

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN SOMALIA





SOMALIA NEEDS STRONG LEGAL FRAMEWORK TO CURB SOCIAL MEDIA “WARLORDS”

LANDMARK STUDY BY PUNTLAND DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH CENTER

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Abstract

This study examines the role of social media platforms in shaping the conflict dynamics in Somalia, which is slowly recovering from a devastating civil war that engulfed the country since 1991. As digital connectivity and use of smart phones increases across Somalia and among Somali communities in the diaspora, social media has become a key battleground, where various stakeholders, clan groups, government entities, political groups and civil society, compete for influence and control over narratives. The paper strived to answer the following questions; How does social media influence the framing and perception of conflict-related events in Somalia? How does social media platforms contribute to the escalation and/or de-escalation of inter-clan violence in Somalia? What are the effects of misinformation and fake news spread through social media on the stability and security of Somalia? And what mechanisms are in place to monitor and control harmful content related to conflict on social media networks in Somalia? The paper has used Agenda Setting Theory to structure the discussions on the impact of social media on conflict dynamics in Somalia.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data on social media usage patterns across Somalia with qualitative interviews from local journalists, social influencers, and policy makers and experts. This research found that social media plays a devastatingly negative role in inciting inter-clan conflict, with diaspora-based influencers playing the biggest role in conflict exacerbation. The study also found there are serious legal and regulatory gaps in monitoring and dealing with misuse of social media in Somalia. However, the study also discovered that social media can be a very useful tool in peacebuilding efforts. The study recommends development of a more robust legal framework to regulate social media as well as creating awareness among the citizens to understand its negative aspects. It also calls for engagement of diaspora communities to come up with means of regulating their members using social media for clan-based incitement, and collaborating with various governments abroad in dealing with the issue.

Keywords; *Social Media, Somalia, Conflict Dynamics, Inter-clan war, Harmful Content*



1.1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has fundamentally altered the way we communicate and interact globally. This transformation has been particularly impactful in regions experiencing prolonged instability and conflict, such as Somalia. In recent years, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp have become central to the daily lives of many Somalis. These platforms provide critical spaces for communication, mobilization, and information sharing. However, in a conflict-ridden context, they present both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, social media enables individuals and groups to voice their opinions, share important information, and organize collective actions. On the other hand, these platforms can be used to spread misinformation, incite violence, and deepen societal divisions (Mercy Corps, 2021). Understanding this dual-edged role is essential for developing strategies that harness social media's potential for peacebuilding while mitigating its risks. Somalia's history of conflict is complex, involving clan-based rivalries, political fragmentation, and the influence of militant groups like Al-Shabaab.

Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has experienced prolonged periods of instability, marked by violence, humanitarian crises, and less successful efforts at state-building. In this volatile environment, social media has played a significant role in shaping conflict dynamics (Zeitsoff, 2017). Despite the growing recognition of social media's role in conflict dynamics, there is a notable gap in research specifically focusing on Somalia. Most existing studies have broadly addressed the impact of social media in conflict zones, with limited attention to Somalia's unique socio-political context.

This gap is significant because the ways in which social media influences conflict can vary greatly depending on local dynamics, historical grievances, and the specific actors involved. For instance, the role of clan identities in the Somali society is a unique factor that shapes the use and impact of social media in this context (Mercy Corps, 2021; Peace Agency, 2023). This research tries to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of how social media impacts conflict dynamics in Somalia. It seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between social media and conflict in Somalia, offering insights that can inform policy and practice in similar conflict-affected regions (Zeitsoff, 2017).



2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

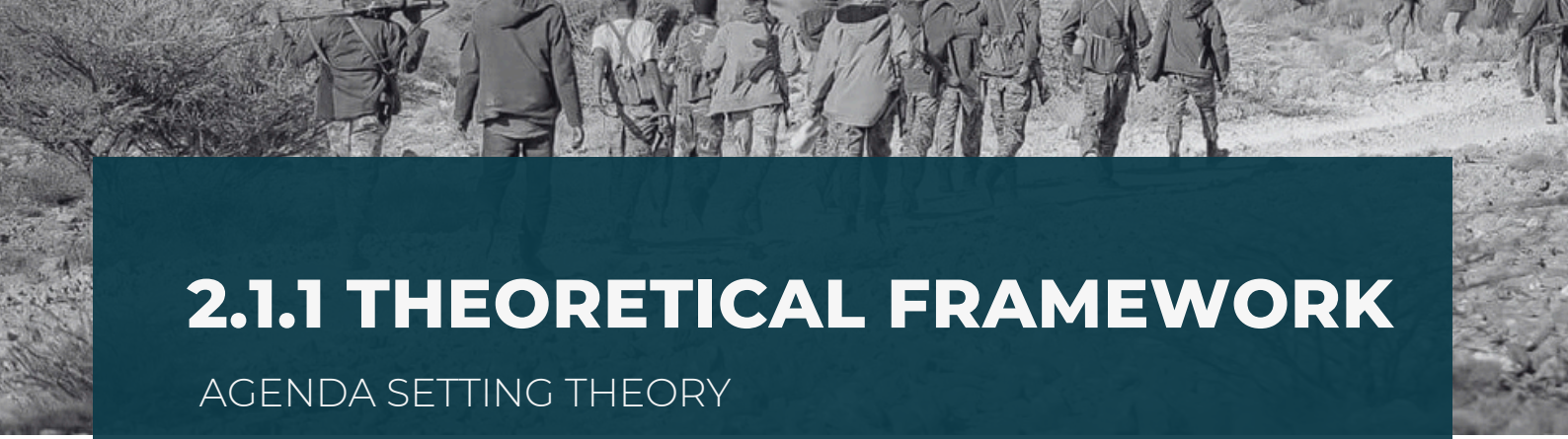
The role of social media in shaping conflict dynamics has garnered significant attention, especially in fragile contexts similar to Somalia. Research from other conflict-affected regions provides valuable insights into the impact of social media on conflict dynamics, which can be applied to the Somali context. The experiences of countries like Nigeria, South Sudan, and Syria, as well as the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians illustrate how social media can influence conflict in both positive and negative ways. In Nigeria, social media has played a crucial role in both fueling and mitigating conflict (Okpalaibekwe et al. 2024).

According to Okpalaibekwe et al (2024) platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been used to mobilize ethnic and religious violence. The study found that social media was instrumental in spreading inflammatory content and mobilizing crowds during periods of heightened tension. However, these platforms have also been used for peacebuilding efforts, highlighting the importance of strategic communication in conflict zones. For instance, during the 2014 Boko Haram abductions, social media campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls helped raise global awareness and pressured the Nigerian government to take action. This example demonstrates the potential of social media to mobilize international support and create a unified response to conflict. A comprehensive analysis by Zeitzoff (2017) demonstrates that social media amplifies conflict narratives but also serves as a vital tool for humanitarian coordination and information dissemination.

During the Syrian civil war, social media was used by various factions to spread propaganda, recruit fighters, and coordinate attacks. However, it also provided a lifeline for civilians and humanitarian organizations. Social media platforms enabled real-time reporting of the conflict, facilitated communication among displaced populations, and helped coordinate relief efforts. The study underscores the dual nature of social media in conflict situations and the importance of strategic engagement to leverage its positive potential. Similarly, the Palestine-Israel conflict offers a pertinent example of how social media can influence conflict. Rashid et al. (2021) notes that traditional news organizations have adopted social media as part of their business model, using platforms like Twitter and Facebook to cover the conflict. This has led to increased polarization and hostilities but also provided opportunities for peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts (Rashid et al., 2021). In their study on social media's role in the Arab Spring, Howard and Hussain (2013) highlighted how these platforms facilitated political mobilization and awareness but also contributed to the spread of misinformation and heightened tensions (Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M., 2013).

Somalia's intricate clan system, a deeply rooted social structure, has long been intertwined with political power and conflict. Social media platforms, with their ability to connect individuals across geographical boundaries, have become virtual spaces for clan mobilization and, at times, the incitement of inter-clan tensions (Ahmed, I. S. Y. 2020). The rapid spread of information, often lacking context or verification, can exacerbate existing rivalries and fuel cycles of violence. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that social media is not inherently a force for conflict. In the hands of peacebuilders and civil society organizations, these platforms offer valuable tools for promoting dialogue, countering hate speech, and fostering reconciliation (Baytiyeh, H, 2019). Somali activists and peace advocates utilize social media to share stories of resilience, challenge extremist narratives, and mobilize citizens for peace. These efforts highlight the potential of social media to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding when used strategically and responsibly (Baytiyeh, H, 2019). Bhat (2019) discusses how social media facilitates real-time updates and live coverage, making it an indispensable tool for both state and non-state actors in conflict settings.

In Kenya, for example, social media played a significant role in inciting ethnic hatred during the electoral process. Ndonge (2014) highlights how platforms like Twitter and Facebook were used to spread inflammatory content, leading to heightened ethnic tensions and violence. Similar dynamics are observed in Somalia, where social media serves as a battleground for competing narratives and propaganda, especially during heightened political activities. The impact of social media on public discourse is not limited to the spread of hate speech. It also includes the potential to mobilize communities for peaceful causes. The "Kenyans for Kenya" initiative demonstrated the power of social media to unite people for humanitarian efforts. Such examples highlight the dual nature of social media as both a tool for incitement and for mobilizing positive social change. The spread of misinformation on social media poses a significant challenge in conflict zones. Fake news, rumors, and false narratives can escalate tensions and undermine peace efforts. Rashid et al. (2021) discusses how the digitalization of conflicts complicates resolution efforts, as the influx of unverified information can hinder diplomatic initiatives and increase hostilities.



2.1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

AGENDA SETTING THEORY

Agenda Setting Theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, suggests that the media doesn't tell us what to think, but it does tell us what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In Somalia, a country grappling with decades of civil unrest and conflict, social media has become a crucial tool for spreading information, shaping public opinion, and potentially influencing the course of conflicts. The country has long been entangled in conflicts involving the federal government, regional administrations, clan militias, and extremist groups like Al-Shabaab (Menkhaus, 2007). These conflicts stem from a complex mix of clan rivalries, political instability, competition for resources, and ideological differences. Traditional media have played a significant role in framing these issues, but the rise of social media has added new dimensions to how conflicts are perceived and managed. Social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and WhatsApp are widely used in Somalia to share news and information. According to Agenda Setting Theory, the media determines which issues are seen as important by the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In Somalia, social media influencers, activists, and even militant groups use these platforms to highlight specific events, grievances, and narratives, shaping how people perceive conflicts. For instance, when violence occurs, social media can amplify these events, drawing both national and international attention. This increased visibility can pressure political leaders to respond, thereby influencing the conflict's direction (Kilcullen, 2022). Conversely, social media can also be used to promote peace initiatives and highlight successful conflict resolution efforts, encouraging a more positive public discourse (Njabi, S. 2019).

Agenda Setting Theory provides an important framework for understanding the impact of social media on conflict dynamics in Somalia. By influencing public perception, mobilization efforts, and the promotion of counter-narratives, social media plays a crucial role in shaping the country's conflict landscape. While challenges remain, leveraging the power of social media to promote peace and stability in Somalia offers a promising avenue for conflict resolution and long-term development. As Somalia continues to navigate its complex conflict dynamics, understanding and harnessing the agenda-setting power of social media will be essential for building a more peaceful and prosperous future.



3.1 METHODOLOGY

To understand the impact of social media on conflict dynamics in Somalia, mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews was used. This blend of methods allowed us to gain a thorough understanding of how social media influences perceptions and behaviors related to conflict among different groups in Somalia.

3.1.1 QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT

For the quantitative part of our study, a survey with 312 respondents spread across all regions in Somalia was conducted. These participants were selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure we captured a diverse range of voices from different cities and demographics across Somalia. The survey aimed to understand people's preferences for various social media platforms, how often they use these platforms, and their views on the impact of social media on conflict awareness and participation. We distributed the survey both online and in person to reach a broad audience, including those with limited internet access.

3.1.2 QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

To complement the survey data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 32 key individuals, including journalists, social media influencers, and policymakers or experts in social media. These interviews provided deeper insights into how social media narratives are shaped, the role of media in conflict dynamics, and the perceived impact of social media on efforts to resolve conflicts.

These interviews were in four major cities: Mogadishu, Garowe, Baidoa, and Dusamareb. This geographical diversity helped us capture different perspectives and experiences from across Somalia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure individuals who had significant experience and influence in media and policy were targeted.



3.1.3 DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data Collection

The survey data was collected and analyzed using statistical software to identify trends and correlations between social media use and perceptions of conflict. This helped us understand general patterns and attitudes within the population.

Qualitative Data Collection

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured format, which allowed for flexibility in the conversation while ensuring we covered key topics consistently across interviews. We recorded these interviews (with the participants' consent) and transcribed them for analysis. Using thematic analysis, we identified key themes and patterns that emerged from the qualitative data, providing deeper context and understanding of the quantitative findings.

3.1.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Strict ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent, understanding the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time. Given the ongoing conflict and political instability in Somalia, we prioritized the safety and well-being of our participants throughout the research process.

4.1 FINDINGS

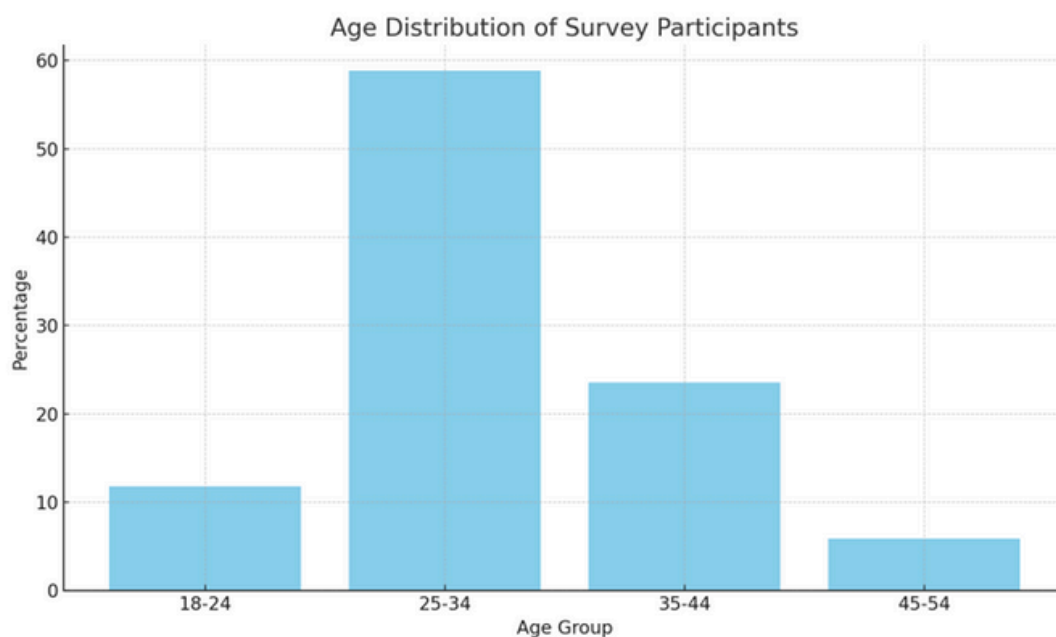
The results were divided into two parts. The results from the quantitative survey will be presented first, followed by the outcome of the qualitative in-depth interviews.

4.1.1 RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The survey conducted on social media preferences in Somalia had 312 participants. The data collected provides insights into the demographics, usage patterns, preferred platforms, and the perceived impact of social media on conflict dynamics in the country. The findings in this survey reveal that social media plays a crucial role in the daily lives of Somalis, particularly among young adults. While it serves as an essential source of news and communication, it also significantly contributes to exacerbating clan and political conflicts.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

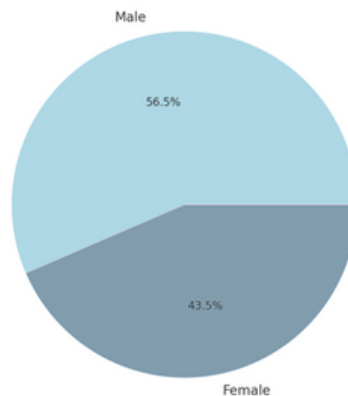
Age Distribution



The survey's age distribution shows that the majority of participants, 58.82%, are aged between 25-34 years. The second largest group, 23.53%, falls within the 35-44 years age range. The 18-24 years group, comprising 11.76% of participants. This age distribution suggests that social media is widely used by Somalia's young adults.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

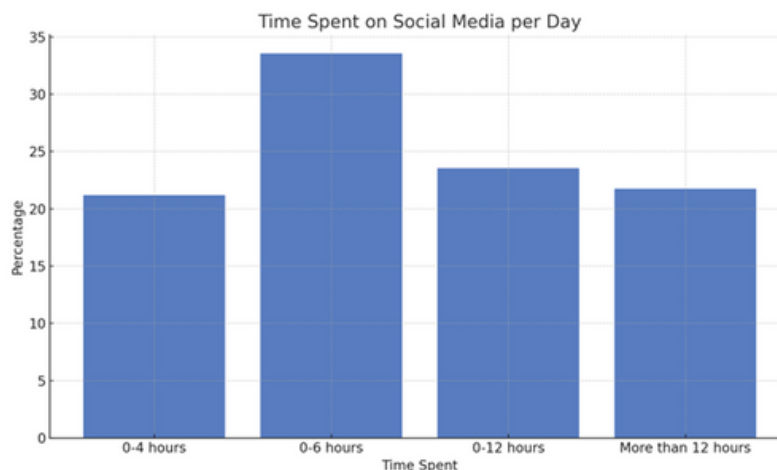
Gender Distribution of Survey Participation



In terms of gender distribution, men constitute 56.47% of the participants, while women make up 43.53%. This relatively balanced gender distribution highlights the extensive use of social media by both men and women in Somalia.

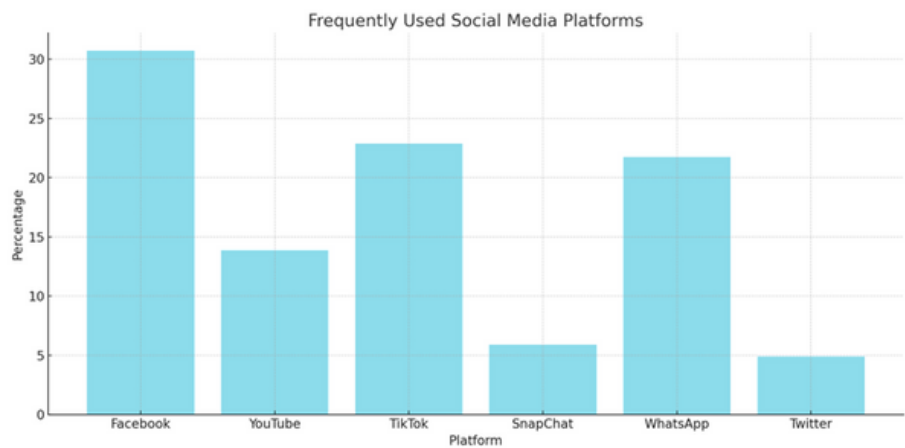
SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Time Spent on Social Media Per Day



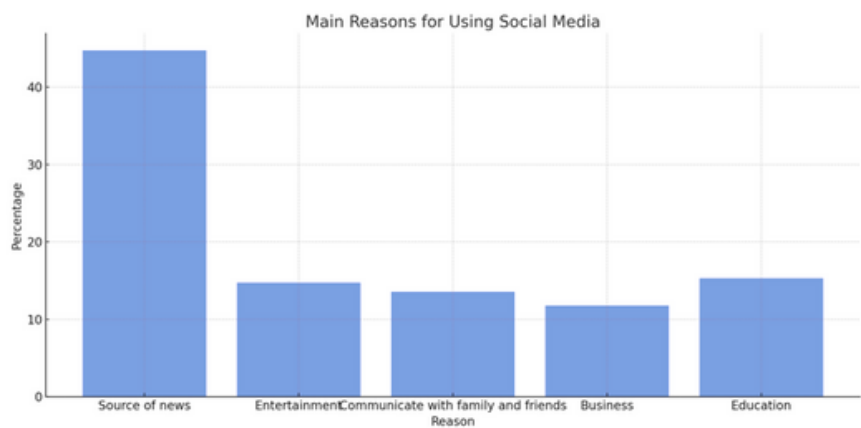
The survey also examined the time spent on social media daily. It found that 33.53% of participants spend 0-6 hours on social media daily, indicating balanced usage. A significant portion, 21.76%, spends more than 12 hours on social media, showing heavy dependency. Another substantial group (23.53%) spends 6-12 hours online. The variation in time spent on social media indicates different levels of engagement, with a high number of heavy users which is an indicator of how social media is taking over the lives of the digital generation.

Frequently Used Social Media Platforms



The most frequently used social media platform is Facebook, favored by 30.71% of participants, followed by TikTok at 22.88% and WhatsApp at 21.76%. The preference for Facebook highlights its dominance as a social networking tool, while TikTok’s popularity underscores the importance of short-form video content. WhatsApp’s strong presence points to the need for private communication channels.

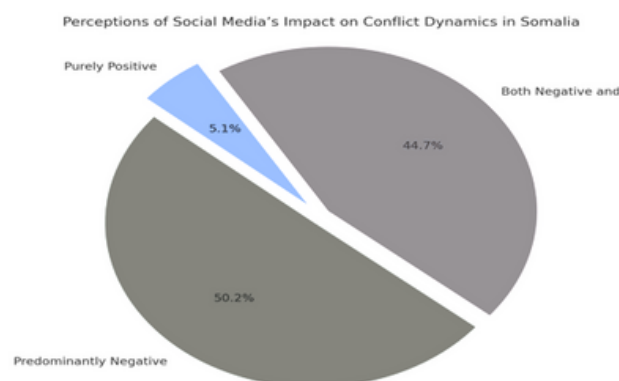
Main Reasons for Using Social Media



Participants primarily use social media as a source of news, with 44.71% citing this reason. Education is the second most common reason at 15.29%, followed closely by entertainment at 14.71%. The preference for news indicates that social media is a critical information source in Somalia.

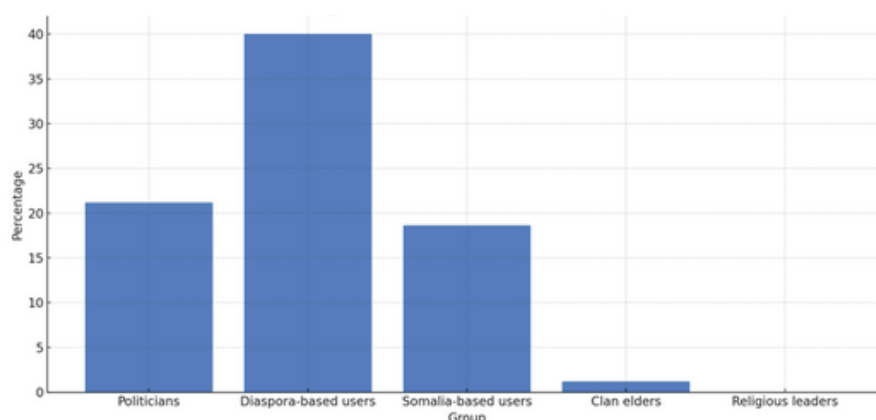
IMPACT ON CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Impact of Social Media on Conflict Dynamics



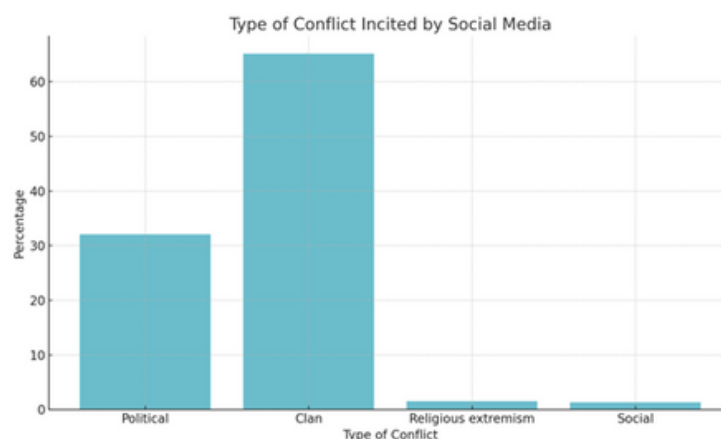
The impact of social media on conflict dynamics in Somalia is perceived predominantly negatively by 50.18% of participants. Another 44.71% see both negative and positive impacts, with 5.11 participants viewing it purely positively.

Most Negative Role in Terms of Conflict Dynamics



Diaspora-based users are perceived to play the most negative role in conflict dynamics, with 40.00% of participants indicating this. Politicians are the second most negatively viewed group at 21.18%, followed by Somalia-based users at 18.62%.

Type of Conflict Incited by Social Media



The survey indicates that users believe majority of conflicts incited by social media are clan-related, as highlighted by 65.10% of participants. Political conflicts are also significant at 32.08%, while religious extremism and social conflicts are minimal, at 1.50% and 1.32%, respectively. The high incidence of clan conflicts points to deep-rooted social divisions exacerbated by social media.

4.1.2 FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

To complement the survey data, we conducted in-depth interviews with 32 key individuals, including journalists, social media influencers, policymakers and experts in social media. They were drawn from four cities in Somalia; Mogadishu, Garowe, Dusamareb and Baidoa. The interviews reveal critical insights into how social media has been both a tool for conflict escalation and a platform for peacebuilding.

Negative Role of Social Media in Conflict Escalation

The overwhelming majority of the participants were of the view that social media plays a significant negative role in exacerbating conflicts in Somalia. The rapid dissemination of information, often unverified, leads to increased tension and violence. As one of the respondents said, “Social media plays a negative role; clan polarization, social division, and incitement make conflict-related content spread faster”.

Furthermore, another respondent highlighted the challenge of misinformation and fake news on social media, noting that “a lot of incitement and fake news...a lot of misuse and misunderstanding” have contributed to the worsening of conflicts. This sentiment was echoed by one of the other respondents, who also stated, “propaganda news at times led to the displacement in cities and escalation of conflict”.

Participants were also of the view that the diaspora-based social media influencers play the biggest role in fueling the conflict in Somalia. One of the respondents said, “our people in the diaspora are misusing the social media due to the fact that they are far away from their kin, and they are misusing social media to fuel inter-clan conflict.” Another respondent agreed, “the social media influencers in Somalia cannot behave like the ones in the diaspora, because they will be seen in the streets and ashamed. But the guys in the diaspora, they come live on social media, and spread hatred, and some of them are responsible for the death of hundreds of people. I know one or two of them who are behind the inter-clan conflict in Lasa’anod in Sool region.” A third respondent concluded that, “the Somali government should find a way to cooperate with Interpol and charge the diaspora-based hatemongers.”

From a policy perspective, respondents highlighted the complex role that social media plays in exacerbating conflict in Somalia, as they noted that social media can quickly escalate misunderstandings into full-blown conflicts, with one respondent stating, “Sometimes normal accidents can be framed to be resulting from inter-clan conflict, and any misunderstanding between individuals can be magnified with the aim of causing conflict between clans”.

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent, who emphasized on the prevalence of misinformation on social media, noting that “a lot of misinformation happens, and most users, especially those based in the diaspora are unprofessional.”

Lack of Content-based Regulatory Policies

Participants in this research also noted a lack of effective regulatory frameworks to curb harmful content on social media. In Somalia, digital media remains largely unregulated, with a focus on traditional media that is being rapidly replaced by digital platforms. A respondent noted, “in Somalia context, digital media is unregulated...there is no legal framework to prosecute the new and emerging warlords, who use the social media”. This regulatory vacuum allows for the unchecked spread of harmful content, leading to further escalation of conflicts.

Participants highlighted the need for updated laws and regulations to control the spread of harmful content, with some suggesting that “there is a need to update media laws to include social media”. However, there was an acknowledgement that the Somali government is aware of the challenges posed by social media, and that there are efforts to regulate its use. For instance, Puntland State of Somalia has “a draft bill on social media before the parliament, targeting individuals using it negatively to cause conflict.” More so, some participants pointed out that both the federal government and regional states are overwhelmed, and the current regulatory mechanisms are not sufficient enough to control the widespread use of social media for hate and incitement. One respondent mentioned that while there are efforts to raise awareness and take some action using the penal code, these measures are not enough to curb the spread of harmful content.

Despite the participants appreciation of existence of policies to control social media, the effectiveness of the mechanisms in place remains questionable, with some respondents suggesting “use Interpol to follow up on the issue of diaspora-based social media influencers inciting clan-based conflict,” indicating the need for international cooperation in addressing the problem.

Most of the participants touched on the effectiveness and implementation of policies aimed at regulating social media, describing it as fraught with challenges. A respondent emphasized that while the government and journalism bodies can regulate professional journalists and media houses, controlling citizen journalists is a significant challenge. Another respondent pointed out, “there is overwhelming use of social media... it is difficult to regulate and control citizen journalists, taking it upon themselves to report what is happening in their surroundings to the public.” There is confusion on how to handle to citizens journalists, with respondents wondering whether they need “to be encouraged for transparency, or controlled, which is against freedom of speech.”

Participants also discussed the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms, revealing that the authorities should consider the creation of a social media monitoring mechanism. A respondent stated, “we need to create a social media monitoring unit, which will help follow up the issue.” This proposed mechanism could play a critical role in addressing the gaps in the current monitoring system in the ongoing incitement on social media, according to respondents.

Public Education

Participants also highlighted the need for public education on the dangers of spreading harmful content on social media. A respondent mentioned efforts by religious leaders to raise awareness, noting, “there are efforts by religious leaders, but they are not on social media, where such raising of awareness is needed... there is need to use both traditional and social media platforms” to educate the public. However, participants acknowledged that more needs to be done to encourage the public to understand and report harmful content.

Some respondents pointed out that many people do not understand what constitutes harmful content on social media, which underscores the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns. “Majority of the people do not understand what constitutes harmful content on social media, and that is why there is a need for awareness creation,” a respondent stated.

Social Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding

Despite its negative impact, participants agreed that social media also holds potential as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Some respondents highlighted the dual-edged nature of social media. For instance, one said that “social media can be used to encourage peacebuilding efforts, and can be used as a platform for calls for peace”. This has played a role in pacification efforts in some of the conflicts, such as in Galgaduud province in Galmudug State. Similarly, another respondent shared a different example where “social media posts to announce a peace agreement between rival groups...led to calm the situation”.

Some of social media influencers have shown that they see their role as crucial in peacebuilding. One respondent emphasized the importance of not siding with any warring parties and instead focusing on peace programs, saying, “It is our obligation to convey events as they happen and ensure we do not side with any of the warring sides”. Most participants recognized the potential of social media as a tool for peacebuilding, with a respondent affirming, “social media can be leveraged very well for peacebuilding.” Participants emphasized the importance of public guidance and awareness creation, particularly for citizen journalists, to avoid incitement and promote positive use of social media.

There was also focus on the need for awareness creation, suggesting that if used positively, social media could bring about societal change and contribute to peace. A respondent stated, “due to its massive use, social media can lead to change in society and bring about peace if it is used positively.”



5.1 DISCUSSION

The findings from this study align closely with the existing literature on the impact of social media on conflict dynamics, particularly in fragile contexts similar to the situation in Somalia. This study confirms the double-edged nature of social media as both a tool for exacerbating and mitigating conflict, reflecting patterns observed in other conflict-affected regions such as Kenya, Nigeria, Syria, and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Social media's role in exacerbating conflict in Somalia is complex and reflects several dimensions of contemporary digital interactions in conflict zones. The findings of this study indicate that the rapid spread of unverified and incendiary content significantly inflames existing tensions, particularly those rooted in Somalia's complex clan structures. This phenomenon is supported by Okpalaibekwe et al. (2024), who highlighted similar trends in Nigeria, where social media facilitated the rapid mobilization of ethnic and religious violence. The unmoderated nature of platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, allows for the proliferation of hate speech and inflammatory content, which can quickly escalate into real-world violence. A notable insight from the study is the impact of diaspora communities on local conflicts. Our respondents emphasized that individuals and groups within the Somali diaspora frequently use social media to influence clan dynamics back home, often causing tension and inciting clan-based hatred and conflict. This finding aligns with Ahmed I. S (2020), who observed that diaspora influencers often amplify clan-based narratives that resonate more with distant memories and less with the present realities. This dynamic can lead to an intensification of conflicts as these narratives can be particularly polarizing.

The political landscape in Somalia is another area where social media plays a disruptive role. Political actors and factions utilize social media to spread propaganda, discredit opponents, and mobilize supporters, often leading to heightened political tensions. The study found that during election periods, social media activity peaks with increased dissemination of false information and incendiary political rhetoric. This mirrors Zeitzoff's (2017) findings in Syria, where political actors leveraged social media to gain support and discredit opponents, contributing to the overall instability.

Conversely, social media's potential for peacebuilding and conflict resolution is significant. The findings of this study highlight various instances where social media has been effectively used to promote peace initiatives, counter extremist narratives, and facilitate dialogue among conflicting parties. This positive use of social media is crucial in Somalia's context, where traditional media and communication infrastructures are often lacking.

For instance, Somali activists and peace advocates have the opportunity to utilize social media platforms to organize and mobilize peacebuilding activities. This is consistent with Njabi (2019), who documented how social media campaigns in Kenya were used to promote peace and reconciliation post-election violence. Similarly, Baytiyeh (2019) illustrated the use of social media in Lebanon to bridge divides between different sectarian groups. In Somalia, social media campaigns that share stories of resilience and highlight peacebuilding efforts help to counterbalance the negative use of these platforms.

The findings in this study underscore the critical need for effective regulation to manage the misuse of social media in Somalia. The absence of robust legal frameworks allows for the unchecked spread of harmful content, contributing to the exacerbation of conflicts. This regulatory vacuum is similar to the situation described by Ndonye (2014) in Kenya, where the lack of digital media regulation contributed to ethnic hatred during elections in 2007, and eventually led to the post-election violence in 2007-2008. The challenge continued for 2013, 2017 and 2022 elections despite existence of legal framework and government efforts to regulate social media (Omanga et al, 2023).

The study participants called for stronger legal framework and regulatory mechanism, without infringing on freedom of expression. As a result, they called for the establishment of social media monitoring units. Such measures would help mitigate the negative impact of social media by identifying and addressing harmful content before it can escalate tensions. Additionally, there is a need for international cooperation to develop and implement regulatory frameworks that balance the protection of freedom of expression with the prevention of harm. Rashid et al. (2021) emphasized this balance, recommending strategic engagement to leverage social media's positive potential while mitigating its risks.



6.1 CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how social media shapes conflict dynamics in Somalia, and in many ways, the findings bring us full circle to the core ideas of the agenda setting theory, which suggests that social media plays a powerful role in directing people on what to think about. In Somalia's fragile context, social media platforms have emerged as key agenda setters, often elevating narratives that either inflame or soothe existing tensions. The evidence gathered here reinforces the dual character of social media. On one hand, it amplifies divisive content, unverified rumors, hate speech, clan chauvinism, and political propaganda, shaping public conversations that harden group identities and intensify conflict. The case of Somali diaspora actors using social platforms to revive clan grievances from afar is a vivid example of agenda setting in action, where distant voices set local priorities in ways that may not always align with on-the-ground realities. On the other hand, the study also points to how these same platforms can be harnessed to set a different kind of agenda, one that promotes peace, resilience, and dialogue. Activists, peace groups, and ordinary citizens have used social media to highlight stories of coexistence and to organize interventions that push conflict off the top of the public agenda. In this way, social media doesn't just escalate problems; it holds real potential to elevate peace as a shared concern.

However, the study also makes clear that without effective regulation and proactive moderation, the agenda-setting power of social media is more likely to fuel discord. Participants across the board called for Somalia to develop robust but fair regulatory frameworks that protect free expression while also cracking down on content that incites violence. The suggestion for dedicated monitoring mechanism underscores a growing recognition that left unchecked, social media's influence over the public agenda can be both volatile and dangerous.

6.1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

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6.1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

To harness social media's positive aspects while curbing its negative impacts, the following policy recommendations emerge from our study:

- **Development of Legal Frameworks:**

Somalia needs to develop comprehensive legal frameworks that address the specific challenges posed by social media. These frameworks should include provisions for monitoring and penalizing the spread of hate speech, misinformation, and propaganda. The following laws are urgently needed in Somalia:

1. **Cyberbullying Law:** This is to protect citizens against cyberbullying.
2. **Hate Speech Law:** This is to prevent and combat different forms of hatred and incitement against sections of the society (including clans).
3. **Fake News Law:** This is to combat misinformation and disinformation.
4. **Cybercrime Prevention Law:** This is to address crimes committed by means of computer systems.

- **Social Media Literacy Programs:**

Implementing social media literacy programs can help users critically evaluate the content they encounter online, reducing the spread and impact of false information. Educating the public on the responsible use of social media is crucial for mitigating its negative effects.

- **International Cooperation:**

Collaborating with international organizations and tech companies can help Somalia implement best practices in social media regulation. This includes adopting technologies and methodologies for identifying and countering harmful content, as well as collaborating with foreign countries that host diaspora-based social media influencers who use their platforms to incite inter-clan conflict.

- **Support for Peacebuilding Initiatives:**

Providing support for peacebuilding initiatives that use social media can amplify positive narratives and counteract extremist content. This includes funding for grassroots organizations and training for activists on effective social media use.

- **Diaspora Engagement:**

Engaging the Somali diaspora in constructive dialogue and encouraging responsible use of social media can mitigate their potential to exacerbate conflicts. Creating platforms for positive engagement and information sharing can help align diaspora narratives with on-ground realities.

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