and that is how we design our posts.

Jack, the founder of another mediation network, has also noticed the potential of LinkedIn's marketing:

There have been a lot of people connecting and randomly asking for books. Buying and putting their toe in the market about this because of the conditions of the world.

The field of peace is growing as universities are providing more higher education programmes in peace and conflict research, and the easy access to information online is presenting new opportunities for individuals to consider and develop new methodologies for peace. This presents an opportunity for peace actors to meet relevant actors on LinkedIn who are interested in sponsorships and buying products that produce value in peacebuilding. Rita, who started a group on LinkedIn explained her views about it:

I haven't been that active with it [the LinkedIn group] so it's not very successful yet, but I thought like this, if we want to exist at all, we have to have a page on LinkedIn. If someone is going to be able to tag us, then there must be something to tag.

By being visible to others on LinkedIn, actors and organisations can establish themselves as valuable members of the peace mediation community.

## Considering the Digital Divide

Considering the 46.6% of the world population that do not have access to the Internet, for LinkedIn to realise its full potential for peace actors action must be taken on giving more people opportunities to access the Internet. Although LinkedIn was not initially designed to be a community of practice for peace professionals, the affordances of the site have presented new opportunities to leverage the potential of LinkedIn. However, considering the digital divide, LinkedIn also has a responsibility to ensure that their features are accessible for a diverse range of social groups and cultures. Alice questioned how language impacts LinkedIn usage:

If someone is posting in Arabic can that person get the same profile reach and everything as stuff that's being posted in English?

Currently, LinkedIn's translation tool holds 48 languages. While the dominant language is English, LinkedIn should consider enhancing its efforts to introduce languages from countries put at a socio-economic disadvantage, since barriers may limit participation and engagement in the platform's global community.

LinkedIn requires an Internet connection to use its features, however, because the main focus on the platform is the profile and the feed, it is possible for peace actors with a low Internet connection to still make use of the benefits of LinkedIn. Knowing what affordances are available are thus equally important. Adrian explained his view on this:

There is a growing need to educate people so everybody has equal access to the Internet or social media or LinkedIn. So I think that there is a need to educate people. There is a need for Internet services to be made in Africa, cheaper and close to the people, especially the locals. Without that, it will be difficult for us to see LinkedIn as an app that can be used.

LinkedIn can be leveraged to enhance the capacity for constructive conflict engagement by providing a platform for peace professionals, regardless of their location or resources, to access a wealth of information, insights, and resources - if they have access to the Internet. Through LinkedIn's professional network, individuals can gain exposure to best practices, research, and expertise in the field of peace mediation. This access to information can help bridge the digital divide by enabling individuals to stay updated on current trends, innovative approaches, and relevant resources, levelling the playing field for practitioners. LinkedIn also allows peace professionals to showcase their skills, experiences, and accomplishments, providing a platform for visibility and recognition. This aspect is particularly crucial for individuals or organisations operating in regions with limited resources or infrastructure. By establishing a professional presence on LinkedIn, peace workers can gain recognition for their work, increase their chances of collaboration and funding opportunities, and amplify their impact in the field of peace mediation. However, connectivity must be ensured because without access to the Internet or digital literacy skills it is impossible to fully realise the potential that LinkedIn has for peace professionals. Adrian explained:

LinkedIn still has a long road ahead unless we experience a huge digitalization process here in Africa, then we can start to see the importance and the usefulness of LinkedIn.

## Conclusion

The task of building peace and transforming conflicts is both enormous and complex, it requires work from a multitude of actors across all levels of society, from the local to the governmental. LinkedIn holds particular significance in the peace mediation context due to its status as the world's largest professional networking platform. The findings show that LinkedIn does have potential to enhance peace mediation professionals capacity for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. By understanding the affordances of LinkedIn and how to effectively leverage them, peace professionals can navigate the platform more efficiently and maximise its potential.

In particular, four themes were identified: 1) Linking Peace Actors, professionals working with peace, not only peace mediation professionals, can connect and network on the site, strengthening personal relationships, which presents opportunities to create partnerships and collaboration. In addition, the ease of which it is possible to connect may contribute to bridging the gap between research and practice and leverage the playing field among actors. 2) Meaningful Information Exchange, because the platform holds experts and professionals from various connected fields, the actors on the site can learn from each other and share knowledge and experience, which can produce meaningful connections between fields and innovative insights. 3) Making Revenue, LinkedIn grants the ability both to seek employment and marketing yourself, which can result in many ways to make an income in the peace profession. 4) Considering the Digital Divide, improving Internet connectivity, digital literacy and reducing language barriers are fundamental to make LinkedIn accessible for middle range actors, or those actors who according to peace research have the most potential to sustain peace efforts.

In sum, by knowing and utilising the affordances of LinkedIn, peace professionals can leverage the platform's potential to create an enabling environment resulting in constructive conflict and peace engagement. However, a majority of the population in many countries with high levels of armed violence do not have access to the Internet. Efforts to improve connectivity, digital literacy and language-barriers are therefore required to fully realise the potential of LinkedIn.

Future communication and human-computer-interaction research should continue to examine the conditions to which conflict- and war-affected populations can become more connected to the Internet and how the affordances of varying platforms can accommodate peace building and conflict transformation initiatives. The examined media can also be extended to other social networking platforms and compared to the results of this study. Whereas LinkedIn provides professionals with a platform for linking peace actors, meaningful knowledge exchange and making revenue, other platforms, such as image or video sharing sites (or a new social media that has yet to be invented) may contribute with other affordances that could contribute to the transformation of the collective consciousness and the resolution of violence, war and armed conflicts on a larger scale.

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## Appendix 1

Data transcript in Swedish (original language)	Translation to English
<p>Asså jag har ofta funderat över vad man gör bäst med LinkedIn eftersom man har så vansinnigt mycket kontakter där. Det är kontakter liksom från många år tillbaks, till kontakter som man inte har dagligen och människor som man har möte eller konferenser med eller sådär.</p>	<p>I've often thought about what you do best with LinkedIn because you have so terribly many contacts there. It's contacts from many years back, to contacts that you don't have on a daily basis and people that you have meetings or conferences with or something like that.</p>
<p>Men jag vet att många de skickar ut request liksom. Till folk de inte känner och så får de då 500 plus. Det ser ju bra ut att man har väldigt stort nätverk men men i verkligheten så betyder ju inte det någonting om man inte har man inte faktiskt har en relation att det faktiskt inte är ett nätverk.</p>	<p>I know of many who send out requests to people they don't know and then they get 500+ connections. It looks good that you have a very large network, but in reality it doesn't mean anything if you don't actually have relationships, that it's not actually a network.</p>
<p>Jag tror att om vi nu jobbar om man genuint jobbar med peace building och medling för att vilja göra en förändring i världen, så. Borde man inte se ett hinder i att dela det oavsett om det är en affärsplan eller om det är det vi säljer till företag så liksom någonstans i övrigt för det greater good.</p>	<p>I think that if you genuinely work with peacebuilding and mediation to want to make a change in the world, you shouldn't see an obstacle in sharing, regardless of whether it's a business plan or something else because it is for the greater good.</p>
<p>Twitter är ju väldigt kortfattat och det är små liksom kommentarer, hit och dit, men det är intressant att kunna ta del av liksom rapporter och ja, kanske ja att man kan sprida information kring. Ja nya trender och så vidare så det. Det är absolut en funktion för för vad heter det LinkedIn.</p>	<p>Twitter is very concise and there are small comments here and there, but it is interesting to be able to take part in reports and take part in new trends. It's definitely a feature of LinkedIn.</p>
<p>Jag ser också mycket posts som är liksom först är det inspiration och de delar med sig av ett verktyg eller tankar, reflektioner för att sen kanske sälja in sig själv eller för att connecta med andra. Så det känns som att det är en merge av mycket i ett inlägg.</p>	<p>I see a lot of posts that are like, first it's inspiration and they share a tool or reflections and then perhaps they try to sell or connect with others. So it feels like it's a merge of a lot in one post.</p>

<p>Det hjälper mig att ta reda på var mitt faktiska område och mitt genuina intresse är. Liksom jag kan själv gå tillbaka och tänka det där är inte exakt det jag faktiskt är, utan jag är det här, och det är lite så i min bransch för att där har man liksom inte en titel. Man är inte så här jurist. Liksom utan det är lite som att du uppfinner din egen nisch.</p>	<p>It helps me figure out where my actual field is and genuine interest lies. I can go back and think that's not exactly who I am, but I am this. It's a bit like that in my industry because you kind of don't have a title, you're not a lawyer, instead it's more like inventing your own niche.</p>
<p>Det är ju inte så att en liksom super professionell som har jobbat i 20 år skulle randomly hitta en nyexad student som har pluggat det här och hör av sig utan det blir ju på den personen som måste ta tag i det.</p>	<p>You have to take action yourself. It's not like a professional who has worked for 20 years would randomly find a newly graduated student and get in touch. It will be up to that person to do something.</p>
<p>Det jag tycker är lite mer intresserad av nu, liksom östafrika, att jobba i. Och där har jag inte haft väldigt mycket kontakter, men jag har på något sätt börjat nu komma in i liksom mer hitta folk inom den de länderna eller som jobbar med liknande grejer. Men det är ju sådant som man kanske får aktivt lite mer leta efter eller hitta någon kolla på deras kontaktnät så fortsätter alltså rulla på.</p>	<p>I am interested in working in East Africa and I haven't had very many contacts there, but somehow I've now started to find people within those countries who work with similar stuff. It's something that you might have to actively search for, or you find someone, check their contact network, then it continues to roll like that for a while.</p>

## Appendix 2

### Interview guide

How long have you worked in peace mediation?

Are you part of any mediation networks?

Do you see a need for an international online network for peace mediation actors?

What motivated you to start using LinkedIn?

What features on LinkedIn do you use?

What do you see are the possibilities of linkedin for peace mediation actors?

What do you see are the constraints?

Who do you talk to through direct messages?

Who are your contacts?

What do you post?

How do you engage with others?

Do you apply for jobs or post jobs?

Do you take part in events shared on linkedIn?

Are you in a linked-in group concerning peace mediation?

How active are you in the group? What is your role?

# Appendix 3

## Information and consent form

### About the research

You are invited to participate in a research study on LinkedIn, professional networking and knowledge-sharing in the international field of peace mediation. The data collection is done online via semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the field, across many geographical regions. The project is part of the final degree project for the 2023 MSc program Communication in Applied Information Technology at the University of Gothenburg.

### Your participation

Your participation is completely voluntary.

You were chosen to participate because of your experience as a professional in the field of peace mediation. Especially, your perspective and experiences of LinkedIn, networking and knowledge-sharing are of interest in the study. The interview is expected to take about 30 minutes and will be recorded for academic quality purposes.

### Confidentiality of data

Your name will be removed in the published version of the study. In the study, your geographical region, and years of experience will be stated. The information you provide will only be used for this research study. All ethical issues are considered in line with CODEX rules and guidelines for research.

### Consent statement

I understand the purpose of the research and consent to the information above.