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FACEBOOK FRIENDSHIP GROUPS AS A SPACE FOR PEACE

A Case Study of Relations between Libyan and American Citizens

Lisa Gibson

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Facebook Friendship Groups as a Space for Peace

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SERIES IN POLITICS

Lisa Gibson's book assesses the extent to which online friendship groups between Libyans and Americans impact on Libyans' views of the American people and on American foreign policy. She concludes that these groups serve as a kind of citizen-led public diplomacy. The study, therefore, has critical implications for the discipline of International Relations, with its persistent focus on states, enmity and war. The book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the roles of both individuals and of friendship in international relations.

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About the author

Lisa Gibson has a PhD in International Relations and a JD in Law and serves as an Assistant Professor and Director of Conflict and Resolution Studies at Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. Dr. Gibson is a mediator and experienced international conflict resolution practitioner and has written several books and articles about ways to more effectively promote peaceful relations in the international arena. Her interest in international conflict came from losing her brother in the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which catalyzed her on an extraordinary journey of reconciliation, including meeting with former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Dr. Gibson's work has been featured in CNN, Wall Street Journal, BBC, Washington Post and countless others.

Summary

Facebook Friendship Groups as a Space for Peace provides new ways of thinking about the concept of friendship in international relations by drawing upon Aristotle's ancient insights on sociability and reconceptualizing them for modern international relations. This book explores how citizens can be engaged in public diplomacy through everyday interactions in Facebook friendship groups which allows them to promote understanding and reframe identity narratives. This book provides rich-in-demand empirical insights from citizens in the global south about the ways that social media friendship groups can be used to facilitate positive relations between citizens from countries that have a history of conflict. It also provides important insights for state leaders on the kinds of citizen initiatives that are seen as most useful in promoting positive images among foreign peoples. However, it challenges much of the notion that citizen initiatives will improve foreign publics views of a state's foreign policy, especially when those foreign policy priorities negatively affect citizens directly, like former President Donald Trump's travel ban. Negative foreign policy initiatives cause distrust and once that is broken, it is difficult to rebuild absent changing the foreign policy. This book shows that conflict is deeply contextual, and as such public diplomacy initiatives must also be designed in such a way to address the unique challenges that exist between countries. Social media friendship groups can be a place to start to promote understanding, dispel stereotypes and reframe enemy narratives, which are essential to long-term positive relations.

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