

ANNUAL **PEACE** **CONFERENCE**

Research
Papers

Volume 2

20
24



Table Of Content



PAPER I.....	1
The Media's Potentiality in Conflict Situations and Its Role in Sustainable Peacebuilding.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	3
2.0 The Role of Media in Conflict and Peacebuilding.....	4
2.1 The Web as Media Tool.....	6
2.3 The Media and Home News Impact.....	7
2.4 The Challenges Facing the Media in Peacebuilding Contexts.....	8
2.5 The Media Influence: Reality, Risk, and Reach.....	11
2.6 Challenges of the Somali Media in Peacebuilding.....	12
2.7 The Shaping of Perception Through Media.....	13
3.0 Conclusion.....	14
4.0 Policy Recommendation.....	15
Paper II.....	17
The Role of Media in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Somalia: A Comprehensive Analysis of Media's Impact on Conflict Resolution and Societal Cohesion.....	17
1.0 Introduction.....	19
2.0 Methodology.....	21
2.1 Research Method.....	21
2.2 Sampling Strategy.....	22
2.3 Sample Size.....	22
2.4 Ethical Considerations.....	23
2.5 Data Analysis Techniques.....	23
2.6 Data Collection Methods.....	24
3.0 Results and Findings.....	25
3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents.....	25
3.2 Role of Media in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation.....	27
3.3 Media Consumption Habits and Trust.....	29
3.4 Media Ethics and Practices from Media Practitioners.....	31
3.5 Summary of Findings.....	34
3.6 Discussion.....	35
4.0 Limitations of the Study.....	38
5.0 Conclusion.....	38
6.0 Recommendations.....	39
References.....	41
Paper III.....	43
The Role of Social Media In the Laascaanood Revolution.....	43
1.0 Introduction.....	45
2.0 Conscience Raising and Collective Identity Formation.....	49
3.0 Mobilization for War.....	46
3.1 Propaganda and Narrative Construction in the War Context.....	54
3.2 Impact on Power Dynamics.....	56
4.0 Conclusion.....	60
Paper IV.....	63
The Role of The Media in Instigating or Mitigating Inter-Communal Conflicts in Puntland.....	63
Abstract.....	64
1.0 Introduction.....	65
1.1 Objective of the Study.....	67
2.0 Literature Review.....	67
3.0 Methodology.....	71
4.0 Findings.....	72

Table Of Content



5.0 Discussion.....	74
6.0 Recommendations.....	76
7.0 Conclusion.....	78
Reference.....	80
PAPER V.....	81
Promoting and Pioneering Media for Peace Mechanisms	81
Abstract.....	82
1.0 Introduction.....	83
1.1 Shaping Media as a Tool for Peace and Conflict Prevention	85
2.1 Empowering Social Media in Peace Campaigns.....	86
2.2 Opportunities for Social Media to Promote Peace in Somalia	90
3.0 Challenges	92
4.0 Recommendations.....	93
5.0 Conclusion.....	94
Paper VII.....	95
THE EFFECTS OF SOMALI SOCIAL MEDIA ON PEACE, CONFLICT, AND SOCIAL COHESION: A CASE STUDY OF THE HERALE AND ABUDWAK CONFLICT IN GALMUDUG.....	95
1.0 Introduction.....	96
2.0 Literature Review.....	98
2.1 Media and Conflict.....	98
2.2 Ethical Journalism in Fragile States.....	98
2.3 Misinformation and Disinformation in Conflict Zones.....	99
2.4 The Role of Media in Somalia's Peace Processes.....	100
2.5 Literature Gap.....	101
3.0 Methodology.....	101
3.1 Data Collection Methods.....	102
3.2 Data Analysis.....	103
4.0 Results and Discussion.....	103
4.1 Media's Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding.....	103
4.2 Ethical Journalism in Somalia.....	104
4.3 Misinformation and Disinformation in Conflict Zones.....	104
4.4 Media–Civil Society Collaboration.....	105
4.5 Capacity-Building and Institutional Support.....	105
4.6 MAP's Peace Councils: Achievements and Limitations.....	105
4.7 Opportunities and Gaps in Media Peacebuilding.....	106
4.8 Summary of Discussion.....	106
5.0 Conclusion.....	107
6.0 Recommendations.....	108
References.....	109
Paper VII.....	111
THE EFFECTS OF SOMALI SOCIAL MEDIA ON PEACE, CONFLICT, AND SOCIAL COHESION: A CASE STUDY OF THE HERALE AND ABUDWAK CONFLICT IN GALMUDUG.....	111
Abstract.....	112
1.0 Introduction.....	113
2.0 Literature Review.....	114
2.1 Social Media and Conflict Dynamics.....	115
2.2 Social Media and Peacebuilding.....	115
2.3 Social Media and Social Cohesion.....	116
2.4 Case Studies and Practical Implications.....	116

Table Of Content



3.0 Methodology.....	117
4.0 Results and Findings.....	117
4.1 Demographic Profile.....	117
4.2 Social Media Engagement.....	118
4.3 Social Media's Dual Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding.....	119
4.4 Impact on Social Cohesion.....	120
5.0 Discussion.....	121
6.0 Recommendations for Improvement.....	123
Conclusion.....	124
References.....	125



PAPER I

THE MEDIA'S POTENTIALITY IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING

Author:

Abdisalam M Issa-Salwe



Abstract

Media and information have the capacity to shape perceptions, influence the public's discourse, and alter the trajectory of conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. In fragile societies like Somalia, where weak institutions and political marginalization exacerbate identity and social conflicts, access to information through free, independent, and pluralistic media can help enhance inclusive dialogue and cohesion. Conversely, the media and access to information can also be weaponized with propaganda used to incite violence, entrench divisions, as has been the case in most conflict-prone regions in Somalia. Having the freedom to express oneself freely is not only essential to the functioning of a peaceful society, but it is also a fundamental human right. This represents the right to information, the freedom of speech, and the representation of a variety of ideas in a diverse society. Media outlets that are both democratic and effective are a vital component of any culture that prioritises prevention. This is especially true for countries that are working towards the establishment of peace after social conflict and creating a democratic and peaceful society.

This paper explores the dual potential of media in conflict situations and investigates its critical role in advancing sustainable peacebuilding in Somalia. The paper draws on the communication for development (C4D) framework and conflict transformation theory to assess how media interventions can be designed to counter negative and harmful narratives and promote civic engagement, reconciliation, and social trust.

Keywords: Somalia, media influence, conflict situations, sustainable Peacebuilding, Media role, Peacemaking.



1.0 Introduction

Information is widely recognized as a form of social and political power, particularly in settings where the social, economic, and political tensions persist. The media, which acts as a vehicle for information dissemination, holds the potential to exacerbate existing social divisions or support conflict transformation. In many societies, particularly post-conflict or those in a transitional phase like Somalia, the influence of the media in shaping public opinion, social-political ideologies, and intergroup identities and relations has continued to increase. As such, access to various media platforms, including the radio, television, digital platforms, and social media, plays an important role in shaping how communities understand, engage, and respond to social and political change.

From an idealistic perspective, access to free and pluralistic media serves as a mechanism for delivering information that is important for a democratic culture and peaceful. Access to information, freedom of expression, and inclusive representation of diverse voices (including marginalized groups) are fundamental human rights and essential for sustainable peace. Globally, in contexts where citizens are excluded from engaging in political processes or silenced through intimidation and censorship, radicalization and risk of violent conflicts usually increase (Price and Thompson, 2002; UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, having vibrant free media institutions is important for fostering civic engagement, promoting transparency, and helping to hold government authorities accountable.

This paper seeks to explore the dual role of the media in Somalia conflict situations by drawing on existing theoretical and empirical insights on communication for development and conflict transformation. Somalia, a country that has been riddled with a complex history of clan-based civil and political conflict for the past three decades, has a vibrant yet fragmented media landscape. This paper examines the dual impact of media initiatives on peacebuilding and reconciliation, on the one hand, and their role in exacerbating tensions through clan and ethnic social and political perspectives, fragile governance environments, and weak or compromised regulatory frameworks, on the other.

In doing so, this paper responds to the critical need in both academic and peacebuilding circles – to better understand the mechanisms through which traditional media, peace journalism, digital platforms, and social media affect the conflict dynamics. The paper also helps to extract actionable lessons and policy recommendations for designing responsible media interventions. More so, this paper will contribute to the broader discussion on peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, with relevance to societies like Somalia, that are emerging from protracted civil conflicts with challenges of rebuilding social and political trust, and legitimacy in the public sphere.

One of the debates in the media and conflict research has been whether the media acts as an escalator or a mitigator of conflict. Scholars have increasingly questioned the extent to which media and media narratives, and emerging technologies contribute to either escalation or de-escalation of conflict in fragile states. On one hand, the media can inflame social tensions by sensationalizing social and political confrontations and legitimizing adversarial narratives. On the other hand, media also serve as a stabilizing force by amplifying moderate voices and discourse that help suppress inflammatory content and, thus, foster a shared understanding among conflicting parties (Bratic & Schirch, 2007; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2005).

This dynamic is particularly noticeable in the Somali context, where the protracted civil and political conflict, state fragility, and fragmented media landscape and coverage have persisted. However, the emergence of the voices of the Somali diaspora has continued to introduce new forms of civic-driven media engagement, seeking to reshape conflict narratives and peacebuilding strategies. These developments underscore the complex nature of media and their role in conflict and peacebuilding in Somalia.

Recent scholarly work has also focused on peace journalism, which is a normative model of journalism that seeks to counteract the existing limitations of the traditional media in conflict coverage. Skjerdal (2021) has argued that peace journalism has gained traction in responding to the growing critique of the mainstream media's perceived complicity in exacerbating conflict, particularly during the global war on terror, which affected Somalia. The concept of peace journalism was first introduced by Galtung (1998), who argued that peace journalism aims to foster conflict resolution by giving voice and humanity to conflicting parties, prioritizing nonviolent responses, and exposing structural drivers of violence. This approach reorients journalism and journalistic practices from reactive to proactive peace facilitation.

Peace journalism can build bridges across social, ethnic, and political divides, which in turn enhances transparency and accountability and broadens the public understanding of complex conflict issues. Media platforms can offer a space for emotional expression and release while providing incentives for peace-promoting actions and engagements (Bratic and Schirch, 2007). However, Skjerdal (2021) has also argued that journalists sometimes do find themselves at crossroads, as they perceive peace-oriented reporting as incompatible with their professional norms of objectivity (reporting actions without censoring for positivity), timeliness, and audience appeal. Regulatory constraints, political pressure, limited resources, and commercial interests of the media owners exacerbate these challenges. In this regard, media owners, who are often driven by advertising incentives, may prioritize sensational content with conflict narratives at the expense of careful, nuanced, peaceful narratives.



Peaceful narratives often struggle to attract public attention, particularly in contexts where violence and conquests command higher ratings.

In post-conflict states, these dynamics underscore the economic and political economies of media production to which journalists are beholden. McNair (2005) and Osman (2018) argue that journalism is expected to fulfill at least three tasks overlapping functions: enabling civic participation within the public sphere (Habermas, 2006), facilitating environmental surveillance through the dissemination of information, and serving as a vehicle for education and entertainment. However, in conflict societies, these functions are often viewed through antagonistic lenses and a conflict prism, resulting in contested meaning and perspectives. Entrepreneurs and professionals working in the media sector base their decisions on their perceptions of what the general public or a specific audience wants to see and hear. This is the basis for their choices. Another factor that contributes to the control of the stories covered and their framing is the growing influence of corporations on the media in certain nations. This control allows corporations to exert more influence over the media. As a result, this control ultimately leads to media control.

Similarly, scholars such as Wolfsfeld et al (2004) argue that there is an inherent tension between the operational logic of journalism and the imperatives of peace processes. Specifically, they identify five key mismatches: (a) conflict is inherently dramatic, while peace is not; (b) peace-building requires patience, while journalism privileges immediacy; (c) peace flourishes in calm environments, while media thrives on crises; (d) peace-building is complex, whereas media demand simplicity; and (e) peace requires mutual understanding, whereas media often reinforce polarisation. These contradictions constrain the media's capacity to sustain long-term peace narratives, especially in the absence of deliberate interventions aimed at media reform and capacity building.

While the media holds promise as a vehicle for peacebuilding, realising this potential requires structural transformation within the media ecosystem - including support for professional development, and a shift in normative journalistic values. Without these shifts, media may remain complicit in reinforcing conflict dynamics, even when situated within societies striving for peace (Wolfsfeld et al., 2004)

The evolution of media in Somalia has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, moving from traditional broadcast and print forms to a complex ecosystem dominated by web-based platforms. In earlier research on the Somali civil conflict, Issa-Salwe (2011) observed that the conventional role of media has been increasingly overtaken by what he terms a "media war", a space where competing narratives, ideological battles, and identity claims are contested through digital means. This shift reflects a broader trend toward media pluralism, but also introduces new layers of complexity in the Somali information environment. Notably, popular Somali websites are often more oriented toward social networking and real-time news exchange than sustained political commentary, suggesting that conflict and war may not be their primary concern.

The Somali Diaspora plays an important role in shaping this web-mediated media landscape. While their most visible contribution has been economic (through remittances), humanitarian support, and contributions to reconstruction efforts, Issa-Salwe (2011), they also contribute to political and communications on various media platforms that help shape peacebuilding and conflict in different measures. The Somali diaspora also maintains close ties with their families and communities, often acting as informal development actors and cultural brokers. Digital technologies, particularly access to the internet and social media, have made it possible for members of the Somali diaspora to mobilise, organise, and influence political discourse across borders. As argued by Issa-Salwe (2009), diaspora-Somali-linked websites have simultaneously represented a society that is both integrated through shared cultural norms and narratives and fragmented along clan, regional, and ideological lines. Through these online channels, political agendas, historical grievances, and visions of the future are all contested, often in highly polarized ways. As Lyons (2004) points out and reinforces this argument of the dual position of conflict-generated diaspora groups. He argues that these communities function as social networks that mostly mediate between three key domains: the memory of the past conflicts, the socio-political condition of Somalia, and the inspirational connection to their homeland. In this context, the readily available digital communication tools, such as websites and social media, have been transformative as they provide platforms for the diaspora to engage. They allow diaspora members to remain actively involved in homeland politics, share media content across borders, and promote specific political ideologies or affiliations. However, Lyons warns that with all these media tools, their usage is not neutral nor conflict-free. These tools can simultaneously unite and divide, inform and mislead, empower and manipulate.

The Somali diaspora sustains transnational ties primarily through economic means, with remittances, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction support playing a foundational role in their ongoing connection to the homeland. These financial contributions are not merely transactional but are deeply embedded in socio-political responsibilities and communal solidarity. Menkhaus (2009) notes that diaspora remittances significantly underpin Somalia's economy, supporting not just livelihoods but also informal governance structures and development activities in the absence of a functioning state.

More broadly, migrant entrepreneurship often flourishes within transnational spaces where traditional state and market structures are weak or fractured. Glick Schiller et al. (1995) argue that the most resilient and adaptive migrant businesses emerge in the interstices of global mobility, such as shipping and cargo enterprises, import-export firms, and transnational labour contracting agencies. These sectors thrive on the diaspora's unique ability to bridge cultural and economic gaps between host and home countries, thus reinforcing the translocal economic architecture that sustains Somali communities across borders.

Communication media, especially the internet, have also transformed these engagements by facilitating new channels of interaction, mobilisation, and influence. However, this digitally mediated interaction is not without challenges. These transnational media platforms often generate unpredictable dynamics of cultural affiliation, political identification, and imagined community (Issa-Salwe, 2011). The availability of Somali-language websites and diaspora-led digital platforms has also created new spaces for political expression, identity construction, and advocacy. These online sites often reflect the fragmented nature of Somali society, while at the same time portraying integration and division. Issa-Salwe further argues that these media spaces illustrate the ambivalent condition of a Somali transnational community that is unified in its global dispersion yet internally fractured along clan, regional, and ideological lines. These platforms serve not only as sources of news and cultural commentary but also as symbolic arenas where conflicting visions of Somalia's future are debated and contested.

Lyons (2004) provides a compelling analytical lens for interpreting this phenomenon. He describes conflict-generated diaspora groups as transactional social networks that have learned to navigate the past (through memory and conflict), the present (through desire for integration), and the future (through aspiration to return to their symbolic homeland). In this regard, media and "home news" operate as crucial pointers for maintaining collective memory, reinforcing identity narratives, and cultivating political imaginations that transcend national borders. The accessibility of inexpensive internet services and telecommunication technologies further amplifies these dynamics, rendering the diaspora both as remittance senders and influential political and communicative actors in Somalia.

2.4 The Challenges Facing the Media in Peacebuilding Contexts

The influence of the media on conflict and peacebuilding has continued to generate academic debate. According to the theory of media impact, state actors often shape media narratives to align with pre-determined government objectives, rather than letting the media influence the trajectory of government policy (Lederach et al, 2021). In the context of Somalia, this theory suggests that governmental intervention or political positioning typically precedes media alignment. As such, rather than initiating public discourse independently, media outlets tend to reflect and voice existing political agendas.

Piers Robinson's (1999) policy-media interaction model offers insight into these perspectives. The model shows that the media generally echoes the government's established stance, particularly in foreign policy and conflict matters. However, in cases where policy is uncertain or contested within government ranks, the media usually play a more influential role by reflecting political elite debates, which often sway public and political opinion. In these circumstances, analyzing media framing becomes critical for evaluating its role in shaping peacebuilding outcomes or hindering them.

1. Structural Constraints and Contextual Limitations

In Somalia, the media's potential as a driver of peace is severely limited by structural, contextual, and political challenges. These obstacles stem from the broader political environment and the internal deficiencies within the media sector. As noted by Skjerdal (2021), Somali media outlets often suffer from acute resource shortages, which in turn shape their editorial priorities, frequently privileging political controversy and entertainment over peace-oriented content or civic education. The limited institutional capacity, a lack of professional standards, and insufficient training in conflict-sensitive reporting often exacerbate bias within the media for objective reporting. In cases where insecurity continues to undermine the operational capacity of journalists, particularly in regions undergoing political transitions or facing protracted violence. Many journalists report self-censorship by avoiding sensitive topics due to fear of reprisal, which weakens the role of the media in transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction.

2. Politicization and Media Fragmentation

There is a broad consensus that the Somali media landscape is highly contested, fragmented along regional and political lines (Agency for Peacebuilding, 2023). In the semi-autonomous territories such as Somaliland and Puntland, media entities are often perceived as mouthpieces for local political agendas. Even when the media is not directly promoting violence, these outlets are seen to amplify narratives that reinforce political exclusion or regional divisions. Such tendencies make the media to be perceived as exclusionary, often marginalizing voices that do



not conform to prevailing political or ideological paradigms. This is particularly evident in the traditional media, where ownership and control remain heavily concentrated among political elites or business entities that have vested interests (in politics and governance). Consequently, independent and peace-oriented journalism struggles to gain traction, both in terms of audience reach and financial sustainability.

3. mplications for Peacebuilding

The structure and operation of media in Somalia, along with their challenges, have far-reaching implications. A media system that is constrained by insecurity, resource scarcity, and political influence cannot effectively serve as a platform for inclusive dialogue or truth-telling, both of which are essential elements in sustainable peacebuilding. The absence of a pluralistic media space undermines efforts to present alternative narratives, counter hate speech, or support reconciliation initiatives. Robust peace journalism requires a media environment that is not only free and independent but also institutionally supported and professionally capacitated. In Somalia's case, addressing the structural deficiencies within the media sector, alongside fostering legal protections and promoting editorial independence, is vital for repositioning the media as a stakeholder in peacebuilding rather than a passive reflector of political divides.

One of the most persistent axioms in journalism is captured by the adage: "*If it bleeds, it leads*". This principle highlights the media's tendency to prioritize stories featuring violence, sensationalism, and crisis, often at the expense of narratives centred on reconciliation, dialogue, or peace. Consequently, headlines tend to spotlight armed conflict and violent confrontation rather than instances of cross-cultural understanding or collaborative peace efforts. As the media primarily focuses on armed confrontations, it often overlooks the ongoing peace discussions. The media's inclination to hide conflict and violence distorts reality, leading many individuals to perceive peace as an artificial state and conflict as omnipresent. This distortion does not stem merely from editorial bias, but from ingrained news values that define what is considered "newsworthy".

Numerous studies have concluded that the media's impact on conflict is significantly greater than its influence on conflict prevention and Peacebuilding. According to Wolfsfeld (2004), this dynamic emerges from what he describes as a "fundamental contradiction" between the intrinsic nature of peace processes and the operational values of journalism. He identifies four dominant journalistic norms that hinder constructive peace reporting:

- 
1. **Immediacy** – The demand for breaking news conflicts with the slow, often nonlinear nature of peace processes.
 2. **Drama** – Sensational and emotionally charged stories receive precedence over measured and nuanced reporting.
 3. **Simplicity** – Complex political and social dynamics are reduced to easily digestible binaries.
 4. **Ethnocentrism** – Reporting tends to reflect the cultural or ideological biases of the journalist or outlet's audience. While these values are commercially viable, they inadvertently privilege conflict escalation over resolution. They inform both editorial choices and audience expectations, reinforcing narratives that often sideline peace advocates, moderate voices, or reconciliation efforts. News media operate as a commercial enterprise, and should therefore produce content that resonates with its target audience to sustain profitability. Content that aligns with dominant cultural values or popular sentiment is more likely to attract readership and advertising revenue. In this context, stories that align with the four norms identified above are not only editorially preferred, they are economically incentivised. This creates a systemic bias within the media ecosystem that favours stories that sensationalize conflict, division, and crisis. As such, peace journalism, which seeks to cover conflict in ways that support resolution rather than escalation, faces substantial structural and cultural obstacles.

Nonetheless, this structural bias does not render peace journalism unattainable. Media practitioners can still strategically engage with media platforms to promote values of dialogue, reconciliation, and understanding. This requires a deep knowledge of newsroom dynamics, editorial decision-making, and the economics of media production. Importantly, scholars and peacebuilders should also remain attentive to opportunities presented by new media technologies, citizen journalism, and digital storytelling. These platforms offer alternative spaces for shaping narratives that counteract the limitations of traditional media models.

2.5 The Media Influence: Reality, Risk, and Reach

Compared to its influence on conflict escalation, the media's impact on Peacebuilding is more widely recognised. This stands in stark contrast to the role the media plays in exacerbating conflict. Nonetheless, there is increasing recognition that media can significantly shape not only conflict dynamics but also efforts toward peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

According to Bratic and Schirch (2007), the media have long demonstrated the ability to incite violence and manipulate public sentiment. Their research draws from historical case studies that highlight how media platforms—when aligned with political or ideological objectives—can contribute to the mobilisation of violence. The following examples underscore this capacity:

1. **Nazi Germany:** Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime used media propaganda to construct a worldview steeped in anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Through state-controlled broadcasts and print media, this ideological narrative was systematically disseminated to justify discriminatory laws, militarisation, and genocide.
2. **Rwanda:** During the 1994 genocide, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) actively incited violence by urging listeners to kill Tutsis, referred to as “cockroaches.” The radio station played a central role in spreading hate speech and directing genocidal action.
3. **The Balkans:** In the former Yugoslavia, local media outlets inflamed ethnic tensions by broadcasting divisive narratives that framed ethnic groups as existential threats to one another, thereby fuelling communal violence.

These case studies confirm that the media can play a destructive role when co-opted for political manipulation, hate propagation, or conflict escalation.

A framework proposed by Livingston (1997) and later discussed by Aho (2018) offers a categorization of four types of international intervention in conflict contexts, such as peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance, and highlights media interest in each.. While peacebuilding itself is not explicitly listed among the intervention types, the model reveals how media framing often reflects strategic interests rather than normative ideals like peace.

Of particular relevance in this framework is the dimension concerning public opinion, which has become increasingly influential in shaping media agendas. Ferguson (2000) similarly notes the growing responsiveness of news outlets to audience preferences. As public sentiment becomes a critical driver of media coverage, the selection and framing of conflict-related topics may reflect populist or nationalistic views, further complicating peacebuilding narratives.

Table 1 - Intervention Types and Accompanying Media Considerations (Michael Aho, 2018)

	Policy goals & objectives	Likely media interest	Government policy	Likely media effects	Public opinion
Peace Making	3 rd party imposition of political solution	High interest initially-level of stability determines rest	Volatile conditions; danger in reporting; access with risk	Attentive public scrutiny; latent public opinion	Latency concerns policy makers
Peacekeeping	Bolster an accepted political solution by presence of 3 rd party	Moderate interest unless accord is destabilized	Generally unrestricted access to theater	Emotion impede most likely	Attentive-latency might concern policy makers
Imposed humanitarian ops	Forceful, apolitical aid policy	Low/moderate interest unless violence ensues	Volatile conditions; reporting risky	Impediment; attentive public scrutiny	Again, latency a concern to policy makers
Consensual humanitarian ops	Agreed humanitarian assistance	Initial operation met by moderate to low interest	Unrestricted, even encouraged by media	Media effect unlikely	Attentive scrutiny

Although this paper does not undertake an in-depth analysis of public opinion as a driver of media behaviour, it is vital to acknowledge its growing significance. In democratic and semi-democratic contexts, media outlets often adjust their editorial priorities in response to public moods and political climates. As such, understanding the interplay between media, political institutions, and public sentiment is crucial for developing communication strategies aimed at peace promotion.

2.6 Challenges of the Somali Media in Peacebuilding

Despite the media's crucial role in promoting peace, the Somali media landscape faces profound challenges that undermine its effectiveness in promoting reconciliation, civic dialogue, and sustainable peace. A growing number of peace analysts and practitioners have voiced concerns that the media, rather than fostering peace, often exacerbates societal tensions and political polarisation. According to the Agency for Peacebuilding (2023), a majority of Somali journalists and media professionals interviewed for their research criticised the role of local media in conflict escalation. The criticism highlights how Somali media outlets frequently amplify political disputes by providing disproportionate airtime to actors who promote divisive narratives, incite controversy, or inflame communal tensions. In such cases, the media becomes a platform for confrontation rather than a space for dialogue or peacebuilding.

2.7 The Shaping of Perception Through Media

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions, particularly regarding conflict and peace. Media gatekeepers, journalists, editors, and media entrepreneurs significantly influence how stories are selected, framed, and disseminated. These decisions are not neutral; they are shaped by the professionals' own experiences, ideological orientations, and assumptions about what the public desires to consume.

Entrepreneurs and professionals in the media industry make decisions based on their opinions of what the general public or a specific audience wants to see and hear. In light of this, it is clear that reports of violent confrontation will dominate the headlines, rather than reports of conversation and understanding amongst people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The predominant focus of coverage in the media is on armed conflict, rather than negotiations for peace. This tendency to conceal conflict and violence distorts reality, leading many to believe that peace is an artificial state and that conflict can occur anywhere.

Several empirical studies support this claim, concluding that the media's influence in escalating conflict far outweighs its contributions to conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Bratic & Schirch, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 2004). According to Wolfsfeld, there exists an intrinsic “fundamental contradiction” between the values of news production and the requirements of peace processes. News values such as immediacy, drama, simplicity, and ethnocentrism directly conflict with the slow, complex, and inclusive nature of peacebuilding.

These values guide the criteria that news organisations use to determine what constitutes “newsworthy” content. Wolfsfeld (2004) notes that although media professionals embrace these principles, they often mirror the expectations of the audience. As such, media organisations, operating within market economies, tend to deliver content that resonates with these shared cultural preferences, thus reinforcing conflict-centric coverage patterns.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for peace practitioners. To effectively engage the media in peacebuilding efforts, they must be aware of the structural and ideological filters through which media content is produced. Warfield (2002) offers a useful ethical framework for peacebuilders navigating dilemmas in such settings. His four-stage model **includes:**

1. **Pause and process** the ethical dilemma internally.
2. **Reflect** by aligning the situation with one's own ethical values.
3. **Share** the dilemma with trusted colleagues or stakeholders to solicit diverse perspectives.
4. **Determine and act**, guided by a conscious evaluation of how one's personal values align or conflict with professional norms, and how others in similar situations have acted.



This model provides peace practitioners with a structured approach for decision-making in ethically ambiguous media environments. While the structural incentives in media may not inherently support peace journalism, this does not negate the possibility of using media as a tool for constructive change. Individuals and organisations committed to peace continue to leverage media to disseminate alternative narratives, challenge dominant frames, and promote values of dialogue, empathy, and coexistence. As Bratic and Schirch (2007) argue, the media possesses significant untapped potential to contribute positively to peacebuilding, provided that practitioners understand its mechanisms and are strategic in their engagements.

3.0 Conclusion

Information is a powerful tool that shapes public discourse, influences perceptions, and either fosters societal cohesion or drives division. In conflict-affected settings, particularly in fragile states like Somalia, the role of media becomes especially consequential. Ideally, a free and pluralistic mass media ecosystem acts both as an instrument for sustainable peacebuilding and a barometer of democratic health. It enables access to diverse viewpoints, enhances accountability, and supports civic engagement, principles that are central to democratic societies and essential for post-conflict reconstruction.

Freedom of expression is not only a normative right enshrined in international human rights law but also a practical necessity for building inclusive and resilient societies. Societies that promote open dialogue and protect press freedom tend to exhibit lower risks of conflict recurrence. Conversely, the absence of participatory political processes and restrictions on independent media tend to exacerbate social fractures and perpetuate cycles of violence.

Media platforms offer a critical arena for negotiating societal narratives. While they can foster dialogue, provide early warning signals, and amplify peace messages, they can also be weaponised to fuel hate speech, polarisation, and conflict. Propaganda, misinformation, and inflammatory rhetoric are among the tools frequently employed to manipulate public opinion and escalate tensions.

This paper has critically analysed the dual role of media in conflict settings, with a specific focus on Somalia. It explored how both legacy and digital media are implicated in shaping conflict dynamics, while also demonstrating potential to support sustainable peacebuilding. Drawing from scholarly literature and contextual realities, the study examined how communication for development (C4D) and peace journalism approaches could be harnessed to counter divisive narratives and support societal healing.



4.0 Policy Recommendations

To harness the full potential of media as a peacebuilding tool, the following strategic actions are recommended:

1. **Develop and Implement Multi-Tiered Media Interventions:** Design inclusive, context-specific media strategies that promote peace, development, and civic engagement across broadcast, print, and digital platforms.
2. **Strengthen Capacity Across Stakeholders:** Provide targeted training and capacity-building initiatives for journalists, editors, citizen reporters, and government officials to promote responsible journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting.
3. **Promote an Enabling Environment for Media Freedom:** Support legislative and regulatory reforms that uphold press freedom, protect journalists from intimidation, and ensure the independence of media institutions.
4. **Tailor Media Engagement to Local Realities:** Design interventions that are sensitive to local conflict dynamics and development challenges, ensuring that peace narratives resonate with community experiences and cultural norms.
5. **Strengthen Multi-Level Partnerships:** Foster collaboration between global, regional, national, and local media actors, civil society organisations, donor agencies, and governmental institutions to sustain peace-oriented media programming and promote mutual accountability.

- Agency for Peace-building (AP). (2023). Media and peace-building in Somalia. https://www.peaceagency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AP_Media-and-Peace-building-in-Somalia_2023_Final.pdf
- Betz, M. (2018). Media noise and the complexity of conflicts: Making sense of media in conflict prevention. Betz Media Consulting. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327163278_Media_Noise_and_the_Complexity_of_Conflicts_Making_sense_of_media_in_conflict_prevention
- Bratic, V., & Schirch, L. (2007). Why and when to use the media for conflict prevention and peace-building. https://documents.sfcg.org/articles/media_for_conflict_prevention.pdf
- Ferguson, S. D. (2000). Researching the public opinion environment: Theories and methods. Sage Publications.
- Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411–426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00280>
- Idris, I. (2020). Media/communications on peace-building/social cohesion/changing prevailing narratives on conflict. Institute of Development Studies. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12413/15226>
- Issa-Salwe, A. M. (2011). The internet and the Somali diaspora: The web as a new means of expression. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 6, 54–67. <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/bildhaan/vol6/iss1/8>
- Issa-Salwe, A. M., & Olden, A. (2008). Somali websites, history and politics. *Aslib Proceedings*, 60(6), 570–582.
- Kuusik, N. (2010). The role of the media in peace-building, conflict management, and prevention. <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/4866>
- Lederach, J. P., Ansel, D., Brandwein, J., Greene, A. L., Clos, R., Lee, S., & Weis, L. (2011). Creating space for fresh approaches to peace-building: Somalia. Life & Peace Institute / Kroc Institute.
- Livingston, S. (1997). Clarifying the CNN effect: An examination of media effects according to type of military intervention (Research Paper R-18). Harvard University.
- Osman, I. (2018). Diaspora journalism and the Somali conflict. *Somali Studies: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal for Somali Studies*, 3, 41–60.
- Robinson, P. (1999). Theorizing the influence of media on world politics: Models of media influence on foreign policy. *European Journal of Communication*, 16(4), 523–544.
- Skjerdal, T. S. (2021). The Somali media and their peace-building potential. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 38–39. <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1119&context=bildhaan>
- Wolfsfeld, G. (2004). Media and the path to peace. Cambridge University Press.



PAPER II

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION IN SOMALIA: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA'S IMPACT ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND SOCIETAL COHESION

Author:

Mahad J. Koronto¹, Warda A. Roble ¹, Mukhtar A. Omar², Adam A. Mohamed³

¹Department of Training and Production, Media INK, Hargeisa, Somaliland

²Faculty of Education, Amoud University, Borama, Somaliland

³Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey



Abstract

This research explores the critical role of media in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Somalia, a country that has endured prolonged conflict and political instability. The study begins by highlighting the significant influence the media holds in shaping public discourse and its potential to foster dialogue and unity in post-conflict settings. However, it also notes that the effectiveness of Somali media in contributing to peace and reconciliation is not well understood. The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the role of media in promoting peace and reconciliation, identify the challenges it faces, and propose actionable recommendations. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative data from structured questionnaires distributed to 424 participants and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with 30 key informants, including media practitioners and regulatory bodies. Content analysis of media outputs was also conducted to assess how peacebuilding and conflict are portrayed in Somali media. The study's findings reveal a highly fragmented media environment in Somalia, characterized by political interference, safety concerns, and limited resources. Quantitative data analysis, including inferential tests, shows no significant relationship between current media practices and peacebuilding outcomes. The qualitative data further corroborates these findings, revealing that media practitioners often lack conflict-sensitive reporting skills, face external pressures, and operate in an environment where sensationalism overrides responsible journalism. The research concludes that while Somali media has the potential to be a powerful tool for peacebuilding, there are significant challenges to overcome. Recommendations include targeted training for journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting, enhancing journalist safety, and developing comprehensive media policies. The study also acknowledges its limitations, particularly the challenging security environment, which restricted data collection in some conflict-affected areas. This research provides valuable insights into the role of media in peacebuilding in Somalia and offers practical recommendations for improving the media's contribution to sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Key Words: Media, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Media Ethics, Media Trust.

Somalia, located in the Horn of Africa, has endured decades of protracted conflict, political instability, and socio-economic turmoil. The collapse of Somalia's central government following the overthrow of President Siad Barre in 1991 plunged the country into chaos, leading to a civil war that fractured the nation along clan lines (Lewis, 2008). The absence of a centralized government allowed various clan-based militias and warlords to vie for control over territory and resources, exacerbating ethnic tensions and violence (Menkhaus, 2010). This period of lawlessness and disorder resulted in a series of humanitarian crises, including famine, widespread displacement, and the emergence of extremist groups like Al-Shabaab (Harper, 2012). The persistent instability in Somalia is intricately linked to historical, political, and social dynamics. Recent research underscores how the enduring legacy of colonialism, the entrenchment of clan-based political structures, and Somalia's strategic significance in the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa continue to fuel conflict and hinder peacebuilding efforts (Hoehne, 2021; Khalif, 2020; Williams, 2020). External interventions, both by neighboring countries and international actors, have often compounded the situation, leading to a highly fragmented society where multiple factions compete for dominance (Marchal, 2007). Despite numerous peace conferences and international efforts to stabilize the country, the underlying drivers of conflicts, such as clan rivalries, competition over resources, and political fragmentation, remain deeply entrenched (Elmi, 2010). In this context, the role of the media becomes crucial. Media can serve as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, fostering dialogue, and promoting peace and reconciliation (Howard, 2013). However, in Somalia, the media landscape is fraught with challenges. The lack of infrastructure, pervasive insecurity, political interference, and the threat of violence against journalists all contribute to a constrained media environment (Puddephatt, 2006). Moreover, the Somali media has been polarized along clan lines, reflecting the broader societal divisions and exacerbating tensions rather than fostering understanding and reconciliation (Menkhaus, 2010). Despite these challenges, the potential of media in peacebuilding cannot be ignored. The media have the ability to reach wide audiences, disseminate critical information, and provide a platform for diverse voices, including those of marginalized groups (Galtung, 2002). However, there is a potential difference between the ability to disseminate meaningful and harmless news or media reports, and what actually exists in Somalia's media fraternity. In conflict-affected societies, media can play a transformative role by promoting inclusive dialogue, countering misinformation, and providing balanced reporting that bridges divides and fosters social cohesion (Brahimi & Dobbins, 2007). The role of media in peace negotiations is particularly significant, as it can influence the narratives surrounding peace processes, highlight the voices of peace advocates, and hold parties accountable to their commitments (Williams, 2011).



In Somalia, the need for peacebuilding is urgent, particularly after three decades of unrest in many Somali regions. Conflicts and instability have devastating consequences for the population, hindering socio-economic development and perpetuating cycles of violence (Muggah, 2009). Peacebuilding efforts in Somalia require a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of conflict, promotes reconciliation, and builds resilient institutions capable of sustaining peace (Bradbury, 2008). Media, as a critical component of civil society, has the potential to contribute significantly to these efforts. By providing accurate information, facilitating dialogue, and amplifying the voices of those advocating for peace, the media can help to create an environment conducive to peace and stability (Puddephatt, 2006). However, the effectiveness of media in peacebuilding is contingent upon several factors, including the professionalism and ethical standards of journalists, the independence of media institutions, and the ability of media practitioners to operate safely and without fear of reprisal (Menkhaus, 2010). In Somalia, where the media faces constant threats and challenges, these factors are often compromised (Harper, 2012). As a result, the potential of media to contribute to peacebuilding is not fully realized.

This study explored the role of media in peacebuilding within the Somali context, examining both the opportunities and the challenges faced by media practitioners. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media can be leveraged as a tool for peace and reconciliation. By analyzing the perceptions of media practitioners and the general public, this study will shed light on the critical gaps that exist between media efforts and public expectations, offering insights into how these gaps can be bridged to enhance the media's role in fostering peace and stability in Somalia (Menkhaus, 2010). In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of media in conflict resolution, providing valuable lessons for other conflict-affected regions where media have the potential to play a transformative role in peacebuilding (Galtung, 2002). Through a set of targeted recommendations, the study offers practical strategies for strengthening the capacity of Somali media to support peacebuilding efforts, thereby contributing to the long-term stability and development of the country.



2.0 Methodology

This section provides an overview of the research methodology employed in this study, outlining the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The methodology is structured to ensure a systematic and rigorous examination of the research objectives, offering a robust framework for interpreting the findings.

2.1 Research Method

The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, informed by recent advances in research methodologies tailored to conflict-affected regions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2020).

Qualitative Component

The qualitative aspect of the research involved in-depth interviews with key informants, including media practitioners, editors, media owners, and representatives from media regulatory bodies. This component provides rich, detailed insights into the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of those directly involved in the Somali media landscape.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative component consisted of structured questionnaires administered to a broader sample of media practitioners and community members. This component seeks to quantify perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to the role of media in peacebuilding, providing statistical evidence to support the qualitative findings.

2.2 Sampling Strategy

Purposive Sampling for Qualitative Data

A purposive sampling strategy is used for selecting key informants for the in-depth interviews. Participants are chosen based on their expertise, experience, and relevance to the study, ensuring that the sample includes a diverse range of perspectives from different segments of the media landscape in Somalia. The selection criteria include factors such as the participant's role within their organization, their experience in the media industry, and their involvement in peacebuilding initiatives.

Stratified Random Sampling for Quantitative Data

For the structured questionnaires, a stratified random sampling method is employed to ensure representation across different types of media outlets (radio, television, print, and online) and regions within Somalia. This approach ensures that the sample is diverse and reflective of the various segments of the media landscape. Stratification is based on media type, geographic location, and participant demographics, ensuring that the sample is representative of the broader population of media practitioners and community members.

2.3 Sample Size

One of the primary challenges encountered in the study was the absence of reliable data on the actual number of practicing journalists in Somalia. There is currently no centralized or official registry that tracks media professionals across the country. As a result, estimations rely heavily on figures provided by media organizations, which base their data on internal registrations and affiliations. To navigate this gap, the research utilized aggregate estimates from leading media institutions operating in Puntland and south-central Somalia. These organizations collectively approximated that there are around 3,700 active journalists within these regions. Although not definitive, this figure served as a practical baseline for determining the appropriate sample size for the study.

To ensure statistical rigor, the sample size for the journalist survey was calculated using Cochran's formula for sample size determination in large populations. This approach allowed for the derivation of a representative sample that accounts for population variability, ensuring greater accuracy and validity in the study's findings despite the limitations of official demographic data.

The formula is as follows:

Where:

n_0 is the sample size,

Z is the Z-value (1.96 for a 95% confidence level),

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2}$$

p is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population (assuming $p=0.5$ for maximum variability),

e is the desired level of precision (margin of error, set at 5% or 0.05).

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = 384.16$$

Rounding up, the required sample size was approximately 385 journalists. To account for potential non-responses and incomplete surveys, the sample size was increased by 10%, resulting in a final sample size of roughly 424 journalists.



2.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Office of the Academic Dean at Amoud University. Before data collection, all participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and voluntary nature of the research. Informed consent was obtained from each participant following a clear explanation that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they retained the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participants were also assured that all information shared during the study would be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic research purposes. To uphold ethical standards, all necessary measures were implemented to ensure the anonymity and privacy of respondents throughout the data collection and analysis process.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from in-depth interviews and open-ended survey responses are analyzed thematically. This involves coding the data into themes and sub-themes, which are then analyzed to identify patterns and insights related to the research objectives. Thematic analysis is chosen for its flexibility and ability to provide rich, detailed accounts of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included multiple readings of the interview transcripts and survey responses, followed by coding and categorizing the data into thematic areas. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the study's research questions and objectives, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and perceptions of Somali media practitioners.

Basic Characteristics of the In-Depth Interview Participants¹

Table 1: In-depth interview participant characteristics

#	Respondent Category	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
	Media Experts/Journalists	21	8	29
	Total	21	8	29



Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey and content analysis is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and regression analysis, are employed to examine relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses.

Statistical software, such as SPSS and Excel, was used to facilitate the analysis and ensure accuracy. The results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs, providing a clear and concise representation of the data.

2.6 Data Collection Methods

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were the primary qualitative data collection method used in this study. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific issues that emerge during the discussions while ensuring that all relevant topics are covered. An interview guide was designed based on the research objectives, focusing on the challenges faced by media practitioners, the ethical dilemmas encountered, and the role of media in facilitating peacebuilding initiatives. The interviews were conducted with key informants who have significant experience and expertise in the Somali media landscape. These include journalists, editors, media owners, and representatives from organizations such as the Media Association of Puntland (MAP) and the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESUJ). The interviews were conducted both in-person and via telephone or online platforms, depending on the availability and safety considerations of the participants.

Structured Questionnaires

The quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to a sample of media practitioners and community members. The questionnaires were designed to capture a wide range of data, including demographic information, perceptions of the media's role in peacebuilding, challenges faced by media practitioners, and levels of trust in local media. The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions, Likert-scale items, and a few open-ended questions to capture additional qualitative data. The questionnaires were distributed both online, using platforms such as Google Sheets, and in-person, ensuring a broad and representative sample. The online distribution is particularly effective in reaching participants in remote or conflict-affected areas where in-person data collection may be challenging.



Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed to examine how Somali media outlets portray conflict and peacebuilding efforts. This involves a systematic analysis of media content, including news articles, radio broadcasts, and social media posts. The content was analyzed for themes, narratives, and frames related to conflict and peacebuilding. This method provides both quantitative data on the frequency and nature of peace-related content and qualitative insights into the framing and tone of media reports (Neuendorf, 2017).

3.0 Results and Findings

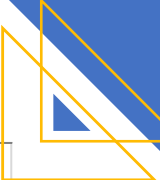
This section presents the findings from the mixed-methods research conducted to explore the role of media in peacebuilding within the Somali context. The results are organized into subsections corresponding to the key research questions, with a detailed analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study surveyed 424 media practitioners and conducted in-depth interviews with 30 key informants from various media organizations in Somalia. The demographic profile of the respondents is as follows:

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 provides an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents for quantitative data, broken down by different locations (Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, Beledweyne, Galkayo, Garowe, Bosaso) and categorized into two main groups: Media Practitioners and the Community. The characteristics include residence and marital status. The table gives a comprehensive overview of the participants' demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, allowing for analysis of how these variables may influence the study's findings.



Variable	Categories	Number (424)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	267	62.9
	Female	157	37.1
Age (years)	18-24	86	20.3
	25-34	198	46.7
	35-44	94	22.2
	45-54	29	6.8
	55+	17	4
Educational background	High school or below	180	42.5
	Diploma	78	18.4
	Bachelor	119	28.1
	Postgraduate	47	11
	Mogadishu	105	24.8
Location	Kismayo	46	10.7
	Baidoa	72	17
	Beledweyne	63	14.9
	Galkayo	47	11.1
	Garowe	52	12.3
	Bosaso	39	9.2
Marital Status	Married	82	19.3
	Divorced	89	21
	Single	175	41.2
	Widowed	78	18.4

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the quantitative respondents



The socio-demographic analysis reveals that the majority of participants were male (62.9%), with a significant portion holding a high school education or below (42.5%) and a substantial number having a bachelor's degree (28.1%). This suggests a relatively educated group, with diverse representation from key Somali cities like Mogadishu (24.8%) and Baidoa (17.0%). The demographic diversity, particularly in education and location, implies that these factors likely influence the opinions and behaviors analyzed later in the study. However, the gender imbalance may affect the generalizability of the findings across a more gender-diverse population.

3.2 Role of Media in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

The perceptions of the media's role in peacebuilding are mixed, with a significant portion of participants viewing the media's contribution negatively. This indicates a critical need for the media to reassess its approach to covering peace and reconciliation efforts in Somalia. The perceptions of the media's role in peacebuilding are mixed, with a significant portion of participants viewing the media's contribution negatively. This indicates a critical need for the media to reassess its approach to covering peace and reconciliation efforts in Somalia.

Variable	Categories	Number (424)	Percentage (%)
How would you describe the overall role of media in Somalia's peacebuilding and reconciliation	Very positive	68	16
	Positive	76	17.9
	Neutral	89	21
	Negative	142	33.5
	Very Negative	49	11.6
How would you rate the role of the local media in contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation	Very positive	65	15.3
	Positive	42	10
	Neutral	93	21.9
	Negative	151	35.6
	Very Negative	73	17.2
What challenges do media practitioners face when reporting on peacebuilding efforts in Somalia?	Threats and violence	103	24.3
	Lack of access to information	59	13.9
	Political pressure and censorship	49	11.6
	Limited resources and funding	119	28.1
	Public mistrust	94	22
Which of the following issues will be useful to cover by media in promoting peace	Providing reliable information	98	23.1
	Educating the public	79	18.6
	Facilitating dialogue and understanding	64	15.1
	Exposing corruption and injustices	97	22.9
	Promoting reconciliation and	86	20.3

Table 3: Role of media in peacebuilding and reconciliation.



The qualitative findings of the study align with the quantitative results. During interviews with the heads and members of media organizations, it was revealed that the media's potential role in conflict resolution is not being fully harnessed. Respondents were asked about the media's role in both fueling and resolving conflicts. As one respondent noted.

"Most journalists do not receive sufficient training on conflict-sensitive reporting. Often, they unintentionally broadcast sensitive statements that incite conflict. For example, during clan conflicts in Marka, a journalist reported that one of the clans had been massacred, which led to prolonged conflicts" (IDI-02, Radio Director)

One of the challenges that emerged from the qualitative data is that certain Somali media outlets, through their reporting practices, are inadvertently fueling conflicts. This issue stems from the absence of a well-defined media policy to guide their operations

Yes, the way the media reports can influence conflict resolution or fuel conflict. Unfortunately, our media often fails to use this opportunity positively. Most of Somali media outlets has no policies and guidelines for reporting on conflicts and peacebuilding. Media outlets do not have conflict sensitivity reporting guidelines, leading reporters to broadcast stories that may harm the community without proper editorial oversight." (IDI-24, General secretary of media organization)

3.3 Media Consumption Habits and Trust

This table provides an overview of the media consumption habits of the participants, including whether they are media consumers, the types of media they use most frequently, their level of trust in local media, and their perceptions of the media's role in exacerbating conflicts. The data offers a snapshot of how the participants interact with media, their trust in its content, and the potential influence of media on public opinion and conflict dynamics. This understanding is crucial for evaluating the media's effectiveness as a tool for peacebuilding in Somalia.

Variable	Categories	Number (424)	Percentage (%)
Are you a media consumer?	Yes	185	43.6
	No	239	56.4
Which types of media do you use most frequently for news and information?	Television	92	21.7
	Radio	139	32.8
	Newspapers/Magazines	0	0
	Online news websites	72	16.9
	Social media	121	28.5
How much do you trust the local media to report accurately on peacebuilding issues?	Completely	67	15.8
	A lot	54	12.7
	Somewhat	71	16.7
	A little	144	33.9
	Not at all	88	20.8
Have you ever felt that the media has played a role in worsening conflicts	Yes	272	64.2
	No	152	38.8

Table 4: Media consumption habits.

The qualitative data collected through interviews corroborates the quantitative findings, highlighting critical issues related to the role of the media in conflict resolution in Somalia.

“Occasionally, unintentionally, the people being interviewed call for peace, which facilitates dialogue, but most media outlets do not have a plan or goal to facilitate dialogues to reduce conflicts” (IDI-04, TV Director)



This statement underscores a significant gap in the strategic use of media for peacebuilding, where the lack of intent and planning often results in missed opportunities for fostering dialogue

"The effectiveness of media in promoting dialogue largely depends on the intent and capacity of the journalists involved. When they have the right support and training, they can make a real difference." (IDI-23, General secretary of media organization)

This response emphasizes the importance of proper training and resources for journalists, affirming that the media can play a crucial role in conflict resolution when adequately equipped.

There is no media policy that focuses on peacebuilding. When we tried to understand the policies of Somali media, we found that no written policies exist. Without editorial policies or conflict reporting policies, many mistakes occur" (IDI-22, General secretary of media organization)

This reveals a systemic issue within Somali media, where the absence of formal policies on peacebuilding and conflict reporting contributes to errors and exacerbates tensions

3.4 Media Ethics and Practices from Media Practitioners

Table five presents the results of a survey conducted among 305 media practitioners, focusing on their training experiences, encounters with ethical dilemmas, and methods for verifying source credibility in the context of reporting on peace and conflict. This data provides insights into the challenges and practices of media practitioners in conflict reporting, highlighting areas where further training and ethical guidelines may be necessary.



Variable	Categories	Number (305)	Percentage (%)
Have you received any training specifically focused on reporting in conflict and post-conflict contexts?	Yes	104	43.6
	No	202	56.4
How often do you encounter ethical dilemmas while reporting on peacebuilding issues?	Very Often	49	16.1
	Often	99	32.5
	Somewhat	53	17.3
	Rarely	41	13.4
	Never	63	20.7
How do you verify the credibility of your sources when reporting on peace and conflict?	Cross-checking information with multiple sources	42	13.7
	Consulting experts in the field	59	19.3
	Verifying the background and reliability of the	81	26.6
	Using only sources that have been previously reliable	45	14.8
	I do not verify the credibility of my sources	78	25.6

Table 5: Media ethics and practices



The qualitative interviews further reinforce the challenges identified in the quantitative data, particularly in how financial pressures, educational shortcomings, and the absence of guiding policies shape the practices of media outlets in Somalia.

(Another challenge is the financial pressure on media outlets. The need to attract viewers or listeners often leads them to prioritize sensational stories over those that encourage reconciliation." (IDI-11, TV admin and finance)

This quote highlights the commercial imperatives that drive media content, often at the expense of fostering peace and dialogue, as sensationalism tends to overshadow more constructive reporting.

The issue of educational quality among journalists also emerged as a significant barrier, impacting the ethical standards and professionalism within the media industry.

(I believe the biggest challenge is the low educational quality of journalists. Additionally, the focus of media on profit-making is a challenge; this means that if someone wants to speak, they can pay and say whatever they want" (IDI-08, TV editor)

This statement underscores the dual challenges of inadequate journalist training and the monetization of media platforms, which can lead to the dissemination of unchecked and potentially harmful content.

The absence of a robust media policy in Somalia has been identified as a critical gap, leading to the establishment of media outlets that may serve narrow, self-interested agendas rather than the public good.

(There is no guiding media policy, and it's possible that the person establishing the media outlet has an agenda to promote their own views. Many media outlets may be established to defend clan interests and work for clan benefits" (IDI-28, Freelancer journalist)

This observation points to the underlying issues of bias and the potential misuse of media platforms for clan-based interests, further complicating the role of the media in promoting peace and unity.



3.5 Summary of Findings

The study's quantitative and qualitative outcomes provide a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in peacebuilding within the Somali context. While both sets of data highlight significant challenges and opportunities, they offer different perspectives on the media landscape in Somalia. The quantitative data reveal that a large portion of media practitioners and the community perceive the media's role in peacebuilding negatively. Specifically, 33.5% of respondents viewed the media's contribution as negative, and 11.6% as very negative. This sentiment reflects a general dissatisfaction with how the media handles peace and reconciliation efforts. Additionally, the data shows that many participants do not trust the local media to report accurately on peacebuilding issues, with 33.9% trusting the media "a little" and 20.8% "not at all." These findings suggest that media practitioners in Somalia face significant credibility challenges, which hinder their ability to contribute to peacebuilding effectively.

Furthermore, the quantitative results highlight key challenges faced by media practitioners, such as threats and violence (24.3%), lack of access to information (13.9%), and political pressure and censorship (11.6%). These obstacles are compounded by limited resources and funding (28.1%), which restrict the ability of journalists to carry out in-depth and impartial reporting on peacebuilding efforts.

The qualitative data, derived from in-depth interviews with key informants, provides a more nuanced understanding of these challenges. Interviewees consistently pointed out that Somali media often sensationalize conflict, focusing on the most dramatic aspects rather than offering balanced reporting. This approach not only exacerbates tensions but also undermines the potential for the media to foster peace and reconciliation. Many respondents emphasized the lack of training and editorial oversight as critical factors contributing to this issue. For example, interviewees noted that most journalists do not receive adequate training in conflict-sensitive reporting, leading to the unintentional broadcast of content that could incite further conflict.

Another key insight from the qualitative data is the media's limited role in facilitating dialogue and reconciliation. While there are instances where the media has successfully promoted dialogue, these are exceptions rather than the norm. The lack of strategic planning and a focus on profit-driven sensationalism were identified as major barriers to the media's effectiveness in this area. Interviewees also highlighted the influence of political and clan interests, which often compromise the independence of media outlets and limit their ability to promote unbiased dialogue.



The comparison between the quantitative and qualitative findings underscores a consistent theme: the media in Somalia is currently perceived as failing in its role to contribute positively to peacebuilding. While the quantitative data provides a broad overview of the public's dissatisfaction and the challenges faced by media practitioners, the qualitative data offers deeper insights into the root causes of these issues, such as the lack of training, editorial oversight, and media independence. The quantitative data quantifies the extent of the negative perceptions and challenges. In contrast, the qualitative data contextualizes these findings, offering detailed explanations and personal experiences that illuminate the complex dynamics at play. Together, these outcomes paint a comprehensive picture of a media landscape that is struggling to navigate the delicate balance between reporting on conflict and promoting peace, highlighting the urgent need for systemic changes to enhance the media's capacity for peacebuilding in Somalia.

3.6 Discussion

The study reveals that the role of media in peacebuilding within Somalia is fraught with challenges, both in terms of public perception and operational realities faced by media practitioners. Quantitative data shows a significant portion of respondents perceiving the media's contribution to peacebuilding negatively, with 33.5% rating it as negative and 11.6% as very negative. Additionally, a large percentage of respondents expressed limited trust in the local media's ability to report accurately on peacebuilding issues, with 33.9% trusting the media only "a little" and 20.8% "not at all." The qualitative findings further corroborate these results, highlighting systemic issues within the Somali media landscape. Key informants emphasized the media's tendency to sensationalize conflict, focus on dramatic aspects rather than balanced reporting, and the lack of sufficient training and editorial oversight as critical factors exacerbating these challenges. The absence of strategic planning and the influence of political and clan interests were also identified as significant barriers to the media's effectiveness in fostering peace and reconciliation.

Similar challenges have been documented in other parts of the Horn of Africa. For instance, a study on the role of media in conflict resolution in South Sudan found that media outlets often exacerbated tensions due to a lack of professional training and the influence of political interests (Deng, 2018). In Ethiopia, research by Woldemariam (2020) highlighted that ethnic-based media outlets played a role in fueling ethnic tensions, pointing to the absence of a national media policy that promotes peacebuilding. These studies resonate with the findings in Somalia, where the lack of a guiding media policy and the influence of clan interests similarly hinder the media's role in peacebuilding. The study highlights the critical yet complex role that media plays in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Somalia. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the media's contribution to peacebuilding is perceived negatively by a significant portion of the population. Specifically, 33.5% of survey respondents rated the media's role in peacebuilding as negative, while 11.6% viewed it as very negative. This sentiment reflects widespread dissatisfaction with how the media handles issues of peace and reconciliation.



Qualitative interviews with media practitioners further elaborate on these perceptions. Many respondents pointed out that Somali media often sensationalizes conflict, prioritizing dramatic and attention-grabbing stories over balanced and constructive reporting. This approach not only exacerbates tensions but also undermines the potential for media to serve as a platform for dialogue and reconciliation. For example, one media director noted that journalists frequently lack training in conflict-sensitive reporting, leading to the unintentional dissemination of inflammatory content that can incite further conflict. Moreover, the study reveals that the media in Somalia has failed to capitalize on opportunities to facilitate peacebuilding efforts. While there are instances where media outlets have successfully promoted dialogue, these are exceptions rather than the norm. The lack of strategic planning and a focus on profit-driven sensationalism were identified as significant barriers preventing the media from playing a more active role in fostering peace. Furthermore, the influence of political and clan interests often compromises the independence of media outlets, limiting their ability to promote unbiased dialogue and reconciliation.

These findings are consistent with other studies conducted in the Horn of Africa. For instance, research in South Sudan and Ethiopia has similarly found that media often exacerbates conflicts due to a lack of professional training and the influence of political interests (Deng, 2018; Woldemariam, 2020). These regional parallels highlight the broader challenges faced by media in conflict-affected areas and underscore the need for comprehensive reforms to enable media to contribute positively to peacebuilding and reconciliation. The study's exploration of media consumption habits and trust among Somali audiences provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between media use and public trust in the media. According to the quantitative data, 43.6% of respondents identified as regular media consumers, with television and radio being the most frequently used platforms, followed by social media. However, the study also reveals a significant lack of trust in local media, with 33.9% of respondents indicating that they trust the media "a little" and 20.8% stating they do not trust the media "at all."



This distrust is partly rooted in the perception that the media plays a role in worsening conflicts or tensions. A substantial 64.2% of respondents acknowledged that they believe the media has exacerbated conflicts at some point which signifies the media is perceived as a major contributor to conflicts in Somalia partly due to lack of professionalism among media practitioners. These findings suggest that the media's credibility is severely compromised, which undermines its potential role in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Qualitative data further supports these quantitative findings, with respondents citing concerns over sensationalism, political bias, and the lack of editorial oversight as key factors contributing to the erosion of public trust. The study highlights that many media consumers are wary of the content they encounter, perceiving it as driven by profit motives rather than a genuine commitment to accurate and balanced reporting. In comparison with other studies in the region, similar trends are observed. For example, in Ethiopia, research has shown that ethnic-based media outlets have significantly undermined public trust due to their biased reporting on ethnic conflicts (Woldemariam, 2020). These findings emphasize the importance of addressing issues of media credibility and trust if the media is to play a constructive role in promoting peace and reconciliation in conflict-prone regions like Somalia.

The study sheds light on the ethical challenges and practices of Somali media practitioners, particularly in the context of reporting on peace and conflict. Quantitative data indicates that a significant number of media practitioners (56.4%) have not received any formal training on reporting in conflict or post-conflict contexts. This lack of training is reflected in the frequent ethical dilemmas encountered by journalists, with 32.5% of respondents stating that they often face such challenges while reporting on peacebuilding issues. One of the most concerning findings is the inconsistency in verifying the credibility of sources. According to the survey, only 13.7% of media practitioners consistently cross-check information with multiple sources, while a notable 25.6% admitted to not verifying the credibility of their sources at all. This lack of rigorous verification processes not only compromises the accuracy of reporting but also contributes to the dissemination of potentially harmful content that can inflame conflicts.



Qualitative interviews provide further context to these challenges. Media practitioners cited financial pressures, educational shortcomings, and the absence of guiding policies as key factors that negatively impact their ability to adhere to ethical standards. For instance, one respondent highlighted how the need to attract viewers or listeners often leads media outlets to prioritize sensational stories over those that encourage reconciliation. Another respondent pointed out that the low educational quality of journalists, combined with the profit-driven nature of the media, allows individuals to pay for airtime to promote their own agendas, regardless of the content's impact on public discourse. These ethical challenges are not unique to Somalia. Studies in other parts of the Horn of Africa have documented similar issues. In South Sudan, for example, media practitioners face intense political pressure and censorship, which hampers their ability to report objectively and ethically (Deng, 2018). These regional parallels underscore the need for targeted interventions, including the development of comprehensive training programs and the establishment of clear editorial guidelines, to enhance the ethical standards and practices of media practitioners in conflict-affected areas like Somalia.

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant challenges faced by the Somali media in fulfilling its potential role in peacebuilding and reconciliation. The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms, including the development of robust media policies, enhanced training for journalists, and measures to safeguard media independence. Addressing these challenges is crucial for transforming the Somali media into a more effective tool for promoting peace and unity in the region.

4.0 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights into the role of media in peacebuilding in Somalia, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as respondents may present themselves in a more favorable light. Additionally, the challenging security environment in Somalia limited the scope of data collection, particularly in conflict-affected regions where access was restricted.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities for media in peacebuilding, providing a foundation for further research and action in this critical area.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that enhancing the media's impact on peacebuilding in Somalia requires addressing these external challenges. This includes implementing safer working conditions, offering training on impartial reporting, and fostering transparency to build public trust. By aligning the quantitative and qualitative findings, the study offers a cohesive understanding of the current limitations and potential pathways for improving the media's role in peacebuilding efforts.



6.0 Recommendations.

The following recommendations are advanced for consideration under this study:

1. Media Practitioners:

- **Training on Conflict-Sensitive Reporting:** Journalists in Somalia often lack the training necessary to report on conflicts in a manner that is both sensitive and balanced. Many inadvertently publish content that inflames tensions rather than diffuses them. To address this, media practitioners must be provided with comprehensive training in conflict-sensitive journalism. This includes understanding the power of language, the ethical implications of reporting during times of crisis, and the importance of providing balanced perspectives.
- **Source Verification Protocols:** One of the critical findings is that many journalists fail to verify their sources adequately, leading to misinformation that can escalate conflicts. Journalists need clear protocols on how to verify information from multiple reliable sources to ensure that their reporting is factual, balanced, and not manipulated by interested parties.
- **Constructive Journalism:** Media practitioners should be encouraged to shift focus from sensational stories to those that build understanding and promote peace. By highlighting peacebuilding efforts, exposing the causes of conflict with accuracy, and promoting reconciliation narratives, journalists can contribute to societal cohesion.

2. Media Institutions (Universities and Training Centers):

- **Specialized Curriculum:** Academic institutions that train journalists should introduce courses on peace journalism, focusing on the ethical and practical challenges of reporting in conflict zones. This curriculum should also address the local context, ensuring that students understand the dynamics of clan conflicts and political divisions that influence Somali society.
- **Hands-on Training:** Practical skills are critical in preparing future journalists. Media institutions should provide opportunities for students to engage in internships, simulations, and case study analysis that equip them with the skills needed to report responsibly in conflict situations.
- **Collaboration with Media Houses:** By partnering with media organizations, universities can help bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world practice. Students could benefit from mentorship programs where experienced journalists guide them on ethical reporting and peace journalism.



3. **Media Regulators (Councils, Associations, and Press Watchdogs):**

- **Development of Media Policies:** The study highlights the absence of clear editorial policies guiding conflict-sensitive reporting. Media councils and associations should collaborate to create and enforce these policies across all media platforms, ensuring that journalists follow strict ethical standards when reporting on conflict and peacebuilding initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** Media regulators must actively monitor how media outlets handle conflict reporting. Any violations of ethical standards, such as the publication of inflammatory or unverified content, should be met with penalties. This will ensure that media houses prioritize responsible reporting over sensationalism. However, the laws or policies should not violate media freedom neither hinder free speech.
- **Support for Media Independence:** Political interference in the media is a major obstacle to peacebuilding. Regulatory bodies should work to ensure that media outlets remain independent, free from political and clan influences. Protecting journalists from external pressure will allow them to report impartially, focusing on stories that promote peace rather than conflict.

4. **Lawmakers (Governments and National Assemblies):**

- **Legislation for Journalist Protection:** Somalia is a dangerous environment for journalists, with many facing threats, violence, and censorship. Laws that protect journalists and ensure their safety while covering conflict zones are crucial. These laws should hold those who target journalists accountable and provide legal avenues for journalists to report freely and without fear.
- **Funding Public Service Media:** To reduce the financial pressures that drive sensationalist reporting, governments should provide funding to public media outlets. This funding can help media organizations focus on stories that promote societal cohesion rather than those designed to attract viewers through shock value.
- **National Media Policies:** Lawmakers should develop comprehensive national policies that define the media's role in peacebuilding and hold media outlets accountable for the content they publish. This could include guidelines for conflict reporting, the promotion of reconciliation stories, and ensuring that media outlets serve the public good rather than private or political interests.

References

- BBC Media Action. (2017). Strengthening peacebuilding and stability in conflict-affected areas: A focus on media's role. BBC Media Action Reports. <https://bbcmediaaction.org>
- Bradbury, M. (2008). *Becoming Somaliland*. Indiana University Press.
- Brahimi, L., & Dobbins, J. (2007). *After the war: Nation-building from FDR to George W. Bush*. RAND Corporation.
- Bratic, V. (2008). Examining peace-oriented media in conflict areas: Lessons from radio in the peace process in Sierra Leone. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 4(2), 17–31.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Deng, F. M. (2015). *South Sudan: A nation in conflict*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://cfr.org>
- Elmi, A. A. (2010). *Understanding the Somalia conflagration: Identity, political Islam, and peacebuilding*. Pluto Press.
- Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Galtung, J. (2002). *Peace journalism: What, why, who, how, when, where?* TRANSCEND.
- Gathara, P. (2018). How Kenya's media fueled and failed the 2007 election violence. *The Guardian*. <https://theguardian.com>
- Harper, M. (2012). *Getting Somalia wrong? Faith, war and hope in a shattered state*. Zed Books.
- Howard, R. (2011). *Conflict-sensitive reporting: State of the art; A course for journalists and journalism educators*. UNESCO. <https://unesco.org>
- Howard, R. (2013). *Conflict sensitive reporting: State of the art; A course for journalists and journalism educators*. UNESCO.
- Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2020). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(2), 112–133.
- Jok, J. M. (2016). *South Sudan: Understanding the conflict 2013–2016*. Institute of Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lewis, I. M. (2008). *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, history, society*. Hurst & Co.



- Lugalambi, G., Mbazira, C., & Kayoka, L. (2011). Press freedom and media development in Uganda. Reporters Without Borders. <https://rsf.org>
- Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2012). Peace journalism. Hawthorn Press.
- Marchal, R. (2007). Warlordism and terrorism: How to obscure an already confusing crisis? The case of Somalia. *International Affairs*, 83(6), 1091–1106.
- Menkhaus, K. (2010). Stabilization and humanitarian access in a collapsed state: The Somali case. *Disasters*, 34(3), 320–341.
- Muggah, R. (2009). Security and post-conflict reconstruction: Dealing with fighters in the aftermath of war. Routledge.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). The content analysis guidebook (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2000). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93–96.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research & evaluation methods (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Puddephatt, A. (2006). Voices of war: Conflict and the role of the media. International Media Support.
- Sommers, M. (2013). War and urban youth: The global youth studies. The MIT Press.
- Williams, P. D. (2011). Horn of Africa: Webs of conflict and paths to peace. Council on Foreign



PAPER III

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LAASCAANOD REVOLUTION

Author:

Abdirahman Isse



Abstract

This article examines the pivotal role of social media in shaping and sustaining the Laascaanood Revolution, a major uprising by the Dhulbahante clan against the Somaliland administration, which unfolded between 27 December 2022 and 25 August 2023. Drawing on qualitative data collected through nine semi-structured interviews with youth activists—conducted in person and by telephone in May 2024, the study captures firsthand accounts of the revolution’s evolution. It explores how digital platforms transformed spontaneous protests into a structured movement widely referred to as the “Blue Revolution.” The findings reveal that social media served not only as a vital tool for communication and real-time coordination among protestors but also played a transformative role in cultivating collective identity, amplifying historical grievances, and reshaping traditional power dynamics. Through the strategic use of digital platforms, activists disseminated mobilization messages, countered state narratives, and galvanized diaspora support. This paper also examines the emergence of decentralized leadership, the significance of cultural and historical narratives in digital mobilization, and the interplay between online activism and on-the-ground action. By situating the Laascaanood case within broader debates on digital resistance, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of social media, identity politics, and grassroots movements in contested political spaces. It offers insights relevant to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the digital dimensions of contemporary revolutionary movements.

Keywords: Social Media, Revolution, Social Movements, Laascaanood, Somalia

On December 26, 2022, Abdifitah Abdullahi Abdi - widely known as Hadraawi Sangub, a prominent member of Somaliland's Waddani Party in the Sool region, was assassinated in Laascaanood.² This tragic event marked the latest in a series of targeted killings that began in 2009, following Somaliland's takeover of the town from Puntland (Markus, 2015). In the immediate aftermath of his burial, youth-led protests erupted across the city, expressing outrage over the escalating violence and demanding accountability from the Somaliland authorities. These spontaneous gatherings reflected deep-seated public disillusionment and a loss of trust in the state's ability to provide security.

Within just two days, the protests transformed from loosely organized demonstrations into a cohesive movement. This transition was catalyzed by tech-savvy youth activists based outside Laascaanood, who provided leadership and digital coordination. The movement, later dubbed the "Blue Revolution," quickly adopted powerful symbolism by raising the Somali national flag in public squares, signaling a call for unity and rejection of Somaliland's rule. Unlike earlier protests that dissipated due to a lack of leadership, this uprising was systematically coordinated. Each neighborhood was assigned a leader responsible for organizing activities through WhatsApp groups, enabling real-time communication and strategic decision-making.³

Digital platforms—particularly WhatsApp—played a pivotal role in maintaining the momentum of the protests. Diaspora communities supplemented these efforts by providing financial support, further solidifying the infrastructure for sustained resistance.⁴ The role of decentralized leadership, facilitated by digital communication, aligns with broader scholarship highlighting how social media enables the organization of protest movements in the absence of formal hierarchies (Poell et al., 2015; Li et al., 2022). Notably, the foundations of the revolution were laid before the protests began, as closed WhatsApp groups served as forums where like-minded youth discussed aspirations for autonomy and strategized around resistance.⁵



Once the protests commenced, these digital spaces became central hubs for scheduling demonstrations, sharing multimedia content, and rapidly mobilizing support. The visibility and scale of the protests drew a heavy-handed response from Somaliland security forces, resulting in the deaths of at least 20 protesters and injuries to over 30.6 Yet, rather than deterring further action, this repression galvanized the youth. As one protester, Abdishakuur Ahmed Salad, poignantly declared on 27 December 2022, “Better to die with dignity than to live with humiliation and indignity.”⁷ Tragically, Abdirashid was killed the following day, further fueling the youth's resolve to protest against the oppressive regime.

As images and videos of state violence circulated widely on social media, national and diaspora audiences were drawn into the unfolding events. In an effort to stifle digital coordination, Somaliland authorities shut down internet access on 1 January 2023, echoing tactics used by authoritarian regimes worldwide to suppress dissent (Al-Saqaf, 2016).⁸ This crackdown did not halt the revolution; instead, youth activists adapted by switching to SMS and traveling to nearby towns to access mobile networks and share updates. Despite arrests and intimidation, the protest infrastructure remained active, albeit with reduced intensity.⁹

The revolution's dynamics shifted dramatically following the killing of a civilian named Mohamoud Ali Saadle. His clansmen retaliated against Somaliland forces, leading to armed conflict. Ultimately, Somaliland was compelled to withdraw from the city after incurring significant casualties, an attempt to appease the aggrieved populace.¹⁰

Throughout the escalation, from December to January, social media functioned as a lifeline for the movement. It facilitated not only tactical coordination but also the cultivation of collective identity, narrative control, and emotional solidarity. The Laascaanood Revolution illustrates how digital tools can be repurposed in conflict contexts to empower marginalized voices, resist state repression, and reshape the political landscape.



2.0 Conscience Raising and Collective Identity Formation

Social media has assumed a significant role in raising political awareness and cultivating a collective consciousness among the Dhulbahante youth. Through digital platforms, these youth have engaged in vibrant discussions about their historical legacy, particularly the Daraawiish movement and their ancestors' anti-colonial struggle against British imperialism.¹¹ This history, deeply rooted in resistance, has become a central reference point for the clan's political awakening and mobilization (Markus, 2015). As Nicholson (2016) notes, historical narratives are not merely reflections of the past; they actively shape collective identity and inform strategic visions for future political action.

Literature has also played a pivotal role in raising awareness and mobilizing the Dhulbahante youth. The community possesses a profound literary tradition that serves as a repository of its historical experiences. Parents and community members pass down the poetry of heroism to the younger generation, recounting the triumphs of their ancestors against their adversaries. These poetic expressions serve as powerful tools for mobilizing youth and are frequently shared on social media platforms.¹² Additionally, songs by artists like Saado Ali have played a significant role in raising awareness and inciting action, with soldiers even utilizing them during times of war, further amplifying their impact through social media channels.¹³

Historically, the Dhulbahante clan had experienced internal fragmentation along sub-clan and administrative lines, particularly following the emergence of Somaliland and Puntland administrations. These political divisions fostered a sense of mistrust and intensified inter-clan rivalries. Many alleged that the Somaliland administration had played an active role in exacerbating such divisions by supplying arms to opposing clans, thereby deflecting attention from its own role in the governance crisis.¹⁴

Despite multiple attempts by Khatumo State administrations to unify the clan, their efforts were largely unsuccessful due to deep-seated mistrust. Some Khatumo leaders ultimately defected to either Puntland or Somaliland, weakening the legitimacy of collective resistance. However, the emergence of social media created a new opportunity for grassroots unification. As Suhaini et al. (2022) argue, digital platforms foster cohesion by enabling collective action and virtual community-building, while Khairina and Triastuti (2021) highlight their potential in trust-building and facilitating social movements. In this context, social media became a critical tool for dismantling divisions and forging unity among the Dhulbahante.¹⁵ The heightened awareness catalyzed by social media exposed collaborators with the Somaliland administration, leading to public shaming and widespread rejection of any perceived betrayal. The fear of social media backlash deterred public opposition to the revolution, thereby solidifying a collective stance against Somaliland's rule.



Through platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, Dhulbahante youth critiqued Somaliland's 16-year rule over their region, exposing the strategies of "divide and rule" employed to suppress dissent. Drawing inspiration from their forefathers' defiance of colonial rule, they questioned the irony of having resisted British imperialism while failing to challenge another Somali clan perceived as less dominant in historical warfare.¹⁶ This generational consciousness was shaped by personal experience. Many of these youth had grown up under Somaliland's control in Laascaanood, experiencing firsthand the limitations on freedom and representation. They felt excluded from the national narrative of Somaliland, which centered on Isaaq clan identity and the Somali National Movement (SNM). In contrast, their own history and heroes were largely marginalized.¹⁷

The formation of the Republic of Somaliland was declared during the Burco conference in 1991, following the fall of the military dictatorship in Mogadishu. While some Dhulbahante and Warsangeli elders were present, they later cited the anti-Darood sentiment, armed Isaaq civilians, and the intimidating presence of SNM members as key factors that suppressed dissenting voices (Markus, 2015). This historical episode contributed to the perception of forced inclusion within the Somaliland project.

Before the outbreak of conflict, digital platforms—particularly Facebook—had already become arenas of ideological contestation between Dhulbahante and Isaaq youth. Social media enabled both sides to articulate competing historical narratives: Isaaq youth portrayed the Daraawiish as religious extremists akin to Al-Shabaab. In contrast, Dhulbahante youth accused the Isaaq of colonial collaboration and complicity in historical atrocities against their people. These disputes extended into claims over land ownership and legitimacy, with Dhulbahante rejecting colonial-era boundaries that now underpin Somaliland's territorial claims. In turn, Isaaq youth dismissed these grievances and provocatively suggested that the Dhulbahante relocate to Garowe, further inflaming tensions.¹⁸

Digital platforms, as Halverson et al. (2013) argue, allow marginalized communities to challenge dominant historical narratives and disseminate alternative perspectives. In this context, Dhulbahante youth used social media to articulate their collective humiliation under occupation, criticize the older generation's inaction, and assert their agency in shaping their political destiny.¹⁹



In the broader context of clan-based politics in Somalia, the establishment of federal member states has also contributed to raising awareness among the Dhulbahante youth. They observe their peers celebrating the founding dates of their respective clan administrations and organizing ceremonies worldwide with great enthusiasm on social media. In contrast, the Dhulbahante, who lack their own administration, experience a sense of envy and question why their region remains under Somaliland's occupation, feeling let down by the older generation. Mocked by their peers on social media for not having their own state and being under the control of the Isaaq clan, the Dhulbahante youth are fueled by bitterness and anger, propelling them towards the pursuit of territorial liberation and the establishment of their own administration. 20

The defunct Khatumo State has had a profound impact on the younger generation by creating distinctive symbols, including the flag, which have come to represent their collective identity. It is important to note that the region was under the rule of Somaliland but is also claimed by Puntland. However, the majority of Dhulbahante people did not identify with either administration and instead referred to themselves as part of the "Khatumo Administration" when asked about their identity. 21 The youth display the flag on social media to assert their unique identity. Symbols such as flags hold great importance in shaping and expressing identities on social media platforms. Flags serve as more than just visual representations; they bear profound cultural and social significance, making them crucial elements in understanding national identity and group association (Brown et al., 2012).

3.0 Mobilization for War

The outbreak of full-scale armed conflict in Laascaanood began unexpectedly on the morning of February 6, 2023, a day scheduled initially for Dhulbahante clan elders to issue a self-determination declaration.²² This event marked the beginning of a seven-month war between the Dhulbahante community and Somaliland forces. Even in the midst of the conflict, social media continued to play a crucial role in both military mobilization and propaganda dissemination. As observed globally, digital platforms have become instrumental in organizing, coordinating, and influencing public opinion during wartime (Zeitsoff, 2017).



In the immediate aftermath of the conflict's eruption, Dhulbahante sub-clans quickly mobilized to recruit fighters and secure weapons. Youth activists utilized social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, to coordinate efforts across clan lines and international borders. Diaspora networks were tapped to galvanize support, raising funds and calling on able-bodied individuals to join the resistance. The unity demonstrated by the Dhulbahante sub-clans during this period was unprecedented in the community's history. 23

Initially, their Harti kin, specifically the Majeerteen and Warsangali clans, remained hesitant, recalling previous short-lived clashes involving the Dhulbahante. However, after 20 consecutive days of intense fighting and strategic victories, including the expulsion of Mahad Canbaashe, a senior Somaliland military commander from the Jaamac Siyaad sub-clan, sentiments began to shift. 24 Frustrated by the lack of support, Dhulbahante youth publicly expressed their dismay on social media, warning that history would judge those who remained silent. These emotional appeals, amplified across digital platforms, eventually resonated. Reinforcements arrived, including significant contributions from the Omar Maxamuud sub-clan of the Majeerteen. Their involvement triggered a tactical withdrawal by Somaliland forces, who retreated approximately 50 kilometers to avoid encirclement. 25

Digital influencers played an outsized role in this mobilization effort (Stojar, 2019). One notable figure was Kabtan Ayuub, a YouTuber based in Germany, who leveraged satire and ridicule to provoke the Majeerteen into joining the conflict. 26 By targeting specific sub-clans, especially the Maxamuud Saleeban, and questioning their honour, he effectively stirred clan pride and compelled them to take action. This form of emotional mobilization, rooted in traditional concepts of honour and duty, proved remarkably effective. Upon arrival in Laascaanood, newly recruited fighters were ceremoniously welcomed by traditional leaders (Garaads), who publicly acknowledged their sacrifice. These ceremonies were livestreamed or recorded and widely shared on social media, boosting morale and strengthening the perception of unity among the Harti clans.



Social media also played a critical role in emotional mobilization by exposing the atrocities committed by Somaliland in response to the protests and throughout the conflict. Activists on social media provided daily updates on the ground, initially focusing on the Somaliland suppression of protests, documenting killings and injuries. Social media served as a bridge between those inside the city and those outside, facilitating the emotional mobilization of segments of society that had previously been politically apathetic.²⁷ Castells (2012) shows how IT plays an essential role in orchestrating a mediated emotional response to political events, leading to the rapid formation of social movements. Moreover, social media platforms were instrumental in sharing the daily bombardment of hospitals and residential homes, providing evidence of the atrocities committed by Somaliland. These posts were tagged to foreign embassies in the country, raising awareness of the situation on the ground and the heinous acts perpetrated by Somaliland forces. The use of GPS coordinates authenticated the locations where bombs were dropped, with images of bomb remains being widely shared. ²⁸

Somaliland forces also documented their military actions, but these backfired. Footage showing bombings accompanied by genocidal rhetoric went viral, eliciting outrage both within and beyond Somalia.²⁹ The moral authority that Somaliland had long claimed—partly due to its history of suffering under the Barre regime—was undermined. For many Somalis, the image of Somaliland as a democratic and peaceful entity was irreparably damaged. This shift in perception marked a significant diplomatic failure for Somaliland. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued multiple statements, but these failed to resonate internationally. By contrast, the Dhulbahante narrative—strategically crafted and consistently disseminated on social media—portrayed their community as victims of ethnic cleansing and human rights violations.

This messaging gained traction with international organizations. The Director-General of the World Health Organization publicly condemned the shelling of hospitals, and multiple human rights organizations released reports detailing the scale of atrocities committed by Somaliland forces. These developments culminated in discussions at the United Nations Security Council, where urgent calls were made for a ceasefire and for the withdrawal of Somaliland troops from Laascaanood.³⁰



Dhulbahante youth utilized social media to propagate a compelling narrative that framed the conflict as a response to long-standing marginalization by the Isaaq-dominated Somaliland administration.³¹ A key element of this narrative was the claim that Somaliland had imposed an informal economic embargo on the SSC (Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn) regions, restricting the operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development actors. Allegations included the prohibition of NGO overnight stays in Laascaanood and the redirection of their operations to Aynabo, a town primarily inhabited by the Isaaq. These restrictions, according to Dhulbahante voices, were part of a broader strategy to dissuade diaspora investors and humanitarian agencies from engaging in the region.

The Dhulbahante clan contended that international assistance intended for their region had been diverted to other areas, resulting in economic and developmental stagnation.³² Central to these grievances was a widely circulated document allegedly authored by the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1991. The letter purportedly outlined a strategy to suppress non-Isaaq clans, limit their access to state power, curtail economic development, and facilitate the eventual demographic domination of their lands by resettled Isaaq populations.³³

These perceived injustices galvanized the Dhulbahante community, who invoked their Harti identity as a mobilizing tool across Somalia and the diaspora. Social media platforms served as critical vehicles for transmitting their narrative to global Harti audiences. Although this collective identity had been weakened in recent decades due to political fragmentation, the escalation of conflict created renewed momentum for Harti solidarity. Nonetheless, the Dhulbahante initially viewed this unity with skepticism, particularly regarding the Majeerteen, whom they accused of leveraging “Hartinimo” opportunistically for political gain.³⁴

Historical grievances shaped these perceptions. During the formation of Puntland in 1998, Harti unity had been prominent. However, the subsequent occupation of Laascaanood by Somaliland forces eroded this solidarity. The Dhulbahante accused the Majeerteen of failing to defend the city and later undermining efforts by the Dhulbahante to establish their own administration. Markus (2013) notes that this perception was rooted in concerns that the Majeerteen feared losing political dominance within Somalia’s federal framework.



Recognizing the limitations of combating alone, the Dhulbahante youth on social media realized the imperative of garnering support from their fellow clans. They diligently worked to foster a sense of unity and solidarity among the Harti community, which had long been deemed a lost cause for over a decade.³⁵ The initial consensus reached between the Dhulbahante clan and Puntland was to frame the conflict as a war between Dhulbahante and Somaliland, thereby asserting ownership of their destiny. This framing allowed Puntland to publicly distance itself from direct involvement, while still providing logistical support and affirming the SSC-Khatumo group's right to self-determination under Puntland's constitution. The Dhulbahante thus gained a measure of operational autonomy while receiving practical and symbolic backing from Puntland. The success of this approach empowered the Dhulbahante to pursue the establishment of their own regional administration without being subsumed under Puntland authority.³⁶ The Dhulbahante also received emotional and financial support from the Darood clan members who were not directly involved in the conflict. They expressed solidarity with their Dhulbahante brethren and contributed financially to the war efforts. The Harti diaspora also played a significant role by uniting and organizing fundraising activities, which were made possible through the mobilization of social media platforms.³⁷

To garner further support, the Dhulbahante employed the Somali unity card as a mobilization strategy. They argued that their fight was for the preservation of Somali unity, highlighting Somaliland's alleged intentions to divide the nation. However, the material support they received from other Somalis who espoused the idea of Somali unity was limited. The Somali government, which the Dhulbahante hoped to align with, advocated for mediation and an end to the hostilities. This stance was disconcerting for the Dhulbahante, as they felt that they were shouldering the responsibility of defending Somali unity while the government appeared indifferent. Somaliland, on the other hand, asserted its sovereignty and claimed that Laascaanood was an integral part of its territory.³⁸ In contrast, the mobilization efforts of Somaliland were inconsistent. Initially, they portrayed their fight as aimed at combating terrorist groups. Somaliland accused Al-Shabaab of being behind the targeted killings in Laascaanood. The Dhulbahante countered these claims, alleging that Somaliland itself was responsible for the assassinations, driven by clan vendettas. They further accused Somaliland of being involved in the founding of Al-Shabaab, with its founders originating from the Isaaq tribe. (Abdifitah, 2023)

In contrast, the mobilization efforts of Somaliland were inconsistent. Initially, they portrayed their fight as aimed at combating terrorist groups. Somaliland accused Al-Shabaab of being behind the targeted killings in Laascaanood. The Dhulbahante countered these claims, alleging that Somaliland itself was responsible for the assassinations, driven by clan vendettas. They further accused Somaliland of being involved in the founding of Al-Shabaab, with its founders originating from the Isaaq tribe. (Abdifitah, 2023)



Somaliland's diplomatic strategy included appeals to the Ethiopian government, recalling Ethiopia's intervention in 2007 to prevent Laascaanood from becoming a safe haven for the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Although a delegation from Ethiopia visited Garowe to mediate, the Dhulbahante leadership remained firm in their demands: full withdrawal of Somaliland troops to Oog and recognition of Dhulbahante self-determination. 39 Somaliland's attempt to use the terrorism card did not yield the desired results, as the Dhulbahante successfully demonstrated to the world that the conflict was primarily between them and Somaliland. To bolster this narrative, Somaliland sponsored media campaigns and invited Hawiye delegations to Hargeisa. However, these efforts had a limited impact. While the Hawiye delegation expressed symbolic support, it was widely perceived as a political maneuver lacking genuine grassroots mobilization. The pan-Irir narrative failed to resonate, as historical and political relationships between the Hawiye and Isaaq have long been shaped more by expedient alliances than by deep-seated identity bonds. 40

3.1 Propaganda and Narrative Construction in the War Context

Following the outbreak of full-scale war on 6 February 2023, social media emerged as a crucial tool for psychological operations and propaganda. The strategic use of social media as a psychological warfare and propaganda tool in periods of conflict and insurgency has been extensively documented (Nyiam, 2021). This has led to a fundamental shift in the dynamics among nations, media organizations, and the public in the dissemination of war-related information (Mejías & Vokuev, 2017). Research indicates that social media exerts considerable influence in shaping public opinion during conflicts, blurring the lines between transparency and propaganda (Heemsbergen & Lindgren, 2014).

The Dhulbahante outmaneuvered Somaliland in the digital arena by adopting a proactive, strategic communication approach, in contrast to Somaliland's reactive and conventional media strategy. While Somaliland relied on traditional media outlets and delayed press releases, Dhulbahante youth flooded social media platforms with real-time updates, images, and emotive storytelling. This strategy allowed the Dhulbahante to win the narrative war long before the military victory on August 25, 2023. 41 As Zhang (2018) observes, the side that controls the narrative often influences how the conflict is perceived globally, sometimes even shaping policy and humanitarian responses.



Dhulbahante supporters leveraged trolling and misinformation tactics to sustain morale and sow confusion among Somaliland troops. Images of seized military hardware were circulated falsely, alongside fabricated reports of injuries to senior Somaliland commanders, including Faisal Abdi Bootaan, who later recorded a rebuttal video to disprove the claims. They also publicized alleged defections within the Somaliland ranks, suggesting that Dhulbahante forces were granting safe passage to defectors and exaggerating desertion rates among Somaliland soldiers. These tactics served both psychological and strategic purposes, aiming to demoralize opponents and attract recruits⁴². Beyond simple disinformation, Dhulbahante digital actors employed deliberate strategies of division. They claimed to have internal intelligence from within Somaliland ranks, thereby fostering distrust and paranoia among troops. Such psychological tactics are consistent with broader patterns in digital propaganda, where false insider knowledge is used to erode organizational cohesion (Bail et al., 2019; Saeed et al., 2022).

Additionally, Dhulbahante communicators weaponized clan dynamics, suggesting that their conflict was not with all of Somaliland, but specifically with the Habr Jeclo sub-clan. By distancing the Garxajis from the fighting, they sought to fragment Somaliland's forces internally. This divide-and-rule tactic exploited historical fault lines and sought to weaken the enemy's collective resolve.

A major liability for Somaliland troops was the inconsistency in official messaging. At various times, they were told they were fighting terrorists, Puntland forces, regional militias (Huwan), or Ethiopian Liyuu Police. This shifting rhetoric blurred the identity of the enemy, contributing to moral uncertainty and disorientation among soldiers. Moreover, presenting the opposition as a fragmented amalgam of adversaries, rather than a singular, clear threat, created the impression of an unwinnable war.⁴³



In contrast, Dhulbahante forces framed their struggle in stark, clan-defensive terms. Their messaging emphasized defending ancestral lands from occupation, which provided a deeply emotive and purpose-driven narrative. The conflict was not framed as an abstract national defense, but as an existential struggle. Their troops, referred to as Qalas (warriors), embraced slogans like “either victory or death,” a form of identity-driven militarism absent on the Somaliland side. 44

The Dhulbahante leveraged real-time battlefield content, posting videos and live updates to showcase territorial gains and portray Somaliland forces as retreating and disoriented. These posts often exaggerated casualties on the Somaliland side while minimizing their own losses, a common feature of wartime propaganda. The arrival of reinforcements from allied Harti sub-clans, including Warsangali and Majeerteen, was heavily broadcast on social media. The staggered arrival of each Majeerteen sub-clan over a period of weeks gave the impression of a growing and unstoppable force, further amplifying morale among Dhulbahante supporters and heightening anxiety among Somaliland troops.. 45

3.2 Impact on Power Dynamics

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool in contemporary political landscapes, providing citizens, particularly youth, with unprecedented access to spaces for political discourse, resistance, and engagement (Kreiss, 2015; Yasir et al., 2022). Social media has the capacity to influence political participation by providing citizens with opportunities to express resistance against dominant powers and practices (Yasir et al., 2022). The use of social media has transformed political power dynamics by providing platforms for political expression, mobilization, and engagement for Dhulbahante youth. This has significantly impacted political discourse and participation, empowering youth to organize protests, shape public opinion, and hold traditional power holders accountable. When protesters were shot and killed by Somaliland troops, the youth pressured traditional elder Garaad Jaamac Garaad Ismail of Sool to speak out. Garaad condemned the killings and called for Somaliland to withdraw from the region. His speech, being pro-Somaliland, was unprecedented and a game-changer. This marked the first success of youth activism on social media and gave them the confidence to hold their traditional elders accountable throughout the revolution. Garaad's unexpected stance shocked Somaliland, leading many to believe that his speech was insincere, but he likely feared losing legitimacy if he didn't support his people. 46 After Somaliland withdrew from the city, the youth organized meetings with various segments of the society. On 6 January, a 33-member committee was established.



Garaad Jaamac Garaad Ismail gave his support to the committee and urged them to propose a solution that aligns with the aspirations of the people. The committees engaged in consultations with different segments of the population. Under pressure from the youth, they issued a clear statement demanding the withdrawal of Somaliland forces from their territory and calling for a self-determination conference to be held in Laascaanood.⁴⁷

The youth forced the traditional elders to convene a meeting in Laascaandood. Most elders were reluctant to come to the city because Somaliland was still administering it. Garaad Jaamac Garaad Ali, the Supreme Garaad of Dhulbahante, initially refused to attend. However, the youth launched a large-scale social media campaign, mockingly calling him "Garaad Youtuber" because of his alleged focus on posting YouTube videos. Eventually, he agreed to attend and received a warm welcome upon his return. He had been in self-imposed exile since 2007, when Somaliland forces took over the city. He vowed to wage endless war unless Somaliland withdrew its troops from its land.⁴⁸ The youth continued to pressure the elders via social media, urging them to state self-determination, demanding withdrawal of Somaliland from their territories, and the establishment of their own administration. The youth's influence through social media has become a force to be reckoned with. The youth have had an impact on the decision-making process of the elders throughout the different phases of the revolution. Although the elders have traditionally held sway in political decisions as respected figures of the Dhulbahante community, their authority has constantly been challenged by the youth on social media, leading to scrutiny of their decisions.⁴⁹

The youth dominated the political discourse by taking the driver's seat. They demanded that all those working for the Somaliland administration resign. A number of youths in Laascaanod who hold positions resigned from their posts and advised other to follow their steps. They decried those who worked for the Somaliland administration as "Horgal," and they asked their clans to denounce them. Their pictures were posted on Facebook to be recognized, along with a detailed description of what they were doing. Then their clans spoke out and vowed that they wouldn't be their sons if they didn't side with their people. They had only two options: flee the city or side with their people.



The telephone numbers of those who hold high-level positions were shared so the people can call and advise them to resign. Abdirizak Khalif, who was the chairman of the Somaliland Parliament and the highest-ranking Dhulbahante in Hargeisa, supported his people's sentiments for self-determination but did not resign immediately. Instead, he used his position to raise awareness about the atrocities committed by Somaliland and informed the world about the situation. Due to his role as a speaker in the Somaliland Parliament, his words carried significant weight and contradicted the official position of Hargeisa regarding the conflict.⁵⁰

While Somaliland relied heavily on traditional, state-owned media outlets, such as Radio Hargeisa and Somaliland National Television, to propagate government narratives, their effectiveness was undermined by the decentralized and rapid communication model of social media. As noted by Stremlau (2013), the absence of independent radio created a vacuum that social media platforms filled. These platforms enabled marginalized voices to bypass censorship, challenge official narratives, and foster a more pluralistic media environment (Johnson, 2017; Ren, 2019). The elder generation of SNM-aligned political actors underestimated the strategic importance of digital platforms in wartime propaganda and political communication. In contrast, SSC leadership, composed mainly of tech-savvy youth, demonstrated strategic communication proficiency, allowing them to dominate the information space and influence both internal and external perceptions of the conflict.⁵¹

Increased exposure and public scrutiny have influenced social media's impact on political operations and the decision-making processes of party-state elites (Bui, 2016). Social Media has been very useful in making the very demands of the youth a political reality. Traditional elders were supposed to establish an interim administration to lead the SSC Khatumo region. However, the elders delayed the formation of the administration for several months. The youth took to social media to criticize the elders for their mismanagement of the struggle and the delay in achieving liberation. The youth drafted a petition, which 177 youth leaders of the revolution signed. Through pressure on social media, the elders eventually formed the interim administration.⁵²



The SSC citizens aspired to have their own administration under the federal government. While the Dhulbahante had representatives in Puntland, they were not treated the same way as those representing in Somaliland, as Puntland supported their struggle. There were 17 MPs from the Dhulbahante in Puntland. With the looming election, there was a discussion about whether or not the elders should nominate 17 MPS. Some believed in nominating until the Harti meeting was convened two years later to separate the two administrations. The majority opinion was that there were no elders to nominate MPs for Puntland, as they had formed their own administration. The youth issued a stern warning to the traditional elders, urging them not to repeat the mistakes of the past and to respect the demands of the citizens. The traditional elders were unable to decide for several weeks, as some of them were not in Laascaanood. Finally, due to pressure from the youth on social media, the elders came together to clarify their position regarding the nomination of the MPs. There were rumors that they would nominate, but the youth with guns went to the elders' house and warned them against making that decision. Eventually, the elders issued a statement saying they would not nominate MPs for Puntland, stating that they respected the wishes of their people. Garaad Abdullahi Garaad Saleeban mentioned that the elders had been coerced into making the statement under duress by the youth who had held guns to their heads.⁵³

The youth have low confidence in the administration and the elders. They believe the politicians and elders can't be fully trusted with their destiny as some have collaborated with Somaliland in the past and were on their payroll. As a result, they have taken on the role of watchdogs to monitor the actions of the government and the elders closely. They want to be actively involved in the decision-making process. The government is under pressure to work in line with the wishes of the people. They have to keep the public informed about their activities. When they face criticism from the citizens, they have to respond to their concerns. Social media has become a powerful tool for holding the government accountable.⁵⁴

The youth's distrust of traditional power holders, whom they believed had previously collaborated with Somaliland, drove them to assume the role of political watchdogs. Through sustained online engagement, they pressured the newly formed administration to be transparent, responsive, and accountable. Citizens began to demand updates, policy clarity, and administrative action via social media. In line with Taufiq et al. (2019), social media amplified political engagement, inspiring both online and offline participation. As a result of public pressure, the administration initiated tax collection and began providing essential public services. Social media thus evolved into a barometer of public sentiment, compelling political actors to act in accordance with the wishes of the population. The power of the platform was vividly demonstrated through the transition from digital protests to armed resistance, underscoring its role in facilitating collective action, narrative shaping, and structural transformation.⁵⁵



4.0 Conclusion

The Laascaanood Revolution offers a compelling case study of how social media can fundamentally reshape the dynamics of political mobilization and social transformation in contemporary conflict contexts. This study demonstrates the capacity of digital platforms, particularly WhatsApp and other social media networks, to redefine traditional activism, enhance communication infrastructures, and empower marginalized actors to articulate collective demands and challenge entrenched authorities.

Redefining Activism and Leadership Through Digital Platforms: Social media served as more than just a tool for communication; it became the organizational backbone of the revolution. The Dhulbahante youth leveraged these platforms to coordinate actions, share real-time intelligence, and formulate collective strategies, bypassing conventional hierarchies and bureaucracies. In doing so, they cultivated a new form of grassroots digital leadership, characterized by decentralization, inclusivity, and responsiveness to emerging challenges on the ground.

Forging Collective Identity and Social Cohesion: Perhaps one of the most transformative aspects of social media was its role in constructing a unified political identity among the Dhulbahante. In a historically fragmented clan structure, social media enabled the formation of virtual communities that overcame intra-clan distrust and fostered unprecedented levels of unity and solidarity. These online interactions became a prelude to offline collective action, enabling the community to rally around shared goals of self-determination and resistance.

Weaponizing the Narrative: Propaganda and Perception: The strategic deployment of social media as a propaganda apparatus allowed the Dhulbahante to shape the dominant narrative of the conflict. By proactively controlling the flow of information and discrediting opposing claims, they undermined the legitimacy of the Somaliland administration in both local and international arenas. This information warfare significantly contributed to their symbolic and psychological victories, culminating in the military retreat of Somaliland forces on August 25, 2023.



Altering Power Structures and Political Accountability: This revolution also marked a significant redistribution of political power. Youth activists, armed with digital tools, were able to influence traditional elders, enforce public accountability, and co-govern the emerging SSC-Khatumo administration. The political discourse shifted from being elder-centric to youth-led, challenging the status quo and redefining the contours of authority and legitimacy in Dhulbahante society.

Global Implications and Future Research Directions: While rooted in the specific socio-political context of Laascaanood, the findings of this study have broader implications for understanding the role of digital platforms in contemporary resistance movements. As social media continues to evolve, its potential to drive political change, particularly among marginalized and stateless populations, warrants further scholarly attention. Future research should explore the sustainability of such digital-led revolutions, their long-term impact on governance, and the potential risks of misinformation, fragmentation, and coercion in decentralized political activism.

References:

- Al-Saqaf, W. (2016). Internet censorship circumvention tools: Escaping the control of the Syrian regime. *Media and Communication*, 4(1), 39–50.
- Bail, C. A., Guay, B., Maloney, E., Combs, A., Hillygus, D. S., Merhout, F., ... & Volfovsky, A. (2019). Assessing the Russian Internet Research Agency's impact on the political attitudes and behaviors of American Twitter users in late 2017. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(1), 243–250.
- Brown, L., Richards, S., & Jones, I. (2012). Sojourner perceptions of the St George cross flag during the FIFA 2010 World Cup: A symbol of carnival or menace? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 49(1), 102–120.
- Bui, T. H. (2016). The influence of social media in Vietnam's elite politics. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35(2), 89–111.
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Halverson, J., Ruston, S., & Trethewey, A. (2013). Mediated martyrs of the Arab Spring: New media, civil religion, and narrative in Tunisia and Egypt. *Journal of Communication*, 63(2), 312–332.
- Hashemi, L. (2020). Media, protest and resistance in authoritarian contexts.
- Heemsbergen, L., & Lindgren, S. (2014). The power of precision air strikes and social media feeds in the 2012 Israel– Hamas conflict: 'Targeting transparency'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(5), 569–591.
- Hoehne, M. V. (2015). Between Somaliland and Puntland: Marginalization, militarization and conflicting political visions (pp. 40–99). Rift Valley Institute.



- Khairina, D., & Triastuti, E. (2021). Trust-building and social support in the online social movement among victims of sexual violence. In *Proceedings of the Asia-Pacific Research in Social Sciences and Humanities Universitas Indonesia Conference (APRISH 2019)*.
- Kreiss, D. (2015). The networked democratic spectator. *Social Media + Society*, 1(1), 205630511557887.
- Li, Q., King, B. A. E., & Uzzi, B. (2022). Quantifying the leadership and social media predictors of violence and racism during the January 6th attack on the Capitol.
- Mejías, U. A., & Vokuev, N. E. (2017). Disinformation and the media: The case of Russia and Ukraine. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(7), 1027–1042.
- Nicholson, C. (2016). The role of historical representations in Israeli–Palestinian relations: Narratives from abroad. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(1), 5–11.
- Nyam, D. (2021). Strategic interest and media: A global perspective. *Predestinasi*, 13(2), 93.
- Panwar, K., & Sihag, V. (2022). Protest movements, social media, and the role of law enforcement. *International Journal of Information Systems and Social Change*, 14(1), 1–13.
- Poell, T., Abdulla, R., Rieder, B., Woltering, R., & Zack, L. (2015). Protest leadership in the age of social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(7), 994–1014.
- Saeed, M. H., Ali, S., Blackburn, J., De Cristofaro, E., Zannettou, S., & Stringhini, G. (2022). TrollMagnifier: Detecting state-sponsored troll accounts on Reddit. In *2022 IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP)* (pp. 2161–2175).
- Stojar, R. (2019). Militarization of information in current conflicts. *International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION*, 25(1), 156–160.
- Stremlau, N. (2013). Hostages of peace: The politics of radio liberalization in Somaliland. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7(2), 239–257.
- Suhaini, N., Aziz, S. F. A., Yusof, F., Arifain, S. M. K., Mustaffa, F., & Saad, M. Z. M. (2022). Perception and impact of social media on unity among minority groups in Melaka. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(12).
- Tahir, A. I. (2023). Understanding Las Anod's conflict: Exclusionary politics, strategic (re)alignment and rupture. *Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR)*.
- Taufiq, A., Alvi, A., & Ittefaq, M. (2019). The use of social media on political participation among university students: An analysis of survey results from rural Pakistan. *SAGE Open*, 9(3), 215824401986448.
- Thomas, J. (2024). Political resistance on social media: An evaluation of figurative language. *Global Political Review*, VII(II), 23–30.
- Zeitsoff, T. (2017). How social media is changing conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(9), 1970–1991.
- Zhang, W. (2018). Analysis of 'proactive discourse' in the construction of local community by the media during the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire in Australia. *Journalism*, 22(6), 1467–1483.



PAPER IV

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN INSTIGATING OR MITIGATING INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN PUNTLAND

Author:

Ahmed Jama Independent Researcher
Garowe – Puntland state – Somalia.



Abstract

This study investigated the role of media in instigating or mitigating inter-community conflicts in fragile contexts, with a specific focus on Puntland state, Somalia. Historically, traditional media such as print and broadcast outlets have played a significant role in either escalating or de-escalating conflicts through their coverage and adherence to journalistic ethics including rules and regulations of mass journalism. However, the rise of social media has created new dynamics, forming virtual societies and digital nations that influence both peacebuilding and conflict enhancement. This research is significant as it explored the impact of media outlets in a region vulnerable to prolonged conflicts, where misinformation, disinformation and lack of critical thinking exacerbate tensions. Therefore, the objectives of this study were: to analyse the impact of media outlets on inter-community conflicts in Puntland; to assess the role of media in peacebuilding efforts and social cohesion; and to evaluate the challenges faced by media outlets in promoting peace in fragile contexts. The methodology used in this study involved a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary documents published by the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC), and the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS). This included examining dialogue platforms like PDRC Talks, the Annual Peace Learning Conference, and dialogue platforms hosted by both PDRC and HIPS, which facilitate knowledge sharing among peace practitioners and community leaders. Additionally, independent publications on the media's role in conflict management and peacebuilding, particularly in Galkayo and Mogadishu, are reviewed. The researcher also analysed Puntland's constitution and media law to understand the regulatory framework governing media practices in Somalia. Finally, the study offered findings, discussions, policy recommendations, and conclusions to the stakeholders on the use of different media outlets for peacebuilding and enhancing regulatory frameworks to ensure the media contributes positively to conflict resolution in Puntland state.

Keywords: Broadcast media, Dialogue platform, Disinformation, Misinformation, Peacebuilding, Print media, Social media.



1.0 Introduction

Media outlets are a part of communication and getting to feed daily news (occurrences) across the world, such as print media (newspapers⁵⁶ and magazines), and broadcast media (Radios⁵⁷ and Televisions). Those mentioned media, including international and local media, focus on peace building by following the code of ethics in journalism under the rules and regulations, such as reliable sources of information and impartiality. Traditional media includes skilled and well-educated prominent persons who are actively encouraging civic engagement and hosting strong roundtable discussions among societies to foster peacebuilding efforts, to prevent hate speech linked to the threat of violence, and propaganda for war. The Media outlet promoted more peace initiatives in Somalia. Social media outlets form citizens' media by creating influencers (YouTubers and Facebookers) who are engaging in peacebuilding, while others are exacerbating conflicts among societies through the Internet. It has also formed elite transformation due to the previous and current media outlets.

Some citizen media platform users have rapidly increased the discriminations, blackmailing prominent persons such; political and famous figures, misinformation, disinformation, fake news, financial fraud scammers (online – scammers), all those are fueling on the conflict's fragile contexts, and it led to social destructive behavior, in regarding to the lack of rules and regulations, and public awareness as well as lack of social responsibility. WhatsApp and TikTok are included.

Regarding the role of media in peace and conflicts in fragile contexts, there are challenges faced to media outlets, such as threats from armed groups, a lack of social responsibility, a lack of law enforcement, a low level of income, a lack of education for social development, competition among influencers based on followers, and freedom of expression. As such, the media fuels Somalia's prolonged conflicts rather than social cohesion and fostering peace. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to focus on regularly reviewing laws and codes of conduct, enhancing public awareness of social media engagement, and facilitating open discussions among elite community leaders, scholars, and senior government officials on the current theme to achieve professional success. Those crucial points will increase social cohesion and peace reconciliations, as well as reduce inter-community conflicts.



Very interestingly, some social media users in advancing positive path, such; social cohesion, promoting peacebuilding initiatives, business, education, making money from online (monetization), creating special social programs improve on mindset (mental attitude) developments including hosting X space debates (previously known as Twitter) and Video Podcasts, as well as low communication costs (conference call video & zoom applications), rather than breaking news. In the Puntland context, the media outlets effectively promote peace. For example, PDRC's social media platforms host forums and talks, along with civic engagement initiatives, to empower peace, democratisation, research skills, and social cohesion. This approach ensures the success of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and helps overcome challenging circumstances.

PDRC launched three main programs for dialogue platforms to provide and share knowledge and various experiences; namely, PDRC Talks and PDRC Annual Peace Learning Conference (APLC), as well as citizen forums among peace practitioners, opinion leaders, activists, and researchers to discuss the ongoing themes, and the publication of research documents.

In March 2019, the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) initiated a monthly event dubbed PDRC – Talks. This event is a new initiative in line with PDRC's strategic plan 2019-2023, to spread ideas, messages, and awareness on issues related to the betterment of Somalia (PDRC , Background to the PDRCTalks, 2019). Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA) focuses on advocacy and peacebuilding efforts, as well as good governance. PUNSAA hosts forums for civic engagement. Additionally, it leads civil society platforms. The involvement of the media in this program promotes social cohesion and public awareness. PUNSAA aims to have a concrete influence in formulating policies that address the needs of all citizens, especially marginalised members of society, including women, minority groups, people with disabilities, and youth (PUNSAA, About PUNSAA , 2008).

PDRC launched three main programs for dialogue platforms to provide and share knowledge and various experiences; namely, PDRC Talks and PDRC Annual Peace Learning Conference (APLC), as well as citizen forums among peace practitioners, opinion leaders, activists, and researchers to discuss the ongoing themes, and the publication of research documents.



In March 2019, the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) initiated a monthly event dubbed PDRC – Talks. This event is a new initiative in line with PDRC’s strategic plan 2019–2023, to spread ideas, messages, and awareness on issues related to the betterment of Somalia (PDRC , Background to the PDRCTalks, 2019). Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA) focuses on advocacy and peacebuilding efforts, as well as good governance. PUNSAA hosts forums for civic engagement. Additionally, it leads civil society platforms. The involvement of the media in this program promotes social cohesion and public awareness. PUNSAA aims to have a concrete influence in formulating policies that address the needs of all citizens, especially marginalised members of society, including women, minority groups, people with disabilities, and youth (PUNSAA, About PUNSAA , 2008).

1.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore, address and highlight the role of the media outlets on peace building initiatives, and contribution of positively to the conflict resolution, particularly in terms of print media, broadcast media, and social media on the intercommunity conflict and building social cohesion, as well as displayed contributions for the purpose of promoting peacebuilding process to evaluate the challenges faced by both traditional media and modern media in promoting peace in fragile contexts.

2.0 Literature Review

The media remain a primary source the public turns to for insight into vital issues affecting their lives. However, communication researchers increasingly stress that established media outlets do not merely provide information; they also shape how people perceive issues. The media have the potential to influence how people act regarding these issues (Milike Yagmur Savrum and Leon Miller, 2015). This research is based on the theoretical framework of Agenda-Setting theory, which suggests the media can shape public opinion by determining which issues receive the most attention. The study also examines the role of media outlets in peacebuilding in Puntland.

Regarding the recent protests in Kenya, Somalia's neighbour, social media became a key tool for organizers both on the streets and online. As one activist noted, “We are realizing that we may not always get coverage in traditional media or may face media blackouts... So many activists are using social media like an independent media outlet – where they can push the conversations and reach more people” (The Guardian, 2022). This demonstrates the media's influence in facilitating peace and mobilizing communities.



In the context of Somalia, the media can play an essential role in the country's transition. As seen in other countries, from Afghanistan to Burundi, the media can be crucial in promoting participation and inclusion among different people and communities, thereby helping to change the narrative around state-building processes like the one unfolding in Somalia. Yet, while support for peacebuilding efforts in Somalia has increased over the last ten years, very little effort has been made to focus on the specific role and capacities of Somali media. Because of this, the media sector itself is still poorly understood (Peace Agency, Somalia Media Hub for Peacebuilding and Human Rights, 2023). Furthermore, Somali media are currently significant contributors to peacebuilding in Somalia through their hard work in promoting social cohesion

Major Associations of Journalists in Somalia:

Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ)	FESOJ is a national union of professional journalists in Somalia based in Mogadishu. It was created in 2002 and it currently has 950 members.
Media Association of Puntland (MAP)	MAP was founded in 2009 to promote press freedom in Puntland. It is an independent, non-profit organization based in Garowe.
National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)	NUSOJ is a national labour union representing over 600 Somali journalists. It was created in 2002 and is based in Mogadishu.
Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA)	SOLJA is a national independent, non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organisation based in Hargeisa. It represents more than 38 media outlets and 800 professionals.

Source: Research Report, ©September 2023, Agency for Peace, Media and Peacebuilding in Somalia.

The challenges facing media outlets in Somalia in previous years included a lack of regulation and accountability, a shortage of training and resources, and restricted freedom of expression. However, these obstacles have now largely been overcome and replaced by well-educated journalists, regulatory frameworks, established procedures, and greater access to training and digital resources. Beyond that, media outlets have become active promoters of peace and public awareness. Therefore, they are consistently making positive contributions to conflict resolution.



The Somali media landscape and its current contribution to peacebuilding are undergoing epochal changes. Today, the country can boast a vibrant, albeit fragmented, media culture. That said, the sector's development remains affected by insecurity and is heavily influenced by the unstable political environment and the country's complex history (PeaceAgency, Media and Peacebuilding in Somalia, 2023). In June 2023, a national conference was launched in Mogadishu on preventing the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. The keynote speakers included journalism experts, Muslim scholars, and activists from various social media platforms. In a related international context, Al Jazeera English's "Inside Story" program aired an episode titled, "Should social media be regulated without violating personal freedom?". Al Jazeera also hosted another program titled "Who should police social media?". These are two significant questions in the public mindset, with debates happening both internationally and locally regarding media regulation.

Regarding the development of media outlets in Puntland state, their role in peace is making progressive baby steps. Journalists are receiving training on their duties; for instance, a three-day workshop on advanced media management was organized by the Media Association of Puntland (MAP) in Garowe in November 2023. In the context of media outlets and civic engagement in Puntland, their role in peacebuilding is evident in places like Galkacyo. Organizations such as PDRC and PUNSAA utilize media platforms to disseminate their work through events like citizen forums, training sessions, public awareness campaigns, dialogue forums, and press statements, alongside uploading research documents online. Actions like these demonstrate that media outlets can play a crucial role in peace and social cohesion.

The media has played a crucial role in efforts across various sectors that have contributed to peace in Galkacyo, including facilitating agreements between media representatives from both sides to collaborate. Furthermore, the media should take a leading role as a peace actor through conflict-sensitive reporting, peace journalism, positive storytelling, creativity, and promoting a culture of peace (PDRC, Re-Assessment of the Social, Peace and Security Situation in Galkacyo, January 2021). Currently, in Puntland state, the media plays a crucial role as a peace actor, supporting conflict resolution, public awareness, the democratization process, and civic engagement meetings to promote social cohesion and peacebuilding initiatives. Furthermore, media outlets also facilitate donations and public contributions for community interests, providing a platform to connect the diaspora and local society for developmental exchanges.



The way media outlets cover conflict incidents can significantly impact whether violence is reduced or increased; their reporting can either instigate or mitigate the situation. For example, provocative and dramatic reporting can escalate violence and tensions, while positive reporting can promote de-escalation. This is also evident in other countries where youth use citizen media outlets to organize local demonstrations. For instance, Kenyan youth used these tools to protest the finance bill. Platforms like TikTok and X are now being wielded as protest tools, where politicians' videos are edited and reposted with negative comments. These platforms are awash with allegations of mismanaged funds and discussions on next steps for the as-yet largely leaderless youth movement (Reuters, 2024).

PUNSAA held a landmark forum tonight in Garowe, focusing on the accountability of Members of Parliament (MPs) and the public. This even brought together residents of the Nugaal region and MPs elected from the area. Approximately five MPs attended the forum, ready to address the public's questions on various issues, creating an open platform for direct engagement between citizens and their representatives ([PUNSAA, PUNSAA Launches Historical Forum on MP Accountability in Garowe, 2024](#)). That even was via social media platforms, moreover, PUNSAA hosts X space debates, trainings, and releasing press statement about the current themes. All those activities empower the community and foster social cohesion through various social media platforms. Furthermore, Puntland constitutional institutions have regularly used social media platforms to reach their daily activities and recent updates to the Puntland citizens, it is also another example for media outlets to enhance civic engagement.

In general, the government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. Additionally, it utilizes mass communication, including media, to shape public opinion. HIPS-think tank harnesses the power of ideas for a better Somalia by launching forums for ideas, including the Annual Forum for Ideas (AFI), hosting roundtable discussions among Somali communities, and publishing research documents and policy briefs. Apart from more research publications, in December 2023, HIPS launched a panel discussion about the role of media in conflict and reconciliation in Djibouti. The media outlets improved those programs. All these media developments were technologically progressive, but in terms of content, editorial controls, and target audience engagement were controlled by a few elites with money and political influence ([Hiiraanonline, 2019](#)).



Article 22 of the Puntland Constitution outlines the rights of journalism, ensuring independence from government interventions. It regulates the rules and laws, alongside the Puntland Media Act, which was recently issued on 22 December 2026 and is currently undergoing reform to limit freedom of journalism. The goal of the workshop, attended by 25 chief editors and media executives, was to enhance the knowledge and leadership abilities of media managers in running their individual newsrooms, as well as their practical skills for managing the media, particularly in times of hardship ([Media Puntland, 2023](#)). Furthermore, both the Puntland Ministry of Information, Telecommunications, Technology, Tourism, Culture, and Heritage (MOITTCH) and MAP collectively hold training for journalists in Puntland, including effective utilization of digital media training courses.

The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) and the Puntland Ministry of Information, Telecommunications, Technology, Tourism, Culture, and Heritage (MOITTCH) have recently completed a series of media trainings on the effective use of digital media. Eighty-one journalists, half of whom were female, took part in a 12-day training programme in the Puntland cities of Garowe, Bosaso, and Galkayo in August and September 2023 ([Horseedmedia, 2023](#)). Eventually, citizen media platforms and media outlets are directly relating to the political stability such as; civic engagement, electoral participation, facts – checks, and political cooperation, while the intervening variables are access to Internet, government policies, and political interests. Very interestingly, with internet affordability, information and communication technologies tools have persistence increased the usage of citizen media platforms among Somali people and connect with worldwide.

3.0 Methodology

Data was collected and analyzed from secondary documents related to the fostering of peacebuilding efforts in Somalia, published by PDRC and HIPS. The researcher focused on the forums (dialogue platforms)' panel discussions for sharing various knowledge and experiences about peacebuilding initiatives in terms of success, challenges, and contributions. PDRC and HIPS have launched those forums.

The researcher also reviewed publications from independent authors on thematic issues, particularly concerning the role of media in peacebuilding in Galkacyo, the role of media in conflict management using the case of the Somali civil war, and the role of social media in political stability in Mogadishu, Somalia. Furthermore, to better understand the role of media in the peacebuilding process, the researcher reviewed the Puntland constitution and Puntland media law, considering relevant codes of conduct and human rights issues.



This paper employed a theoretical framework based on Agenda-Setting theory. This theory suggests that the media can shape public opinion by determining which issues receive the most attention and has been widely studied and applied to various media forms. The research examines how the presentation of news stories and topics influences public opinion, as well as the role of media outlets in peacebuilding initiatives in Puntland.

In simple terms, the study aims to understand further how the media can either instigate or mitigate inter-community conflict in Puntland state. The goal is to provide stakeholders with detailed findings, discussions, conclusions, and policy recommendations to ensure the media contributes positively to conflict resolution.

4.0 Findings

From this study, the paper provides a detailed contribution to knowledge and outlines best practices regarding the media's role in peacebuilding initiatives across the region, including recommendations and a conclusion. To ensure that media outlets contribute positively to conflict resolution and become active promoters of peacebuilding to enhance social cohesion, the researchers found that the following highlighted points must be fully considered and implemented.

1. **Collaboration between Media Outlets, Government, Political Parties, and Civil Society:** Media outlets, government senior officials, political party leaders, and societal elites must work collectively to mediate peacebuilding efforts and de-escalate tensions that threaten peace and social cohesion by applying rules and regulations. They must also foster and enhance contributions to social cohesion.
2. **Promoting Skills Training in Journalism:** Journalists must further develop their knowledge and skills relating to professional standards and current issues to prevent fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, which can easily lead to social conflict. Promoting skills training is a vital factor for the success of peacebuilding efforts. Journalists must perform systematic monitoring and investigation of broadcast programs. This also includes empowering capacity building within journalism associations.
3. **Respecting the Freedom of Information Act:** The government must implement articles and conduct related to the freedom of information acts for its citizens under the country's rules and regulations. This will help diminish the widespread circulation of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. Furthermore, every government institutional agency currently has its own social media accounts, managed by a public relations office, to display public information to citizens.



4. Promoting Human Rights Issues: International and local human rights organizations must advocate for the protection of human rights, particularly freedom of opinion and expression, to encourage dialogue platforms and enable media outlets to cover broadcasting programs that ensure social cohesion and avoid social conflict. These organizations ought to defend public speakers and commentators who express opinions based on factual evidence, as local authorities sometimes detain them in violation of freedom of opinion and expression. The Office of the Puntland Human Rights Defender (OPHRD) is mandated to observe constitutional and legal rights and advocate for human rights issues in Puntland state.

5. Encouraging Public Awareness and Civic Engagement: Local authorities must constantly perform awareness-raising campaigns to improve the social mindset (mental attitude) of society and educate on the positive and negative impacts of social media. This is to counteract harmful social media influencers in the community who may incite social conflict.

6. Reforming Codes of Conduct by the Government: Codes of conduct within media laws, such as the Puntland Media Law and Somalia Media Law (regulatory frameworks), must be constantly updated and reviewed. The rules and regulations for media platforms must be continuously updated due to the dynamic nature of media outlets and the various types of news circulating on the internet. The Puntland Media Act is currently under review.

7. Improving Research Institutions' Capacity: Somalia needs greater commitment to developing research centers financially and technically, such as PDRC, SIDRA, GRD, HADAF, CES, and HIPS, to highlight and publish research documents on peace and social cohesion, and to increase dialogue platform discussions. In the Puntland state, PDRC is actively committed to peacebuilding initiatives, conferences, debates, and collecting documents on peace and social cohesion.

8. Skills Development for Job Creation and Youth Employment Programs: Regarding citizen media platform users, harmful social media influencers seek views on their videos (containing hate speech, escalating hostilities, and offensive content) to generate income, which is proportional to the number of viewers. This escalates social conflict in fragile contexts, undermining peacebuilding efforts and social cohesion. Therefore, local authorities must promote skills development for job creation and youth employment programs to redirect these social media influencers toward positive activities.

9. Inspiring Good Social Media Influencers: Positive influencers who consistently encourage peacebuilding efforts rather than social conflict should be rewarded by the government as "Role Models" for other social media influencers.

10. Strengthening Civil Society Organizations: PUNSAA, a leading civil society platform (representing the voice of civil society), must receive greater commitment from both government institutions and the local community. This is to enhance civic engagement and mobilize civil society in a progressive manner towards social cohesion, a culture of non-violence, and peacebuilding efforts through better coordination.



5.0 Discussion

This section of the discussion focuses deeply on the findings of this paper, which align with the literature review, panel discussions, and relevant studies cited.

The research paper identified several main challenges facing media outlets, including: a lack of education for social development, insufficient journalism training, an absence of rules and regulations, low public awareness, a deficit in social responsibility, and low-income levels. All these factors have broad negative implications for the media's role in peacebuilding initiatives.

The challenges that previously faced traditional media outlets included a lack of regulation and accountability, poor communication systems, insufficient training and resources, and restricted freedom of expression.

To overcome these factors, the researcher found it necessary to promote skills training in journalism. Providing journalists with advanced training can positively contribute to the media's role in peacebuilding efforts by promoting and empowering their professional capacity.

The research also highlighted that citizen media (social media) influences peacebuilding initiatives online through hate speech, escalated hostilities, and offensive internet content. Social media easily shapes societal mindset and has been used to organize protests, which negatively impacts the media's role in peace and social cohesion. While expert journalists monitored traditional media, citizen media is not.

However, most social media platform users contribute positively by advancing social cohesion, establishing special programs, and earning money online all of which automatically promote peacebuilding initiatives and social cohesion.

To minimize the negative role of social media platforms and strengthen societal confidence, collaboration among media outlets, government, political parties, and civil societies is essential. It is also important to reform codes of conduct for modern media platforms. Furthermore, inspiring positive social media influencers is another vital factor for enhancing the role of social media in peacebuilding.

Interestingly, skills development programs for job creation and youth employment need to be developed by the government to reduce reliance on citizen media platforms and their potential negative uses.

Media outlets should further develop public awareness campaigns on civic engagement and host dialogue platforms to exchange views on the media's role in peacebuilding efforts. This will help strengthen civil society organizations and increase public participation in the peacebuilding process.



In the Puntland context, media outlets play a more developed role in peacebuilding compared to other states, owing to strong collaboration among the government, civil societies, journalists' associations, and human rights organizations. The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) and the Puntland Ministry of Information, Telecommunication, Tourism, Culture, and Heritage (MOITTCH) collectively enhance journalism training and capacity building. The Puntland Development and Research Centre and Puntland media outlets have successfully participated fully in peacebuilding initiatives and promoted social cohesion across the Puntland state on numerous occasions.

In a related event, the researcher closely followed a panel discussion from a conference launched by HIPS, titled "Fostering a Culture of Peace in the Horn; Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis," which was held in Djibouti from December 19th to 21st, 2023. The researcher focused specifically on the panel concerning the role of media in conflict and reconciliation. The keynote speakers were long-time journalism experts from media outlets. The panelists were: Ali Bashe Omer (mediator), Abdirizak Haji Atosh, Eng. Abdimanan Yusuf, Hassan Ali Gesay, Awo Abdi, and Mohamed Dahir Hassan. These experts discussed the role of media outlets in peacebuilding initiatives and social cohesion. They outlined the historical background of Somali media outlets and conflicts that have occurred within societies due to the media. They held a robust discussion on the impact of social media platforms on the peacebuilding process, as well as on elite transformation. Finally, they suggested that positive social media activities should be encouraged to promote peacebuilding and social cohesion. Other recommendations included creating job opportunities for the youth, increasing training and workshops for journalists, and urging the government to develop strategic communication and stronger editorial policies to discredit unethical social media outlets.

Furthermore, other relevant studies for this research paper include a national conference held in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, from June 3rd to 4th, 2023, themed "National Conference on Preventing the Spread of Misinformation, Disinformation and Fake News." While the participants covered multiple panel discussions on the topic, the researcher of this paper considered only one. The keynote speakers for this panel were: Abdirahman Koronto (Mediator), Yusuf Garad, Da'ud Aweys, Albadri Abukar Albadri, Abdirizak Haji Atosh, and Abdirahman Abdishakur. They discussed the theme professionally and offered several recommendations, including increasing public awareness, educating journalists, developing media rules and regulations, enhancing social responsibility, having government institutions provide easy access to information and sources (including fact-checking), preventing deepfake news in the future, and establishing public



6.0 Recommendations

Media outlets play a crucial role in contributing to peacebuilding efforts and enhancing social cohesion, which is essential for their success. They also de-escalate tensions arising from social conflicts among communities. The following recommendations were suggested:

1. To the Government Sector: The government must implement the following points:

- **Verification for Prominent Public Figures:** Prominent public figures should obtain a blue verified badge on social media. Some users spread fake news, misleading information, and disinformation by impersonating public figures, which can easily escalate social conflict. Verifying the accounts of prominent people increases credibility and helps avoid the enhancement of social conflict, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news on social sites.
- **Women and Media Inclusion:** To promote peace through the media, it is vitally significant to encourage the inclusion of women in the media.
- **Easy Information Accessibility:** All constitutional institutions must provide easy access to daily news and information regarding their constitutional tasks, surrounding issues, and current themes for the public and media outlets. Accessibility of information for both civilians and the media will reduce the rate of misinformation and increase collaboration between the government and civic engagement. Institutional websites and social media platforms must be updated regularly.
- **Improving Media Code of Ethics:** Media outlets are constantly evolving, dynamic entities worldwide; therefore, their regulatory framework requires persistent updating and reviewing. This is crucial to ensure media outlets mitigate rather than instigate situations within the state.



2. To Journalists and Journalism Associations: Journalists must respect the following points to promote peacebuilding initiatives:

- **Improving Civic Engagement:** Journalists should address public opinion on political and non-political issues by fostering civic participation. Civic engagement includes voting, political activism, and community consultations.
- **Fostering Capacity Training:** Both media outlet operators (journalists) and community members should receive better social education development on ongoing thematic discussions. Therefore, full capacity trainings and workshops need to be provided. Social education development enhances peacebuilding efforts and social cohesion among communities, political parties, and the government.
- **Using Strongly Reliable Sources:** Broadcast and print media must consistently use strongly reliable sources of information for current issues or topics. This will play a crucial role in developing reliability and trust from the community.
- **Consistently Covering Mediation and Peacebuilding Efforts:** Media outlets must persistently foster peacebuilding initiatives and social cohesion, as well as cover news related to community development, including dialogue platforms and civic engagements.

3 To Civil Societies: Civil societies must collectively encourage peacebuilding initiatives:

- **Ignoring Harmful Social Media Influencers:** Social media users who actively promote bad habits, such as certain Facebookers and YouTubers, should not be listened to to avoid the escalation of social conflicts. The government, media outlets, and civil society elites should collaborate to publicly identify these individuals and take actions in accordance with the country's regulatory frameworks.
- **Preventing Deepfake News:** The community and government must collaborate to generate and implement regulatory frameworks to avoid deepfake news, including public awareness campaigns.
- **Enhancement of OPHRD's Mandate:** The Office of the Puntland Human Rights Defender (OPHRD) is mandated to observe constitutional and legal rights and advocate for human rights issues in Puntland state. When the office actively fulfils its duties and responsibilities, it becomes easier to ensure clear accountabilities for all activities involving senior officials of constitutional institutions, communities, journalists, and civil societies.



7.0 Conclusion

This research paper examined the role of media in instigating or mitigating inter-community conflicts in fragile contexts, with a focus on the Puntland State of Somalia. As is widely recognized, media outlets can either instigate or mitigate ongoing situations within societies. Previous media consisted of traditional forms (print and broadcast), while the current media landscape has undergone a dynamic transformation with the emergence of social media, also known as citizen media, which has created virtual societies and digital nations. Traditional media was controlled and operated under a strong editorial system. It generally adhered to and respected codes of conduct, rules, regulations, and broader regulatory frameworks. Additionally, it was managed by well-educated journalists. These media outlets promoted peacebuilding initiatives across Somalia, focusing on themes relevant to the country's situation. For instance, traditional media participated in peacebuilding efforts such as the Somali Reconciliation Conference in Arta, Djibouti, in 2000.

A small number of traditional media outlets did escalate conflicts in Somalia during earlier periods. This was primarily due to a lack of responsibility, insufficient knowledge, and control by a few elites with financial and political influence. Despite this, the number of media outlets advocating for peace was greater than those escalating situations in Somalia.

The challenges faced by traditional media included a lack of regulations and accountability, poor communication systems, insufficient training and resources, and restricted freedom of expression.

In the modern century, media technology has developed significantly in all aspects. Media outlets now play a crucial role as peace actors, facilitating conflict resolution, raising public awareness, addressing social needs, promoting social cohesion, and serving as platforms for civic engagement. Modern media sites (social media), or simply citizen media, have created influencers (YouTubers and Facebookers) who encourage communities to promote peacebuilding efforts, social cohesion, business, education, online monetization, open platform discussions, and community development activities. However, there are also a small number of harmful social media influencers who increase discrimination, blackmail prominent persons, and create fake news and deepfakes.



In Puntland state, local media outlets collectively cover social development activities, broadcast programs, host roundtables and debates, and take a leading role in peace, democratization processes, developing critical thinking, and peacebuilding efforts in places like Galkacyo and Saaxmaygaag, in addition to covering humanitarian affairs.

Furthermore, for any incident in the state, the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) researches the root cause and hosts forums and talks to achieve durable reconciliation. Similarly, PUNSAA produces press releases and hosts conferences to participate in the reconciliation process. The media is involved in these processes to enhance the widespread dissemination of events through live streams.

The Puntland government, particularly the Ministry of Information, in collaboration with the Media Association of Puntland (MAP), collectively holds a series of trainings for journalists on the effective use of digital media to foster and participate in peacebuilding efforts.

In the discussion section of this research paper, the researcher considered two panel discussions held in Djibouti and Mogadishu in December 2023 and June 2023, respectively. The panelists in both sessions were long-time experts in media outlets. They discussed the themes professionally and provided significant suggested remarks on the role of media in fostering peacebuilding initiatives across Somali territories.

To further enhance the role of media outlets in contributing positively to conflict resolution in Somalia in general, and Puntland state in particular, the research underlines and highlights several points that should be fully considered. These include: promoting skills training in journalism, enacting freedom of information acts, establishing regulatory frameworks, encouraging public awareness, enhancing education for social development, upgrading social responsibilities, preventing deepfake news, and implementing fact-checking for broadcasting programs.

Finally, notably, the research offers policy recommendations to stakeholders involved in the process to achieve significant developments in the role of media outlets in peacebuilding efforts. These recommendations include: having prominent and public figures obtain verified badges (blue checkmarks), improving civic engagement, ignoring harmful social media influencers, and fostering capacity-building training for both media outlet operators (journalists) and the community, as well as taking social responsibilities in mediating peacebuilding efforts.



Reference

- Hiiraanonline. (2019, September 20). Opportunities and Challenges for social media in Somalia. Retrieved from <https://www.hiiraan.com/>: https://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2019/sept/165579/opportunities_and_challenges_for_social_media_in_somalia.aspx
- Horseedmedia. (2023, September 19). With UN support, the Media Association of Puntland and the Puntland Ministry of Information trained 81 journalists. Retrieved from <https://horseedmedia.net/>: <https://horseedmedia.net/with-un-support-the-media-association-of-puntland-and-the-puntland-ministry-of-information-trained-81-journalists-382829>
- Media Puntland. (2023, November 27). Puntland: Endowment support enables MAP to hold a tailored media management course for executives and chief editors. Retrieved from <https://mediapuntland.org/>: <https://mediapuntland.org/puntland-endowment-support-enables-map-to-hold-a-tailored-media-management-course-for-executives-and-chief-editors/>
- Milike Yagmur Savrum and Leon Miller. (2015). The Role of the Media in conflict, peacebuilding, and international relations. St.Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House Publishers.
- PDRC . (2019, 03 01). Background to the PDRCTalks. Retrieved from <https://pdrCsomalia.org/>: <https://pdrCsomalia.org/pdrc-talks/>
- PDRC . (January 2021). Re-Assessment of the social, peace and security situation in Galkacyo. Garowe: PDRC .
- PeaceAgency. (2023). Media and Peacebuilding in Somalia.
- PeaceAgency. (2023, July 12). Somalia Media Hub for Peacebuilding and Human Rights. Retrieved from <https://www.peaceagency.org/>: <https://www.peaceagency.org/somalia-media-hub-for-peacebuilding-and-human-rights/>
- PUNSAA. (2008). About PUNSAA . Retrieved from <https://punsaa.org.so/>: <https://punsaa.org.so/who-we-are/>
- PUNSAA. (2024, May 21). PUNSAA Launches Historical Forum on MP Accountability in Garowe. Retrieved from PUNSAA.org.so : <https://punsaa.org.so/punsaa-launches-historic-forum-on-mp-accountability-in-garowe/>
- Reuters. (2024, July 12). Kenya MPs flaunting wealth on social media added fuel to tax protests . Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/>: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/social-media-fuels-kenyan-youth-backlash-over-lawmakers-opulence-2024-07-12/>
- The Gurdian. (2022, July 12). On the street and online: social media becomes key to protest in Kenya. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/>: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jul/12/on-the-street-and-online-social-media-becomes-key-to-protest-in-kenya>



PAPER V

PROMOTING AND PIONEERING MEDIA FOR PEACE MECHANISMS

Author:

Ahmed Awil
Journalist and Media Advisor in Somalia and
the Horn of Africa



Abstract

This research paper examines the constrained role of media in peacebuilding and conflict prevention within the challenging context of Somalia, where journalists face severe threats, impunity, and political restrictions. Despite operating in an environment marked by insecurity and violence, the Somali media has historically contributed to reconciliation by amplifying peace messages and facilitating dialogue. However, its potential is limited by a lack of professional capacity, strategic approaches, and neutrality, often resulting in content that inadvertently escalates tensions rather than promoting solutions. The paper analyses the dual impact of media, referencing regional cases where it has both fuelled conflicts and served as a tool for peace when properly guided. A significant modern development is the rise of social media, which offers new opportunities for inclusive peace campaigns and public engagement but also poses substantial risks through the spread of hate speech and misinformation. Key challenges include inadequate training, the absence of supportive policies and laws, limited collaboration between media and peace mediators, and the restrictive 4.5 power-sharing political model. The paper recommends an urgent need for professional capacity building for journalists, the establishment of media resource centres, the finalization of an inclusive media law, the creation of a cybersecurity framework, and strategic collaboration between traditional and social media platforms to foster a coherent and effective media-for-peace ecosystem.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Conflict prevention, Media practitioners, Social media, Journalists, Somalia

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Conflict prevention, Media practitioners, Social media, Journalists, Somalia



1.0 Overview of Somali Media

Somalia is among countries in the World where journalists operate under critical circumstances, difficulty security situation, detention, murder and refusal for media practitioners in getting access and space to report citizens and the general public about information and programs that bring about reform on areas of peace building, conflict prevention, good governance, security, injustice, terrorism, corruption and humanitarian programs as the country faces some of the most significant catastrophic disasters in Africa. At the same time, press freedom and freedom of expression have increased over the past few years. According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, Somalia ranks at the top of its 2023 global impunity index for eight straight years. The index has highlighted countries where journalists and media practitioners are murdered as a result of their duty. At the same time, the assailants of those acts against the press are mostly not apprehended. The primary goal of restricting press freedom in Horn of Africa countries is to suppress media and freedom of expression, ultimately benefiting the general public by addressing their concerns. The latest incidents against Somali Journalists between 2022/2023 show that 63 Journalists were detained, four were murdered, eight were injured, and 25 others were tortured, while two media stations were shut down in Somalia and Somaliland, according to the Somali Mechanism for Safety of Journalists, known as SMSJ, which advocates for the protection and safety of Journalists in Somalia. This is an outright violation of the rights and freedoms of media practitioners.



Despite of numerous challenges of insecurity, political uncertainty, limited knowledge, continues intimidation, killing and threatening for Journalists and media practitioners on duty in Somalia for decades, it is doubtless that media has played a significant role in peace building, reconciliation and conflict prevention for so many years by amplifying peace messages, voices of citizens, raising awareness on conflicts and engaging dialogue among different stakeholders in country including traditional elders, civil society representatives, women and youth and hosted many programs that advocated for peace in various regions and districts in the country. The media has been playing a crucial role in disseminating valuable information to the public, transforming the landscape from war, hostilities, and confrontations into reconciliation, discussions, and lobbying for potential solutions through various meetings, conferences, and gatherings. However, the media access in getting relevant information on peace efforts was limited due to number of issues including limited capacity and skills in cultivating peace programs, information and reports that brings about reforms to the public perception, perspectives and prospects and henceforth, their focus has always remained in airing short programs about peace and conflict resolution on short period while they don't invest much in finding the correct information, setting more strategic agendas for lasting peace and designing holistic approach with collaboration for different stakeholders or peace activists in any location of the country.

Similarly, the approach of designing ways of addressing peace campaigns and what programs, reports are relevant to pacify the on-going peace activities and deescalating hostilities among different rival clan militia, states and in this case, the media sometimes escalates the conflict instead of advocating for solutions and navigating war in to peace and stability and that is why conflicts affect many journalists who sought to report from violence in to peace due to lack of clear approach, designs, strategies in covering news, reports that are fundamental for peace initiatives, mitigation of tensions and avoiding conflict sensitization while mobilizing influential people in playing vibrant role in downsizing issues that can further sensitize or increase tensions.

In the worst case, the limited neutrality role and impartiality have led many journalists to lose access to reporting from conflict-prone areas, as they are allegedly siding with one of the warring groups and disseminating propaganda and news that damages the reputation of many reporters. Media practitioners and media stations that engage in biased reporting for specific groups, clans, political parties, or movements, while compromising their ethical standards based on impartiality, principle, neutrality, and fairness, can contribute more to peacebuilding and conflict resolution among the public and states. Providing unbiased information to the public and citizens during conflict plays a vital role in the campaign of finding solutions for the confrontations.



Engaging media in peace efforts is essential for lasting peace and prevention of conflict however, the media engagement for peace has always been limited and the need for neutral, balanced and substantive information and news that add more value for peace promotion is pivotal for a country that is still recovering from decades of conflict, political uncertainty and other catastrophic disasters that requires for better and responsive media engagement with citizens, governments by shaping the public opinions, narratives and tracking down social transformation with the mindset of citizens who love peace and development in Somalia and the region as well. In addition, establishing access and space to media/Journalists can contribute to positive peace-building interventions, as this will escalate the engagement of different sectors, voices of vulnerable communities, influential peace activists, government officials, the private sector, and elites.

1.1 Shaping Media as a Tool for Peace and Conflict Prevention

Shaping the media to transform war into peace and its ability to reach a large audience is crucial, both during conflict and beforehand. Although the press has a partially negative impact on the escalation of disputes and violence, accurate, fair, and neutral information can foster better confidence among rival groups and contribute to potential conflict prevention. Reference to the recent conflicts in several countries in Africa including Rwanda, Kenya, DR Congo, South-Sudan, Sudan, and Somalia, it has been proven that media practitioners played a key role in fueling such confrontations and fighting between different clan rivalries, political groups, ethnic-groups or communities and in this case those examples indicate how unshaped media can deescalate the violence and how the media can contribute peace during conflicts if they are trained, mobilized and shaped well with accurate guidance that seeks for positive change.

In this situation, the Somali media requires precise shaping and structural systems when engaging peace campaigns and working on programs and messages to prevent conflict. Some of the necessary elements that support this concept include delivering accurate approaches and strategies in dealing with programs, news, and information that direct solutions and lead to lasting peace. Behavioural changes for media practitioners who are at field and reporting from peace campaigns/conferences and conflicts while it is significant for Journalists to shape their programs and work in lobbying for peace and avoiding anything that can harm the on-going peace efforts while they are also required to enlarge awareness campaigns and messages to citizens for the implemented of various peace agreements that are signed between rival clans, rival political groups or states in a way of prioritizing while considering the public interest for peace and development and conflict prevention.



In further clarity, media practitioners in Somalia should also be given professional capacity building on approaches of creating, producing and airing programs, news and reports that are designed for the strengthening of peace and encouraging the prevention of war and violence. In addition, building a network among Journalists, traditional elders, elites, and other influential actors is also commendable as part of shaping the media by actively engaging the peace process. More frequently, violence and tensions escalate where there is no access to information or information access or where there is information scarce during conflicts and in this situation, Journalists and media practitioners are required to deliver variety of information that contains facts, real perspectives and opinions that will decrease conflict. In contrast, journalists must always maintain professionalism and objectivity, even in the face of potential conflicts, and focus on finding peaceful solutions. Despite the neutrality issue being sometimes complicated, media practitioners need to practice neutral reporting and deny the notion that media are controlled for specific purposes and individuals.

In building capacity and assistance on media can be categorized as three different aspects for the local press in enhancing peace and conflict transformation including establishing an open media culture that allows other voices and perspectives emerge and be heard, strengthening professional training and education for Journalists more focus on content development, shaping clear approaches to seek solution for peace instead of fueling conflict and the distribution of technical equipment to the media houses thus creating behavioral changes for some media practitioners are important by respecting and implementation of media culture for peace and tolerance and the formation of understanding among different actors and representatives involved in the reconciliation process and dialogue for lasting harmony.

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.” – Albert Einstein.

Therefore, the media can play an active and potential role by cultivating conditions for conflict transformation through various of programs, reports and news by not only informing citizens about the outcome of conflict but advocating and campaigning for peace and reconciliation. At the same time, the media can also generate mediation opportunities by bringing the rival groups together for dialogue and effective communications, discussions to end the conflict and reach an agreement.



Key Approaches for Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention by Media

1. Facilitate positive dialogue and consensus-building discussions and meetings between rival groups, clans, states, or parties.
2. Develop potential Radio or TV dialogue sessions to enhance peace and prevent conflict. This should be redesigned to encourage the media to engage in peace and reconciliation efforts actively.
3. Training for local Journalists on best practices in reporting peace initiatives and conflict prevention skills. This should also include the civil society representatives, youth, women, and University students.
4. Establishment of the Media for Peace Network that advocates for peace and conflict prevention. The network should be invited for local Journalists, media unions, influential elders, elite, clerics and peace activists. There are already existing media umbrellas, such as the Media Association of Puntland, but their role is not solely peacebuilding.
5. Access to information policy and other important legal documents should be updated or drafted if some of those policies are not in place by the government and state governments.
6. The establishment of a Media resource centre for peace development and conflict prevention in various regions of Somalia, where possible, and engage a large number of Journalists, media practitioners, and influential community members for better programming in peace.

2.0 Social Media and Its Role in Peacebuilding

With affordable and faster internet access as part of the growing technology, access to information and quick social interaction, Somali people use social media platforms extensively for the past 10 years for enormously programs based on entertainment, political and security discussions and news dissemination, Islamic awareness programs, fundraising purposes, tracing, connections and information sharing and other development programs according to various research and assessments made by numerous local and international organizations and institutes. From the “We Are Social and Hootsuite’s Digital 2019 Report”, 56 per cent of the world’s population is currently online, while 45 per cent use some form of social media platform. This proportion is likely to at least double over the next 20 years. Young people between 18 and 34 use over half of the global social media audience, with those around the age of 30 currently accounting for the largest share of the world’s social media users.



Social media and faster digital communication have widely affected the use of traditional media, more specifically, Radio and TV in Somalia. In contrast, the use of Facebook, X (Previously Twitter), WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and others can be widely used to facilitate peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, building bridges between different communities and people who gather in using platforms, interacting, and sharing content information that can fill the communication gap among various people and community members.

Social media can be used as an essential tool for peace building and conflict prevention, and on the other hand, escalates violence, conflict, tension, hate speech, community or public incitement, and has transformed widely from the use of traditional to digital media across the world, Africa, and Somalia for more than a decade. The reason is 75% of Somalis are youth according to statistics published by the Ministry of Planning of the Federal Government of Somalia with support from UNFPA. Those young men and women are connected to the internet, and almost everyone has a smartphone to use, post their views, comments, videos, and concepts about numerous topics. Despite social media being a significant tool for promoting peace and development in the country, it has its risks according to several incidents that happened in the past few years where rival clan militia, political groups, and states used the social media as a platform for hate speech, incitement of violence, and public uprising while debates that are based on clan-basis are highly used by young men and women on TikTok and Facebook in the past 4 years. Those platforms have escalated the division of Somali citizens, negative propaganda against the government and regional states, defamation against political leaders, public figures of the society, and influential people, including traditional leaders.

Other platforms that are used mainly for community mobilization as a means of clan-based clashes include YouTube and Instagram. This indicates that the use of social media is hazardous according to a number of reasons; however, it can also be used for peace building, reconciliation campaigns, and conflict prevention by mapping effective programs that transform the youth both abroad and, in the country, establishing clear strategies, policies, and laws to control the negative use of social media. In recent years, peace mediators and policymakers have utilized social media to share progress on peace and conflict resolutions. However, the risks associated with social media use in Somalia and other countries worldwide remain.



2.1 Empowering Social Media in Peace Campaigns.

The overall media landscape change of media has enormously changed as people around the world and Somalia get the latest news online. The use of social media has entirely changed traditional media. In contrast, every person has a mobile phone with which they capture videos and post online or text in the country as soon as incidents happen. This has significantly affected the content of online media, ethics, norms, rules, and even the draft media law of the country. Therefore, understanding the conflict areas and impact on social media during the processes requires massive analysis and the use of effective paths including platforms on Facebook, X (Previously Twitter) and WhatsApp since those tools are significant in mobilizing peace and conflict for both while the use of social media in peace campaigning on areas of social debates, discussions, conferences and meeting and political reforms however, it can cause social division, public incitement, clan rivalries and the mobilization of armed forces across different regions in Somalia,

It has been agreed that social media provides a space for discussions and debates for different political groups, elites, and citizens, compared to the use of traditional media. It can significantly alter public perspectives and perceptions of key issues, including governance, corruption, elections, peace and conflict prevention, commercial advertising, and numerous other problems of public interest. At the same time, diversity of opinions and viewpoints on specific elements is circulated via online media. Social media can contribute to peace and conflict prevention positively when journalists and media practitioners are empowered with best practices in using social media and establish strong connections and links between traditional media and online media. For example, media practitioners may be required to develop large platforms on social media in which peace, reconciliation efforts, and progress made in conflict prevention are posted. At the same time, citizens will be able to discuss the subject. Another crucial aspect is that Journalists should receive training in mentoring peace activists and mediators on the effective use of social media, thereby preventing misinformation, misperception, and the dissemination of fake information by mediators involved in peace efforts. The voices of mediators, including traditional elders, politicians, elites, government officials, and civil society representatives, are sometimes changed via other voice-over pieces that fuel confrontation between rival groups.



While there are numerous challenges and risks associated with social media, it can strategically and actively assist peace mediators, political negotiators, and Journalists. It can influence the perspectives of rival groups during dialogue and reconciliation efforts, as well as the de-escalation of conflict, because online media directly affects understanding and public perception. In addition, the use of social media with relevant narratives would also make a positive change in conflict and further deliver immediate feedback from the rival clans, states, groups, and further allow peace mediators to assess the progress of their peace campaigning. Somali journalists must develop the skills to dissect both potential and positive narratives on social media, fully understanding their gains and risks. Therefore, journalists must be well-equipped in balancing between perspectives and ideas of different groups by ensuring impartiality, credibility, and integrity.

2.2 Opportunities for Social Media to Promote Peace in Somalia

Social media offers significant opportunities to shape the agenda of peace talks between rival groups, both formally and informally. This, in turn, enables journalists to establish digital platforms and forums that provide peace mediators with information on the outcome of their talks and public views. In this situation, journalists and other media practitioners have significant roles in shaping the peace agenda between different rival groups and advocating for peace and conflict prevention. Developing the right approach to designing programmes and initiatives for peace development requires a multifaceted approach, which can be achieved by creating active links between traditional and social media, and by adapting programming design to an online platform. In addition, strategic and holistic approaches based on skills and experience can foster the involvement of vibrant media in enhancing peace and the prevention of violence and conflict in the country. Some of the following key aspects are key opportunities for social media in peace.

- 
- 1.Strengthening the linkage between the traditional media and online media so that they can actively cooperate, and citizens and the general public will engage and respond to peace narratives, initiatives, and programs
 - 2.Establishing online platforms and forums for debates where peace mediators, influential community members, state officials, and civil society representatives are invited to discuss the peace process, progress, and challenges. Media experts should lead online platforms from the outset, facilitating an exchange of opinions and views among citizens on peace and conflict prevention.
 - 3.Designing and laying out strategies and approaches for social media to shape the public agenda, perspectives, and viewpoints towards peace and reconciliation, while cultivating the understanding of media practitioners.
 - 4.Establishment of media champions to promote peace online, specifically on Facebook, X, and WhatsApp. These champions will include peace activists, journalists, traditional elders, state officials, women, and youth, who will discuss progress on peace processes, alert to any possible conflicts, and work collectively to resolve them.
 - 5.The use of social media platforms as sources of knowledge, the dissemination of peace awareness campaigns and messages, and the prevention of conflicts through the mobilization of media unions, associations, and practitioners.



3.0 Challenges

Despite challenges that affect the media in addressing peace development and conflict prevention, they cannot be summed up. Here are some of the challenges that media practitioners and Journalists encounter:-

1. Limited capacity building and skills in initiating, designing, producing, and airing effective peace programs, news, and reports that advocate for peace and bring about positive public change in conflict prevention.
2. A lack of strategies, policies, and guidelines that assist media practitioners and Journalists in promoting peace campaigns and preventing violence.
3. The limited role of journalists and media in peace talks has exacerbated their limited ability to influence peace dialogues and reconciliation efforts. This is particularly evident in their approach of shuttling between rival groups, which seeks to foster harmony and agreement between the two sides for the benefit of the general public.
4. Unclear acceptable media law in Somalia. This limits the role of media and ethical practices, including neutrality, impartiality, and integrity. Consequently, some sections of media practitioners and journalists are unable to produce the required media programs for not only peace but also development issues, including good governance, corruption, robbery, and other elements.
5. Limited collaboration exists between independent media and state governments on peace processes and other key state-building initiatives.
6. The lack of functioning media resource centres responsible for producing quality programmes aimed at enhancing peace and conflict prevention.
7. Media stations provide limited airing exposure for peace campaigns.
8. Media owners and directors invest much of their time in programs other than peace and conflict prevention.
9. Somalia lacks a cybersecurity policy and law that addresses risks emerging from social media.
10. A lack of collaboration among directors, media practitioners, Journalists, and peace mediators during conflicts.
11. The 4.5 power-sharing deal for Somalia poses a significant barrier to press freedom and freedom of expression, hindering advocates for peace, good governance, democracy, and universal suffrage elections.



4.0 Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

1. Professional capacity building and skills will be provided to Journalists, media practitioners, and influential social media users in areas such as peace building, reconciliation, and conflict prevention.
2. Somali media stations, Journalists, and media unions should be trained and provided with practical strategies and guidelines that facilitate potential approaches to promoting peace and conflict prevention across both social and traditional media.
3. The establishment of the Media Resource Center for peace development and conflict prevention, in which peace programs are initiated, discussed, planned, and produced, and accompanied by skilled journalists for peace and other programs.
4. The finalization of acceptable, inclusive media laws and policies that provide space and access for journalists to produce and cover peace programs and conflict prevention.
5. Creation of Media for peace committees in various regions of the country, including Journalists, media practitioners, peace mediators, women, youth, and state officials, to address potential issues in fostering peace and conflict prevention. The committee will actively engage and disseminate information about the outcome of peace talks through both online and traditional media.
6. Drafting a cybersecurity law or policy to mitigate the risks and tribulations arising from public and citizens' use of social media.
7. Media stations to allow adequate space for airing peace and reconciliation programs, messages, and consistently use social media more actively by engaging their audiences on various topics that induce debate on diversity of perspectives and opinions.
8. Establishment of solid collaboration between media practitioners, journalists, and peace mediators.



5.0 Conclusion

Both traditional and social media can contribute to peace development and conflict prevention if they are trained well on the subject, have access to work, and are inclusive of peace and reconciliation efforts, while ensuring the availability of acceptable media. It is obvious today that social media is a potent tool that has brought bigger transformation in to the media industry and can be used as a significant tool for peace initiatives and prevention of violence henceforth, the engagement of citizens including influential community members, Journalists in peace process is an essential element that will allow them to advocate more stable, peaceful and democratic nation that seeks for universal suffrage elections and eliminates the 4.5 power-sharing deal. In this case, media development programmes can reduce several existing challenges that require sustainable solutions for lasting peace in Somalia.



PAPER VI

ETHICAL MEDIA PRACTICES IN PEACEBUILDING: LESSONS AND FUTURE PATHWAYS FROM SOMALIA. A CASE OF MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF PUNTLAND (MAP)

Author:

Mohamed Dahir Warsame ^a, Ibrahim
Abdirahman^b

^a Chairperson, Media and Association of
Puntland

^b Programs Manager, Media and Association
of Puntland



Abstract

This study investigates the role of ethical journalism in Somalia's fragile context, analyzing how misinformation and weak media-CSO collaboration undermine peace-building efforts. Focusing on challenges faced by journalists, the impact of media practices on conflict, and lessons from the Media Association of Puntland (MAP), it employs a mixed-methods approach combining interviews, literature review, and content analysis. Findings reveal that while initiatives like MAP's peace councils promote dialogue, systemic gaps in fact-checking and media-CSO coordination persist. The study proposes actionable strategies—including strengthened partnerships, robust verification mechanisms, and ethical journalism training—to enhance accurate reporting and support peacebuilding. These recommendations aim to inform media practices in Somalia and other conflict-affected regions, contributing to broader discourse on responsible journalism in fragile states.

Keywords: Ethical journalism, Peacebuilding, conflict-sensitive reporting, misinformation, disinformation, Media, Somalia, Puntland.



1.0 Introduction

The early 1990s marked a period of upheaval and uncertainty for Somalia, as the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in 1991 plunged the country into civil war. Political fragmentation and the rise of militant groups like Al-Shabaab exacerbated governance failures, creating a protracted conflict that persists today. Scholars such as Reiff (1998), Bayart (1998), and Duffield (1998) highlight how internal factors—including corruption, ethnic tensions, and weak institutions—have perpetuated instability. Unlike conventional wars observed elsewhere, Somalia's conflicts are deeply rooted in complex social, political, and economic dynamics (Kaldor, 2000).

Within this turbulent context, the media plays a pivotal role. It can either escalate conflict through misinformation or contribute to peacebuilding by fostering dialogue and accountability. Ethical journalism, characterized by balanced and fact-based reporting, has been shown to mitigate conflict and promote reconciliation (Howard, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Yet in Somalia, media coverage often prioritizes sensationalized conflict narratives over peacebuilding efforts, leaving constructive initiatives underrepresented.

Historically, Somalia's media landscape was tightly controlled by Barre's regime, serving as a mouthpiece for state propaganda. After the regime's collapse, the emergence of private radio stations offered fleeting opportunities for media diversification. However, many outlets were quickly co-opted by warlords and political elites, weaponizing information to fuel divisions. Despite these challenges, Somalia's media sector has grown into a vibrant but fractured ecosystem. Journalists operate under extreme duress, with over 50 media workers killed since 2010, and the country is ranked 169th globally for journalist safety.

Amid these adversities, the Media Association of Puntland (MAP) has emerged as a critical advocate for ethical journalism and conflict resolution. Since launching its "peace councils" in 2018, MAP has facilitated dialogues between civil society, security agencies, activists, and media professionals. These biannual forums address pressing issues like journalist safety, freedom of expression, and misinformation. Each conference concludes with an actionable roadmap, which contributed to a dramatic decline in clashes between law enforcement and reporters, from 30 annual incidents to just two over three years. MAP's model demonstrates the potential for media-civil society collaboration to advance peace, and the organization advocates for replicating such platforms nationwide across Somalia. However, MAP experiences financial and technical challenges that limit its capacity to participate in peacebuilding initiatives despite its willingness and readiness. This is where collaboration with civil society organisations such as PDRC and Puntland Non-State Actors' Association (PUNSAA) becomes inevitable and timely.



2.0 Literature Review

This section discusses and reviews literature related to media, conflicts, and ethical journalism in Somalia

2.1 Media and Conflict

The role of media in conflict, either as a catalyst for violence or a facilitator of peace, has been extensively studied. Scholars such as Howard (2002) and Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) emphasize that media can either exacerbate tensions or contribute to conflict mitigation. In Somalia, media platforms like Radio Daljir and SBC have been instrumental during times of political unrest, offering platforms for inclusive dialogue and conflict de-escalation (Howard, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). The 2023 Puntland election crisis, during which Radio Daljir's reconciliation programming played a crucial role in facilitating negotiations among opposing parties (ReliefWeb, 2023; Radio Daljir, 2023a).

Similarly, Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election violence demonstrated how media could serve both destructive and constructive roles. While some Kenyan media outlets incited violence, others supported peacebuilding through balanced reporting and mediation efforts (Oduor, 2008). Post-election violence can also extend to Somali regions unless strong security measures are put in place, especially after the introduction of multi-party politics in the country. Collaboration between media institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) is essential to building sustainable peace. According to the International Crisis Group (2021), the lack of structured, strategic collaboration between media and CSOs hampers effective responses to misinformation and conflict. Despite shared goals, fragmented efforts and the absence of institutional partnerships often limit the media's capacity to act as agents of peace.

2.2 Ethical Journalism in Fragile States

In fragile states like Somalia, ethical journalism is both a necessity and a challenge. Interview evidence underscores how journalism is often compromised by political interference and financial incentives from media owners and political figures. In Puntland and other Somali regions, journalists routinely face threats, job insecurity, and coercion—conditions that foster unethical practices such as “brown envelope journalism.” Following long-standing state and colonial control, the liberalization of Somalia's media landscape has not been matched with corresponding regulatory reforms. This institutional lag creates vulnerabilities within the media system, fostering a climate where incitement, defamation, and corruption thrive, undermining both media credibility and efforts toward peacebuilding. Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) concept of peace journalism is particularly pertinent to the Somali context. Peace journalism promotes conflict-sensitive reporting, favoring narratives of reconciliation over sensationalism. A helpful comparison is post-apartheid South Africa, where the South African Media Institute has championed ethical journalism as a tool for national reconciliation. Despite successes, South Africa still faces challenges in fully aligning journalistic practices with peace-building principles, mirroring the Somali experience



2.3 Misinformation and Disinformation in Conflict Zones

Like any other conflict zone, Somalia is prone to misinformation and disinformation, particularly on social media platforms.

Conflict and Media Theory

The foundational work of Galtung and Ruge (1965) illustrates how media not only reflect conflict dynamics but also shape them. Sensationalist or biased reporting can intensify divisions and prolong violence. In fragile settings, media can inadvertently or deliberately become conduits for misinformation and disinformation, distorting public understanding and inflaming hostilities. In Somalia, the widespread circulation of misinformation poses a serious obstacle to peacebuilding. BBC Media Action (2023) documents how disinformation fuels political discord and public panic, especially on issues concerning governance, religion, and health. False narratives surrounding political developments, for instance, have incited unrest and deepened mistrust among communities. The study calls for enhanced media literacy and ethical journalism as critical tools for curbing the spread of false information.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) highlight the broader implications of misinformation, showing its capacity to erode institutional trust and influence public behavior, particularly in conflict-prone societies. Their findings stress the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms and civic education to build public resilience against manipulated narratives.

Implications for Peacebuilding

Improving media literacy and promoting ethical journalism are central to combating the adverse effects of misinformation. Educational programs that develop critical thinking skills and public awareness can help audiences identify and resist disinformation. Furthermore, coordinated efforts among media organizations, CSOs, and governmental institutions are crucial for promoting transparency and disseminating reliable information. As emphasized by the International Crisis Group (2021), only collective action can effectively counter misinformation and support durable peace. Policy measures are equally vital. State Governments and international organizations should develop frameworks that ensure accountability and transparency in media practices while safeguarding press freedom. These efforts will help foster an informed and resilient society, capable of withstanding the divisive impacts of false information.



2.4 The Role of Media in Somalia's Peace Processes

Somali media, particularly in Puntland, have shown a proactive commitment to peacebuilding. For example, Radio Daljir and SBC have facilitated national dialogue through reconciliation programming and coverage of political developments. Radio Daljir's engagement during electoral periods has been particularly notable in promoting transparency and conflict resolution. Comparative examples offer critical insights into the media's dual potential. For instance, Rwanda's Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) notoriously incited violence during the genocide, demonstrating how media can be weaponized for hate. Conversely, in post-conflict Liberia, media-CSO collaborations helped facilitate peace talks and reconstruction (Davis, 2009).

In Somalia, despite positive steps, gaps persist. Chief among these is the lack of formalized partnerships between media and CSOs. The UNDP (2017) stresses the need for integrated strategies that institutionalize such partnerships, ensuring that media and civil society can jointly support peacebuilding. Capacity-building is another pressing need. Somali media institutions often lack the technical, financial, and human resources required for conflict-sensitive reporting. Strengthening these capabilities is essential for enabling journalists to engage meaningfully in peace processes and support national stability. In summary, Somali media outlets have shown potential as peace actors, but their effectiveness is hindered by weak institutional support and fragmented collaboration with CSOs. Addressing these issues through structured partnerships and capacity development would significantly enhance the media's role in Somalia's peacebuilding landscape.

The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) plays a pivotal role in fostering ethical and professional journalism in the region. In early 2021, MAP, together with the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), which later transformed to PEC, introduced a revised media code of conduct tailored to local municipal elections. This initiative sought to ensure impartial and responsible reporting, reinforcing the media's role in promoting democracy. MAP has emphasized conflict-sensitive journalism through targeted training and its "Peace Council" initiative, which creates platforms for dialogue among media professionals, CSOs, and security agencies. These efforts align with peace journalism principles, promoting responsible coverage of conflict issues. MAP's work has evolved into broader partnerships, exemplified by the 2022 Danwadaag initiative. Designed to enhance government legitimacy and disaster risk management, Danwadaag is grounded in principles of transparency, inclusivity, and citizen engagement. The initiative brings together international and local actors, demonstrating MAP's belief in collaborative approaches to peace and governance.



2.5 Literature Gap

While existing literature offers substantial insights into the role of media in conflict, ethical journalism, and peacebuilding, notable gaps remain in the Somali context. Most studies emphasize the media's potential without sufficiently exploring the structural and institutional barriers that limit this potential. The lack of empirical data on the effectiveness of media-CSO collaborations in Somalia is a key research gap. Moreover, while comparative studies (e.g., from Kenya, South Africa, and Liberia) provide valuable lessons, there is a dearth of localized, longitudinal research on the Somali media's evolving role in peace processes.

Additionally, little attention has been paid to the impact of emerging digital platforms and social media on the spread of misinformation and on journalistic ethics in Somalia. Given the increasing consumption of news via digital channels, future research should investigate how these platforms influence public perceptions and conflict dynamics in fragile states. Furthermore, while MAP's initiatives are documented in project reports, there is limited academic evaluation of their long-term impact on media professionalism and peacebuilding. Addressing these gaps through rigorous, context-specific studies is crucial for developing effective media policies and support structures in Somalia.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the role of media, ethical journalism, and peacebuilding in Somalia, with a particular focus on the Media Association of Puntland (MAP). The chosen methodology enabled an in-depth understanding of how media organizations contribute to or hinder peacebuilding efforts in fragile and conflict-affected states.



3.1 Data Collection Methods

Documentary Review: A range of secondary sources was analyzed, including scholarly articles, reports from international organizations (such as UNESCO and UNDP), and publications from MAP. This method provided critical insights into Somalia's media landscape and the specific initiatives undertaken by MAP to promote ethical journalism and peace.

Case Studies: Comparative case studies from conflict-affected countries such as Kenya and South Africa were reviewed to draw relevant parallels and identify best practices that could be adapted to the Somali context. These comparisons enriched the study by situating Somalia within a broader regional and global discourse on media and peacebuilding.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Somali journalists, media experts, and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs). These interviews offered first-hand perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by media actors in peacebuilding processes, particularly under the leadership of MAP.

Justification for Methodology

The qualitative approach was selected for its strength in capturing the depth, nuance, and complexity of media operations in fragile contexts. Unlike quantitative methods, which often rely on standardized data, the qualitative approach allowed for the flexible exploration of evolving perspectives and experiences. The use of documentary analysis, case studies, and interviews facilitated a holistic examination of the Somali media landscape and MAP's specific contributions to peacebuilding. Moreover, this approach enabled the study to critically assess the extent and effectiveness of collaboration between media and civil society, an aspect that would have been difficult to capture through quantitative techniques alone. In summary, the qualitative methodology provided a robust framework for understanding the intricate interplay between media, ethics, and peace in Somalia. It offered a detailed account of MAP's role in shaping a more responsible and peace-oriented media sector.



3.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret key patterns and recurring themes in the data, such as media ethics, misinformation, and media-CSO collaboration. In addition, comparative analysis was employed to contextualize Somalia's media dynamics by juxtaposing them with findings from other post-conflict regions, thereby highlighting both gaps and opportunities.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study, examining the role of media in conflict and peacebuilding in Somalia, with a specific focus on the Media Association of Puntland's (MAP) peacebuilding initiatives. The discussion integrates empirical findings with relevant literature, highlighting points of agreement and divergence to contextualize the Somali experience within broader global practices.

4.1 Media's Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding

The study reaffirms the media's dual role in exacerbating conflict and promoting peace, echoing prior literature (Howard, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). In Somalia, particularly in conflict-affected areas, media outlets have been used to deepen divisions through biased reporting, often influenced by political elites or extremist groups like Al-Shabaab. This supports earlier research by Galtung and Ruge (1965), which emphasized the media's potential to intensify societal tensions in fragile contexts.

However, this study also reveals positive strides in the use of media for peacebuilding. The establishment of MAP's peace councils in Puntland has fostered dialogue between journalists, civil society, and security forces. These councils exemplify conflict-sensitive journalism in practice, aligning with the peace journalism framework proposed by Howard (2002). Notably, this challenges the dominant narrative that media in fragile states mainly contribute to conflict, instead highlighting Somalia's emerging potential in peace media development.



4.2 Ethical Journalism in Somalia

Ethical journalism is a cornerstone of responsible media in fragile environments. The findings indicate that MAP's conflict-sensitive journalism training has improved the quality of reporting in Puntland. Journalists trained under MAP's initiatives are more likely to avoid sensationalism and report facts with balance, reflecting principles from the peace journalism model (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

These improvements align Somalia with countries like South Africa, where the media contributed significantly to post-apartheid reconciliation. However, challenges persist. Journalists outside Puntland face threats from militant groups, political manipulation, and institutional weaknesses. Unlike South Africa, where regulatory frameworks support ethical journalism, Somalia's media environment remains fragmented and vulnerable to coercion, impeding broader ethical reforms.

4.3 Misinformation and Disinformation in Conflict Zones

The study identifies misinformation as a critical barrier to peacebuilding, especially during politically sensitive periods like elections. This finding is consistent with research by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) and BBC Media Action (2023), which highlight how misinformation can escalate conflict and weaken democratic processes. While MAP has taken steps to address this challenge through peace councils and ethical reporting campaigns, these initiatives are limited in scope. Unlike countries with institutionalized fact-checking mechanisms, Somalia lacks comprehensive misinformation mitigation strategies. The study shows that although MAP promotes responsible journalism, systemic efforts, such as national media literacy programs and dedicated fact-checking teams, are still underdeveloped. This divergence underscores the need for more coordinated, nationwide interventions.



4.4 Media–Civil Society Collaboration

The research reveals the importance of collaboration between media and civil society organizations (CSOs) for effective peacebuilding. MAP's peace councils demonstrate how partnerships between journalists, CSOs, and security agencies can reduce tensions and foster mutual understanding. This supports findings by UNESCO (2012) and the International Crisis Group (2021), which stress the value of cross-sectoral cooperation in conflict-prone settings. In Puntland, such collaborations have led to tangible improvements, including a marked decrease in confrontations between journalists and security personnel. However, beyond Puntland, these alliances are weak or nonexistent. Compared to Liberia, where media-CSO collaboration is formalized and integrated into peacebuilding strategies (Davis, 2009), Somalia still lacks institutional mechanisms to support nationwide media–civil society engagement. This gap limits the scalability and sustainability of MAP's model.

4.5 Capacity-Building and Institutional Support

The study finds that journalist capacity-building is a critical enabler of peace-oriented media. MAP's training initiatives have raised journalistic standards, leading to more nuanced and accurate reporting. These findings resonate with previous research by UNESCO (2012), which highlights the role of capacity-building in strengthening the media's contribution to peace. However, the study also reveals a fragmented training landscape. While MAP has made commendable efforts in Puntland, other regions lack similar opportunities. Unlike countries such as Liberia or South Africa, where journalist training is embedded in national development plans, Somalia's efforts are sporadic and under-resourced. Without broader institutional and financial support, the impact of existing training programs remains localized and insufficient for national transformation.

4.6 MAP's Peace Councils: Achievements and Limitations

A central focus of the study is MAP's peace councils, which have emerged as a promising model for media-led peacebuilding in Puntland. The councils have successfully facilitated dialogue between media and security forces, significantly reducing incidents of journalist harassment, from an average of 30 cases annually to just two in the last three years. This demonstrates the potential of structured engagement to improve the safety of journalists and promote media freedom. However, the peace councils' contribution remains largely confined to issues of media safety and ethics. Their broader role in addressing root causes of conflict, such as clan tensions, political marginalization, and social inequality, remains limited. The councils have not yet evolved into platforms for inclusive peacebuilding dialogues beyond the media sector.



Despite these limitations, the sustainability of MAP's model is evident. With adequate support from international donors and national institutions, the peace councils could be scaled up across Somalia. This would require formal recognition by state authorities and integration with broader peacebuilding frameworks.

4.7 Opportunities and Gaps in Media Peacebuilding

The study identifies both opportunities and challenges for enhancing the role of media in peacebuilding:

Opportunities: The existence of MAP and its operational success in Puntland presents a strong foundation for broader media reform. Journalist training, media-CSO collaboration, and peace journalism practices offer scalable pathways to peacebuilding.

Gaps: Resource constraints, limited reach beyond Puntland, and insufficient national coordination hinder the full potential of media-led peacebuilding. Additionally, the lack of institutional frameworks to support ethical journalism, combat misinformation, and foster collaboration across sectors remains a pressing challenge.

4.8 Summary of Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on media and peacebuilding in fragile states. While Somalia shares challenges common to other conflict-affected regions, it also shows signs of innovation and resilience. MAP's initiatives represent a localized but adequate response to the complex dynamics of conflict reporting and journalist safety. However, for Somalia's media to fulfill its peacebuilding potential, a more systemic and inclusive approach is necessary—one that integrates ethical journalism, misinformation management, cross-sector collaboration, and institutional reform into national peacebuilding agendas.



5.0 Conclusion

This study explored the intersection of media, conflict, and peacebuilding in Somalia, with a particular focus on the role of the Media Association of Puntland (MAP) in promoting ethical journalism and fostering peace. The findings underscore the dual role that media can play—either exacerbating conflict through inflammatory or biased reporting or contributing positively to peacebuilding through responsible journalism and inclusive dialogue.

MAP's peace councils in Puntland have emerged as a promising model for constructive engagement between media practitioners, civil society actors, and security agencies. These initiatives have successfully reduced tensions and misunderstandings between journalists and security forces, highlighting the value of structured dialogue in promoting media freedom and conflict-sensitive reporting. However, the focus of these councils has primarily centered on journalist safety and freedom of expression, with less emphasis on broader peacebuilding strategies that address the root causes of conflict and societal division.

The Somali media landscape has evolved significantly since the fall of the Siad Barre regime, transitioning from a centralized tool of state propaganda to a more dynamic but fragmented sector. Despite this progress, the media continues to face significant challenges, including political manipulation, threats to journalist safety, limited financial and technical resources, and the pervasive spread of misinformation. These obstacles hinder the media's full potential to act as a peacebuilding force at the national level.



6.0 Recommendations

To address these issues and further enhance the role of the media in promoting peace across Somalia, this study offers the following integrated recommendations:

1. Upscale and Replicate MAP's Interventions in other Somali Regions and States

The success of MAP's peace councils in Puntland presents a scalable model for media-led peacebuilding. Expanding this model across Somalia would provide platforms for dialogue between media professionals, civil society, and security actors in other regions. These councils could address not only journalist safety but also broader social and political issues contributing to conflict. Scaling this model requires strategic coordination and international support to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

2. Strengthen Media–Civil Society Collaboration

Effective peacebuilding depends on strong partnerships between the media and civil society organizations (CSOs). While MAP has initiated such collaboration in Puntland, these partnerships should be institutionalized throughout Somalia. Joint efforts between media and CSOs can promote fact-based reporting, counter misinformation, and amplify community voices, especially in conflict-prone areas. Establishing formal collaboration frameworks can enhance credibility, inclusiveness, and local ownership of peacebuilding efforts.

3. Combat Misinformation through Media Literacy and Fact-Checking

Misinformation continues to be a major driver of conflict in Somalia. Developing national media literacy programs can help the public critically evaluate information sources and reduce the impact of false narratives. At the same time, Somali media outlets should adopt and strengthen internal fact-checking mechanisms to ensure accuracy and credibility in reporting. These initiatives are essential to building public trust and supporting informed, peaceful discourse.



4. Scale Up Capacity-Building for Journalists

Enhancing the skills of journalists through targeted capacity-building programs is vital to promoting ethical and conflict-sensitive reporting. MAP's training efforts in Puntland should be expanded to reach journalists across all regions of Somalia. Training should cover ethical standards, investigative techniques, conflict resolution, and digital safety. Special attention should be given to journalists operating in high-risk or under-resourced areas, ensuring they receive adequate support, protection, and professional development opportunities.

5. Secure International Support for Media-Led Peacebuilding

International development partners and donors have a key role to play in supporting Somali media. Funding should prioritize programs that strengthen ethical journalism, promote freedom of expression, combat misinformation, and institutionalize peace councils. Strategic partnerships between Somali media organizations and international bodies can foster knowledge exchange, provide technical resources, and promote sustainable peacebuilding practices.

6. Establish a Policy Framework for Media–Government Relations

A clear, collaborative policy framework is needed to govern the relationship between the Somali government and media institutions. This framework should safeguard media freedom while ensuring accountability and transparency in reporting. Legal protections for journalists and clear ethical standards can foster a media environment conducive to peacebuilding, free from political interference and censorship.

6. Encourage Public Participation in Media-Led Peace Initiatives

Community engagement is essential for the success of peacebuilding efforts. Media-led initiatives, such as peace councils, should actively involve diverse community stakeholders—including women, youth, religious leaders, and marginalized groups. Public participation not only strengthens the legitimacy of peace efforts but also ensures that solutions are inclusive and grounded in local realities.

While the Somali media sector continues to grapple with multiple challenges, it also holds significant potential to contribute to national peacebuilding. MAP's work in Puntland offers valuable lessons in using media as a tool for dialogue, accountability, and societal healing. By expanding successful initiatives, addressing systemic barriers, and fostering inclusive collaboration among stakeholders, Somalia can unlock the media's full potential as a driver of peace and social cohesion.



References

- Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>
- BBC Media Action. (2023). Media in conflict zones: The case of Somalia.
- Finnish Foundation for Media and Development. (2017). The role of MAP in promoting ethical journalism in Somalia.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Hoxha, D. (2014). Journalism ethics in conflict zones: A comparative study.
- Howard, R. (2002). Media, war, and conflict. *Journal of Media Studies*, 4(3), 45–67.
- Kaldor, M. (2000). *New and old wars: Organized violence in a global era*. Stanford University Press.
- Lynch, J., & Galtung, J. (2010). *Reporting conflict: Media coverage of war and peace*. Sage Publications.
- Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2005). *Peace journalism*. The Media Foundation.
- Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2005). *Peace journalism*. Hawthorn Press.
- Reiff, D. (1998). Media control and conflict in Somalia. *International Journal of Media Studies*, 6(2), 88–101.
- South African Media Institute. (2019). *Promoting ethical journalism in post-apartheid South Africa*.
- UNESCO. (2012). *Misinformation in conflict zones: Challenges and solutions*.
- UNESCO. (2012). *Media development indicators: A framework for assessing media development*. UNESCO



PAPER VII

THE EFFECTS OF SOMALI SOCIAL MEDIA ON PEACE, CONFLICT, AND SOCIAL COHESION: A CASE STUDY OF THE HERALE AND ABUDWAK CONFLICT IN GALMUDUG

Author:

Mohamed Abdullahi Ahmed, Abdirizak
Ibrahim Ali



Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted impact of Somali social media on peace, conflict, and social cohesion within the context of the recent conflict between the Herale and Abudwak communities in Galmudug State of Somalia. Social media has become an increasingly influential tool in shaping public opinion and community dynamics, particularly in fragile contexts. The Herale-Abudwak conflict provides a pertinent case study to explore how digital platforms can both exacerbate tensions and facilitate peacebuilding efforts. A significant aspect of this research focused on the activities of Somali social media users from both the Herale and Abudwak clans, who had been posting videos and photos taken during the fighting. These posts often included inflammatory clan rhetoric and content that incited violence, further exacerbating the situation. By spreading misinformation and hate speech, these social media activities deepened divides and escalated conflicts.

To achieve a comprehensive analysis, this study employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through surveys administered to members of both communities, assessing their social media usage and perceptions of its impact. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including community leaders, social media influencers, and peacebuilders. Additionally, a content analysis of social media posts related to the conflict was conducted to identify key themes, narratives, and influencers shaping the digital discourse. Network analysis further examined how information spreads through social media networks and the role of key influencers in shaping public opinion. The findings highlighted instances where social media successfully promoted mutual understanding and reconciliation, alongside examples where it fueled hostilities and conflict escalation.

By understanding these dynamics, the research sought to provide actionable recommendations for leveraging social media more effectively to enhance social cohesion and peacebuilding. The study also offered policy recommendations for regulating social media use in fragile contexts like Galmudug, balancing the need to protect freedom of expression with the necessity to prevent harmful content. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of media literacy programs to equip communities with the skills to assess information and engage responsibly online critically. The overarching goal was to harness the potential of social media as a tool for peace, ensuring it contributed positively to the fabric of social cohesion in Galmudug and similar contexts.

Key Words: Social media, Conflict, Peacebuilding, Social Cohesion, Galmudug, Herale, Abudwak, Misinformation.



1.0 Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media and internet connectivity has fundamentally transformed communication, particularly in fragile and conflict-prone regions such as Somalia. As an example, in the Galgaduud region of Galmudug, Somalia, the recent outbreak of violence between the Abudwak and Herale communities highlighted the complex and often differing role of social media in either exacerbating conflicts or fostering peace. The conflict, which erupted on 8 June 2024 in the Laandheer area, resulted in more than 50 fatalities and over 60 injuries, including one woman, making it one of the deadliest inter-clan conflicts in recent years in Galmudug. The incident, involving heavily armed militia groups from both clans, underscored the deep-rooted tensions and rivalry over resources, territory, and political influence that characterized the interactions between these communities.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become pivotal in shaping the narratives around such conflicts. While these platforms have the potential to bridge divides, spread accurate information, and promote peace, they can also be manipulated to spread misinformation, incite violence, and deepen societal cleavages. During the Herale-Abudwak conflict, social media was extensively used by individuals from both clans to share videos and photos of the ongoing violence. These posts, often accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric, not only fueled hostilities but also mobilized subject clan members to engage in further violence. The use of clan-based rhetoric exacerbated tensions, making reconciliation efforts more challenging.

Given the significant role that social media played in this conflict, it is essential to understand its impact on peace, conflict, and social cohesion in such fragile contexts. This research paper aims to investigate how social media influenced the dynamics of the Herale-Abudwak conflict, focusing on both its destructive and constructive potential. By analyzing the social media activity during and after the conflict, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the dual role of social media in either aggravating or alleviating inter-clan violence.



The research also aims to explore how social media could be leveraged to enhance peacebuilding efforts, particularly by promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups such as young women in peace processes. Moreover, the study examined the ethical implications of social media usage in conflict situations, offering recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on how to regulate and guide social media use to prevent it from being a tool of division and violence.



Figure 1 Map 1: Areas that Marihan and Dir clan conflict happened, which is between Herale and Abudwaaq (Laandheer)

2.0 Literature Review

Social media is becoming a more important tool for influencing how the general public views and behaves in relation to peace and conflict (Grizelj et al., 2020; James, 2024; Khalif, 2023; Norah & Akpanke, 2024; Skjerdal, 2011). Due to social media's widespread use, information can spread quickly, mobilizing communities and potentially intensifying hostilities while also supporting efforts to promote peace. This literature review examined the effects of social media on conflict dynamics, peace processes, and social cohesion, particularly within the context of Somalia's clan-based conflicts.



2.1 Social Media and Conflict Dynamics

Social media has played a dual role in conflict dynamics, serving as both a catalyst for conflict escalation and a medium for peacebuilding. Social media platforms facilitate the rapid spread of information and misinformation, which can exacerbate existing tensions and incite violence. This effect is especially noticeable in regions that are prone to conflict, like Somalia (Muhammed T & Mathew, 2022). The spread of inflammatory content and propaganda can deepen divides between conflicting groups (Burstion et al., 2018; Proctor, 2021). Social media has exacerbated clan-based conflicts in Somalia by disseminating divisive rhetoric and false information. Social media can escalate tensions between clans by broadcasting exaggerated or false claims that intensify existing grievances (Abdi Mohamed Qasaye, 2023; Maalim, 2024; Sonu, 2015). This phenomenon is evident in conflicts like those between the Marehan and Dir clans, where social media has been used to mobilize support and exacerbate hostilities.

2.2 Social Media and Peacebuilding

Conversely, social media also offers potential for peacebuilding by facilitating dialogue, promoting understanding, and mobilizing support for peace initiatives. Social media can be harnessed to foster positive engagement and bridge divides between conflicting communities (ElTarabishi & Galal, 2023; Thomas, 2024). Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to organize peacebuilding activities, share peace messages, and facilitate online forums for dialogue.

In Somalia, successful peacebuilding efforts have often leveraged social media to enhance communication and coordination among peace stakeholders. Social media platforms have been utilized to share stories of reconciliation and mobilize support for peace initiatives. The use of social media for peacebuilding aligns with the findings of Lederach (2007), who emphasizes the importance of local engagement and communication in sustaining peace agreements (Joakim Öjendal, 2017).



.3 Social Media and Social Cohesion

The impact of social media on social cohesion is multifaceted. On one hand, social media can strengthen social cohesion by connecting individuals across different communities and fostering a sense of shared identity (Sahharon et al., 2023; Stieglitz & Ross, 2022, 2022). Social media can enhance social capital by facilitating interactions and building networks among individuals who may not otherwise engage with one another.

On the other hand, social media can also undermine social cohesion by perpetuating divisions and reinforcing echo chambers. Social media platforms can create isolated communities where users are exposed primarily to viewpoints that will strengthen their existing beliefs, thereby deepening social divides (González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2022; Jiang et al., 2021; Lauer, 2021). This dynamic has been observed in Somalia, where social media can both connect and divide communities depending on how it is used.

2.4 Case Studies and Practical Implications

Several case studies illustrate the complex role of social media in conflict and peacebuilding. The 2012-2019 South Sudanese and Zimbabwe conflicts demonstrated how social media could be used to incite violence and spread hate speech, but also how it facilitated international advocacy and mobilization for peace (Shajema, 2020; Tawanda & Mbwirire, 2020). Similarly, the 2011 Arab Spring showcased social media's potential for mobilizing mass protests and advancing democratic movements, though it also revealed the risks of social media being used for harmful purposes (Howard et al., 2011).

In Somalia, the role of social media in peacebuilding and conflict exacerbation reflects broader trends observed in these case studies. The literature reveals that social media plays a complex role in influencing conflict dynamics, peacebuilding efforts, and social cohesion. While it can amplify tensions and spread misinformation, it also offers opportunities for dialogue, reconciliation, and enhanced community engagement. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies that leverage social media for positive outcomes in conflict-affected regions.



3.0 Methodology

The methodology for this research on the peace process between the Marehan and Dir clans in the Abudwaq and Hirale regions of Somalia involved a mixed-methods approach and interviewed 200 respondents. This combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict, the interventions used, and the outcomes of the peace process.

4.0 Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic distribution of respondents reveals a predominantly youthful and male sample, with 71% identifying as male and only 29% as female. Age-wise, the majority fall within the 18–24 (40%) and 25–34 (35%) age brackets, reflecting the centrality of youth in digital engagement and political discourse. Only 10% were aged 35–44, while individuals aged 45–54 (6%) and 55 and above (4%) were significantly underrepresented, suggesting limited participation from older demographics in social media-related activities surveyed.

Occupationally, 40% of respondents reported being employed, followed by self-employed and social media users (20% each). Students and the unemployed each made up 10% of the sample. This data reflects a respondent pool that is both economically active and digitally engaged, particularly among younger cohorts. The strong representation of social media users and employed youth highlights the increasing role of digitally literate young professionals in shaping public discourse and potentially influencing peacebuilding and governance processes in Somalia.

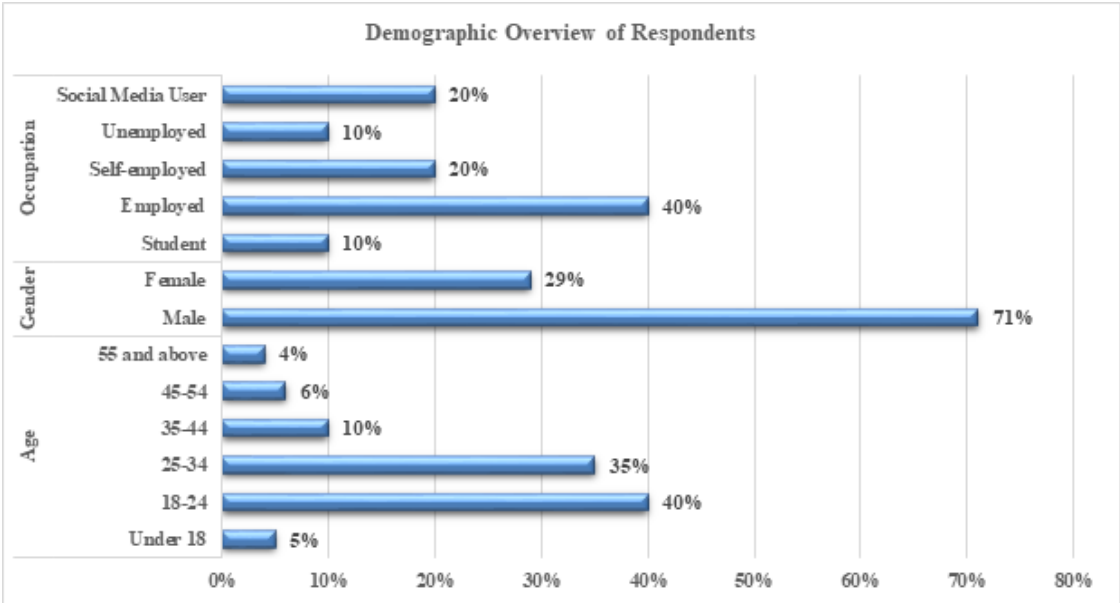


Figure 2 Demographic Overview Graph Representations.



4.2 Social Media Engagement

Based on the data presented in the "Social Media Usage Overview" chart, the findings demonstrate that social media has become an integral part of users' daily lives, with 80% reporting daily engagement. Platforms such as WhatsApp (80%), Facebook (75%), and YouTube (65%) dominate user preference, indicating a clear trend toward instant messaging, multimedia sharing, and video content consumption. The high frequency of use and platform dominance underscore the growing role of social media in shaping information access, communication habits, and digital socialization.

Moreover, the primary purposes for engaging with social media, news, and information (70%), social connection (65%), and entertainment (55%), reveal a shift toward social media as a multi-functional tool that blends information, social bonding, and leisure. Notably, 30% of users also engage in advocacy and activism, suggesting that while civic engagement is not the leading driver, digital platforms still hold potential for social mobilization and political discourse, as summarized in Figure 3. These insights are particularly relevant for strategists, activists, and policymakers seeking to leverage digital platforms for outreach, advocacy, and citizen engagement in today's increasingly connected societies.

Social Media Engagement

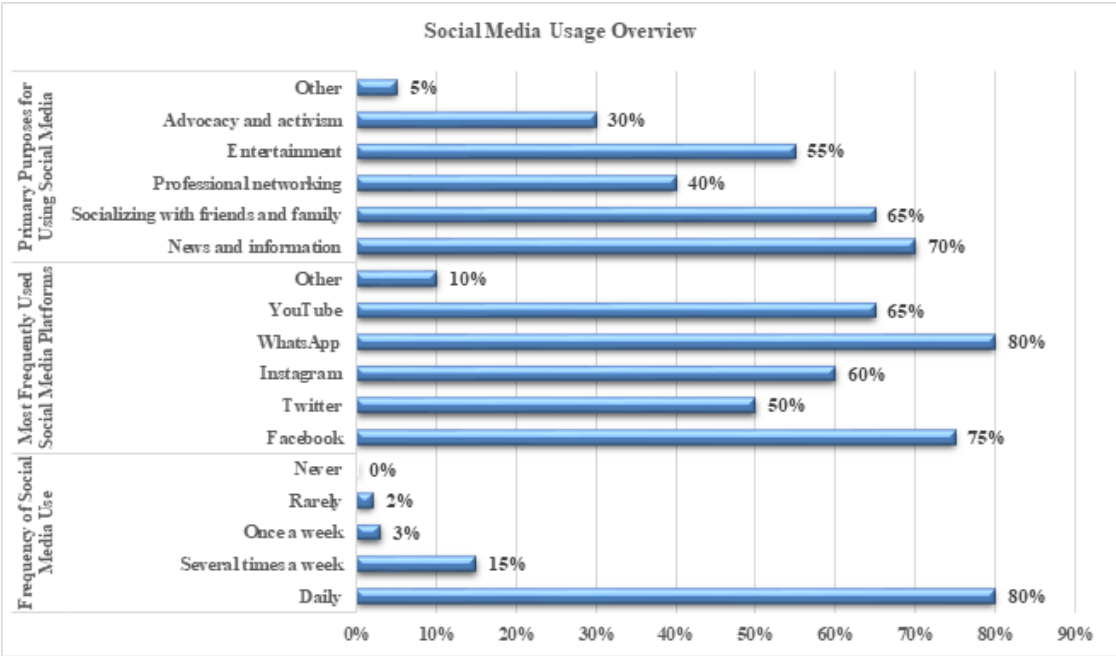


Figure 3 Social Media Engagement Graph Representations.



4.3 Social Media's Dual Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding

The data illustrate the complex duality of social media in conflict and peacebuilding processes. A significant 85% of respondents reported encountering social media content related to conflict, with 70% viewing videos and photos of the conflict and 60% accessing news articles. Disturbingly, 65% believed that social media exacerbated tensions, and 60% noted the spread of misinformation, confirming social media's role in inflaming conflict dynamics. Content such as clan rhetoric and inflammatory language (50%) and incitement to violence (55%) were also prevalent, raising concerns about the medium's capacity to escalate hostilities and deepen divisions.

Conversely, the same platforms are also seen as vehicles for peacebuilding. Over 60% of participants had encountered peace-oriented content, including online discussions, campaigns promoting unity, and educational content on conflict resolution. Furthermore, 30%–35% acknowledged social media's role in supporting peace initiatives and promoting dialogue and understanding. Notably, 50% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that social media contributes to spreading clan-based rhetoric, highlighting the platform's powerful influence in shaping public sentiment. This paradox underscores the urgent need for digital peacebuilding strategies, ethical content moderation, and media literacy to mitigate harm and harness social media's potential as a tool for sustainable peace.

Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding

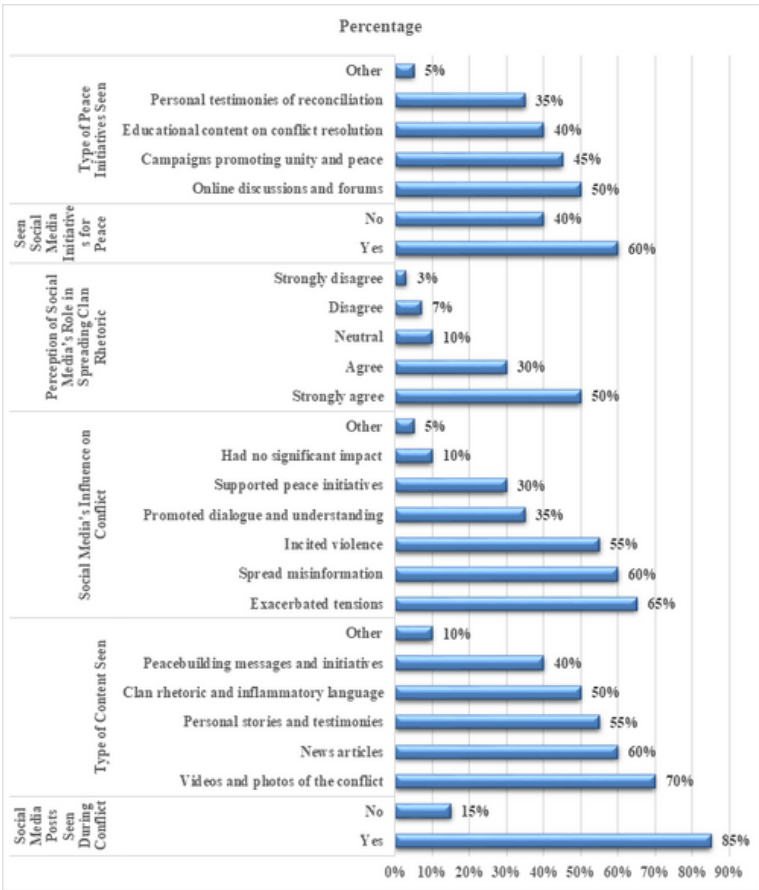


Figure 4 Role in Conflict and Peacebuilding Graph Representations.



4.4 Impact on Social Cohesion

The data illustrate a multifaceted perspective on the role of social media in shaping social cohesion and its utility in peacebuilding efforts. A significant portion of respondents (45%) strongly agree and 35% agree that social media holds potential for peace, reflecting a strong belief in its capacity to foster constructive dialogue and community resilience. Despite this optimism, opinions on actual outcomes are more divided: while 40% reported that social media improved social cohesion, a slightly higher percentage (50%) believed it weakened cohesion, indicating an underlying tension between potential and lived experience.

Strategically, respondents endorse proactive measures to leverage social media for peace. Notably, 60% support promoting positive and constructive dialogue, and 55% advocate countering misinformation and hate speech, highlighting content integrity as a priority. Similarly, promoting ethical use of social media (55%) and education about harmful content (60%) were identified as key regulatory needs. In terms of institutional roles, there is a clear call for government and local authority engagement, especially in developing regulations (60%) and supporting peacebuilding initiatives (55%) as summarized in Figure 5. This suggests that while digital platforms are vital arenas for peacebuilding, their effectiveness relies heavily on informed usage, institutional support, and responsible governance.

Impact on Social Cohesion

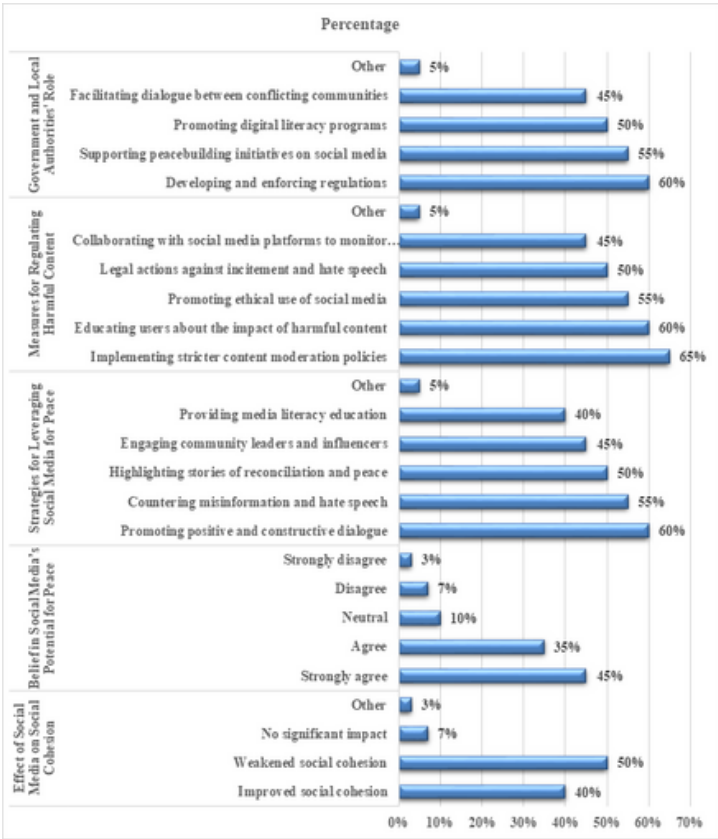


Figure 5 Impact on Social Cohesion Graph Representations.

The findings of this study offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the dualistic role social media plays in shaping conflict dynamics, peacebuilding efforts, and social cohesion within Somali communities. These results not only affirm prevailing theories in the literature but also extend them by highlighting the context-specific realities in Somalia, where clan identity, historical grievances, and fragile governance structures intersect with the digital information ecosystem.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Conflict Escalation

The study reinforces the argument that social media can significantly exacerbate conflict by enabling the rapid spread of inflammatory content, misinformation, and divisive clan-based rhetoric. A considerable number of respondents reported encountering such content online, echoing findings by Muhammed T. and Mathew (2022), and Burston et al. (2018), who discuss the potential of digital platforms to amplify identity-based grievances. These narratives often exploit deep-seated tensions, such as those between the Marehan and Dir clans, by recycling historical injustices and broadcasting them to broad audiences in real time, often without verification. This aligns with Qasaye (2023) and Maalim (2024), who noted that the lack of regulatory frameworks allows hostile messaging to flourish, increasing the risk of physical violence.

Social Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding and Positive Engagement

Despite these risks, the data equally highlight the potential of social media as a force for good. Several respondents described their participation in digital peace campaigns, online dialogues, and conflict resolution forums. This reflects the findings of ElTarabishi & Galal (2023) and Thomas (2024), who emphasized the transformative potential of social media to promote understanding, disseminate educational content, and bridge intercommunal divides. These platforms can give voice to marginalized perspectives, build empathy through storytelling, and even mobilize grassroots peacebuilding efforts when designed with intentionality. Such uses of social media support Lederach's (2007) vision of "strategic peace infrastructure," where everyday citizens are empowered to take part in reconciliation processes.

Tensions Between Connection and Division: Impact on Social Cohesion

In terms of social cohesion, the findings present a complex picture. A significant portion of respondents viewed social media as a tool for strengthening community bonds, particularly through storytelling, collaborative activism, and real-time communication. This observation aligns with Sahharon et al. (2023) and Stieglitz & Ross (2022), who argue that digital platforms can enhance social capital and participatory engagement when used ethically. However, this optimism is tempered by equally strong concerns regarding the negative impact of echo chambers, disinformation campaigns, and online harassment. These divisive practices deepen polarization and fragment communities, consistent with the work of González-Bailón & Lelkes (2022) and Jiang et al. (2021), who caution against the unmoderated use of social media in politically sensitive environments.



A Context-Dependent and Strategically Contingent Influence

Overall, the findings point to the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of social media's influence on peace and conflict in Somalia. Rather than being inherently positive or negative, its impact is shaped by who uses it, how they use it, and the sociopolitical context in which it is used. The Somali case illustrates both the dangers of weaponized information and the opportunities for grassroots-led peacebuilding. Therefore, policy responses must be equally multifaceted: promoting digital literacy, enhancing ethical content creation, encouraging community-led moderation, and establishing legal frameworks that address incitement without stifling free expression.



6.0 Recommendations for Improvement

To better harness social media for peacebuilding, several strategies were proposed by respondents:

- **Promoting Constructive Dialogue:** There was a call for increased efforts to foster positive and productive discussions on social media. This includes encouraging respectful exchanges and focusing on shared goals and interests.
- **Countering Misinformation:** Respondents emphasized the need for initiatives to combat misinformation and hate speech. This could involve fact-checking services and campaigns to educate users about the dangers of false information.
- **Engaging Community Leaders and Influencers:** Leveraging the influence of community leaders and social media influencers was suggested to promote peace and unity. Their involvement could help amplify positive messages and foster trust.
- **Media Literacy Education:** Providing education on responsible social media use and critical media literacy was highlighted as a key measure to mitigate the negative impacts of harmful content.

Policy Measures

Respondents provided several recommendations for regulating harmful content on social media:

- **Stricter Content Moderation:** Implementing more rigorous content moderation policies to address harmful posts and reduce the spread of inflammatory content.
- **Educational Programs:** Increasing efforts to educate users about the consequences of harmful social media use and promoting ethical practices online.
- **Legal Actions:** Taking legal measures against those who incite violence or spread hate speech on social media.
- **Collaborations:** Collaborating with social media platforms to develop and enforce guidelines that prevent the dissemination of harmful content.

Government and Local Authority Roles

There was a consensus on the need for government and local authorities to play an active role in managing social media's impact:

- **Developing Regulations:** Crafting and enforcing regulations to govern social media use and addressing issues related to conflict and peacebuilding.
- **Supporting Initiatives:** Supporting and funding peacebuilding initiatives that utilize social media as a tool for promoting reconciliation and dialogue.
- **Facilitating Dialogue:** Encouraging and facilitating dialogue between conflicting communities through social media platforms.



Conclusion

The survey reveals the significant role of social media in exacerbating and mitigating conflict, especially in the Herale and Abudwak conflict. Social media has been both a platform for spreading inflammatory rhetoric and misinformation that fuels tensions and a vital tool for peacebuilding efforts and fostering dialogue among affected communities. However, it also has the potential to catalyze positive change. The survey results indicate that social media has the power to influence social cohesion in profound ways. For some, it has weakened community bonds by amplifying divisive narratives and spreading hate speech. In contrast, for others, it has improved social cohesion by providing a space for constructive dialogue, sharing personal stories of reconciliation, and promoting peace initiatives. These divergent experiences highlight the complexity of social media's impact on communities and the need for nuanced approaches to its management. In conclusion, the survey highlights the influential role of social media in shaping perceptions and actions during the Herale and Abudwak conflict. Balancing regulation with initiatives to promote positive engagement and dialogue is necessary for building a more cohesive and peaceful society.

References

- Abdi Mohamed Qasaye, O. (2023). *Clan and Islamic identities in Somali society. International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 12(5), 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.21275/sr23425132632>
- Burston, A., Barrios, J. C., Gomez, D., Sturm, I., Uppal, A., Yang, Y., & Walther, P. J. B. (2018). *The danger of fake news in inflaming or suppressing social conflict*. Center for Information Technology and Society - UC Santa Barbara. <https://www.cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news/danger-social>
- ElTarabishi, M., & Galal, S. (2023). The role of social media in promoting peace building and prevention of societal violence among university youth (Analytical descriptive study). *Journal of Media and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(4), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.21608/jmis.2023.313513>
- González-Bailón, S., & Lelkes, Y. (2022). Do social media undermine social cohesion? A critical review. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12091>
- Grizelj, I., Frank, A. M., & Deng, A. A. C. (2020). Pioneering peace pathways: Making connections to end violent conflict. *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 29, 93–94.
- Howard, P., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M., Mari, W., & Mazaid, M. (2011). *Opening closed regimes: What was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?* SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595096>
- James, A. B. (2024). The role of social media in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. *International Journal of Social Science*, 14(2), 770–776.
- Jiang, J., Ren, X., & Ferrara, E. (2021). Social media polarization and echo chambers in the context of COVID-19: Case study. *JMIRx Med*, 2(3), e29570. <https://doi.org/10.2196/29570>
- Joakim, Ö., Leonardsson, H., & Lundström, M. (2017). *Local peacebuilding – Challenges and opportunities*. Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA). https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-05_Peacebuilding_webb_Tillganp.pdf
- Khalif, H. (2023). The role of the media in conflict resolution and management in Somalia. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR23722160333>
- Lauer, D. (2021). Facebook's ethical failures are not accidental; they are part of the business model. *AI and Ethics*, 1(4), 395–403. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-021-00068-x>

References

- Maalim, M. (2024). TikTok in Somalia: A breeding ground for clan violence, division, and hate. *Somali Signal*. <https://somalisignal.com/tiktok-in-somalia-a-breeding-ground-for-clan-violence-division-and-hate/>
- Muhammed T, S., & Mathew, S. K. (2022). The disaster of misinformation: A review of research in social media. *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics*, 13(4), 271–285. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41060-022-00311-6>
- Norah, A., & Akpanke, K. (2024). Social media for conflict escalation and de-escalation: Two sides of a coin. *Intercontinental Journal of Social Sciences*, 1, 208–230. <https://doi.org/10.62583/24ybh184>
- Proctor, K. (2021). *Social media and conflict: Understanding risks and resilience; An applied framework for analysis*. Mercy Corps. <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Assessing-Digital-Conflict-Risks-Resilience-073021.pdf>
- Sahharon, H., Zulkefli, M. Y., & Ibnu, I. (2023). Enhancing the sense of social cohesion through virtual community: A systematic review. *Virtual Communities Review*, 378.
- Shajema, Y. (2020). *Assessment of the role of media in conflict: A case of South Sudan* [Master's thesis, University of Nairobi, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies].
- Skjerdal, T. S. (2011). The Somali media and their peace-building potential. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 11, 27–50.
- Sonu, D. (2015). In pursuit of peace. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 25(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.5840/peacejustice20152511>
- Stieglitz, S., & Ross, B. (2022). The impact of social media on social cohesion: A double-edged sword. *Media and Communication*, 10, 104–107. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5792>
- Tawanda, C., & Mbwire, J. (2020). *The role of media in peacebuilding: A case study of both public and private media in Harare, Zimbabwe*.
- Thomas, S. (2024). Echoes of peace: Media's challenges and opportunities in shaping societal narratives. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 12, 2695–2702. <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.12.1.1085>