



The Role of Social Media in Fueling Resource-Based Conflict: A Case Study of Inter-Clan Conflicts in Somalia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media has rapidly transformed the information landscape in Somalia, emerging as a potent tool in shaping inter-clan conflict dynamics, particularly in resource-scarce regions. The country, historically plagued by resource-based inter-clan conflicts over land, pasture, and water, now faces a digital dimension to its conflict landscape. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Twitter have become central to clan mobilization, misinformation dissemination, and escalation of violence. The study explores how the proliferation of social media influences inter-clan conflicts in Somalia and the mechanisms communities and authorities use to respond. The devastating impact of misinformation and hate speech in a weak regulatory and low digital literacy environment has intensified clan polarization and conflict recurrence. **Methods:** This study employed mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 304 social media users across five federal states (Jubbaland, Southwest, Puntland, Galmudug, and Hirshabelle), while qualitative data were gathered from 20 key informant interviews (KIIs), including community leaders, NGO officials, protection officers, and youth representatives. The analysis involved descriptive statistical techniques for quantitative data using SPSS and thematic analysis for qualitative responses. **Results:** Findings indicate that 94.4% of respondents actively use social media, with 72.7% having witnessed clan mobilization online. Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the primary platforms for conflict-related content, with 64.4% and 12.2% usage respectively in mobilization efforts. About 70.7% reported encountering false information about clans, and 61.5% agreed that misinformation and hate speech have directly contributed to violence in their communities. A significant portion (45.7%) described social media's influence during clan conflict as "very negative." Despite this, community and authority responses remain inconsistent. 35.9% acknowledged institutional responses, while 36.2% rated local mechanisms as effective. Strategies proposed include enhanced digital literacy, stronger legislation, content moderation, and engagement with influencers and tech companies. **Conclusion and Recommendation:** The study reveals that social media has amplified the frequency and intensity of inter-clan conflicts in Somalia, especially in resource-constrained areas. The unchecked spread of misinformation and hate speech, combined with weak regulatory systems and low digital literacy, contributes to escalating tensions and real-world violence. The study recommends implementing a comprehensive digital peacebuilding strategy encompassing community awareness, content regulation, policy enforcement, and collaboration with social media platforms. Empowering local actors, fostering responsible digital engagement, and improving institutional response mechanisms are essential for promoting social cohesion and mitigating the digital drivers of conflict. Future

research should explore longitudinal impacts of digital narratives on conflict and assess the effectiveness of community-based countermeasures.

BACKGROUND

Resource-based conflicts, driven by competition over scarce resources such as water, land, and pasture, have long been a defining feature of Somalia's socio-political landscape (FAO, 2023). These conflicts, often occurring between clans, have been exacerbated by environmental stressors like drought and flooding, which further intensify resource scarcity (World Bank, 2024). In recent years, the rapid proliferation of social media platforms has added a new and complex dimension to these disputes, amplifying tensions, accelerating mobilization, and shaping conflict dynamics in unprecedented ways.

Globally, social media has transformed how communities share information and organize collective action, with both positive and negative consequences (Jost et al., 2018). In fragile states like Somalia, where governance structures are weak and traditional mediation mechanisms are under strain, social media has become a double-edged sword—facilitating communication while simultaneously fuelling division. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and YouTube are widely used across the country, even in rural areas, due to the expansion of mobile internet access (GSMA, 2023). According to Hilowle (2024), over 75% of Somalia's population now has mobile internet access, making social media a powerful tool for clan-based mobilization and information dissemination. However, this connectivity has also enabled the rapid spread of misinformation, hate speech, and propaganda, particularly during resource-based disputes. For instance, during the 2023 drought in the Gedo region, social media posts falsely accusing rival clans of hoarding water escalated tensions, triggering violent clashes that displaced over 10,000 people (UNHCR, 2023). Similarly, in Puntland, contested narratives about land ownership circulated in WhatsApp groups have reignited longstanding clan rivalries (Chonka, 2021).

Despite the growing influence of social media on inter-clan conflicts in Somalia, its specific role in shaping resource-based disputes remains underexplored. Existing research has examined the broader socio-political impacts of clan rivalries, but limited attention has been given to how digital platforms exacerbate these tensions (Hassein, 2022). The lack of effective regulatory frameworks and limited capacity of local authorities to counter online provocations further compound the problem (UNDP, 2023). The unchecked spread of inflammatory content risks deepening clan divisions and undermining peacebuilding efforts, making it increasingly difficult to resolve resource-based conflicts through traditional mechanisms. Without a clear understanding of how social media influences these conflicts, policymakers and community leaders are ill-equipped to mitigate its destabilizing effects. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the extent to which social media escalates inter-clan conflict, facilitates mobilization, and spreads divisive narratives. Additionally, it will explore how communities and authorities respond to online-driven tensions and propose strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of social media on resource-based disputes in Somalia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study adopts a mixed-method research approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture objective and subjective dimensions of social media's role in

inter-clan conflicts (Barrett & Conostas, 2014). This combination strengthens the research design by providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. It is particularly effective in addressing the ‘what, why, and how’ questions related to the escalation of conflicts, clan mobilization, misinformation, and community responses through social media, offering comprehensive evidence to support the study’s objectives.

Study Area

The study encompasses all federal states in Somalia, reflecting the widespread use of social media and the prevalence of resource-based inter-clan conflicts across the country. However, for practical feasibility and depth of analysis, five states were purposively selected based on their significance in resource conflicts, social media penetration, and diversity of ecological and social contexts: Jubbaland State, Southwest State, Galmudug State, Puntland State, and Hirshabelle State. Jubbaland State: Encompassing Gedo (Luuq, Bardhere) and Lower Juba (Kismayo), this flood-prone region experiences intense clan disputes over water and pasture, amplified by social media narratives (UNFPA, 2024). On the other hand, Southwest State: Covering Bay (Baidoa) and Bakool (Hudur), this drought-affected area sees frequent conflicts over scarce resources, with social media playing a growing role in mobilization (World Bank, 2020). Also, Galmudug State: Including Mudug and Galgaduud, this state is marked by pastoralist rivalries over land, where digital platforms escalate tensions (SIPD, 2024). Puntland State: Represented by Bari and Sool, this semi-arid region faces resource disputes exacerbated by online misinformation (Ahmed, 2024). Hirshabelle State: Covering Hiraan and Middle Shabelle, this area is prone to both drought and flooding, with social media influencing clan dynamics (UNHCR, 2023). These states were chosen due to their high incidence of resource-based conflicts, significant mobile internet access (GSMA, 2023), and representation of Somalia’s geographic and climatic diversity, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of social media’s role in inter-clan disputes.

Study Population

The study targets a population of 2,000 individuals actively engaged in or affected by social media dynamics in resource-based conflicts across the selected states. This includes clan members, youth (social media users), and key informants such as traditional elders, local authorities, civil society representatives, and technology company personnel. The total target population of 2,000 is justified by the need to capture a diverse cross-section of social media users and stakeholders in conflict zones, reflecting Somalia’s estimated 60% mobile internet penetration among its 17 million population (GSMA, 2023), with a focus on active users in conflict-prone areas. The breakdown across the five states is as follows:

Table 1: Target Population

Federal States	Towns	Number of Participants
Jubbaland State	Kismayo	450
	Bardhere	250
Southwest State	Baidoa	450
	Hudur	200
Galmudug State	Galkayo	350
Puntland State	Bosaso	300
Hirshabelle State	Beletweyne	250
Total		2,000

Source: Author, 2025

Sampling Techniques

A sample is a subset of the population under investigation (Wilson, 2014). With a target population of 2,000 (<10,000), the sample size is calculated using Yamane's (1973) formula:

A sample is a fraction or portion of the population under investigation. It also refers to a group of individuals in a study who are participating in or are engaged in it (Wilson, 2014).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where,

- n = is the sample size
- N = Population Size (2,000)
- e = Acceptable sampling error ($e = 0.05$, when confidence level is 95%)
- $n = 2000 / 1 + 2000(0.05^2) = 333$

The sample size is thus 333 participants. Proportionate stratification ensures representation from each stratum (town), calculated as:

$$nh = (Nh/N) * n$$

Where:

- nh = sample size for stratum h
- Nh = population size for stratum h
- N = total population size (2,000)
- n = total sample size (333)

Table 2: Target Population and Sample Size

Stratum	Towns	Targets	Proportional Allocations	Sample (nh)
<i>Jubbaland State</i>	Kismayo	450	$(450/2000) \times 333$	75
	Bardhere	250	$(250/2000) \times 333$	42
<i>Southwest State</i>	Baidoa	450	$(450/2000) \times 333$	75
	Hudur	200	$(200/2000) \times 333$	33
<i>Galmudug State</i>	Galkayo	350	$(350/2000) \times 333$	58
<i>Puntland State</i>	Bosaso	300	$(300/2000) \times 333$	50
<i>Hirshabelle State</i>	Beletweyne	250	$(250/2000) \times 333$	42
Total		2000		333

Source: Author, 2025

The sample size of 333 is justified by the need for statistical reliability across five states, balancing feasibility with representativeness. Purposive sampling is used to select 20 key informant interviews (KIIs) 4 each from traditional elders, local authorities, civil society representatives, technology company personnel, and youth leaders ensuring participants with expertise in social media and conflict dynamics. Stratified random sampling is applied to the broader population to reflect diverse perspectives.

Data Collection Tools

The study employs questionnaires and key informant interview guides for data collection. Structured questionnaires, administered to social media users (clan members and youth), assess usage patterns, exposure to conflict-related content, and perceptions of escalation. Key informant interviews provide qualitative insights from stakeholders on mobilization, misinformation, and responses. Two research assistants, trained to mitigate language barriers and understand study objectives, assist in data collection to enhance accuracy and efficiency.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires is analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (regression models) via SPSS V.25 to explore relationships between social media use and conflict dynamics. Qualitative data from interviews is thematically analyzed, identifying patterns related to escalation, mobilization, misinformation, and mitigation strategies. Themes are derived from study objectives and emerging data, with findings presented narratively to complement quantitative results.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and approval from relevant Somali authorities. Participants receive a detailed overview of the study's aims and objectives, participating voluntarily. Confidentiality is ensured by securely storing data, accessible only to the research team, and anonymizing identifiable information. Interviews and data collection occur in private settings to protect privacy, with participants assured that personal details will not be disclosed without consent. The study collects only essential data, minimizing intrusion and fostering trust to ensure honest responses without fear of repercussions.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study targeted 333 participants, of whom 304 responded, representing a response rate of 91.3%, while 29 (8.7%) did not return their questionnaires. Respondents were drawn from various districts across Somalia, ensuring diverse perspectives on the influence of social media on clan mobilization and conflict.

The highest representation was from Baidoa District (10.9%), followed by Heliwa (8.9%), Hudur (8.2%), Balad (7.6%), and Barawa (7.2%). Other districts represented included Hodan (5.9%), Kismayo (5.6%), Wadajir (3.9%), Wardhigley (3.0%), Daynile (2.3%), Dharkenley (2.6%), and Waberi (2.6%). Additionally, 31.6% of respondents were drawn from 43 other districts collectively grouped under "Others." This wide geographical distribution allowed for the inclusion of voices from both central and peripheral regions, thus enriching the diversity and contextual relevance of the findings.

In terms of gender distribution, 222 (73.0%) of the respondents were male, while 82 (27.0%) were female. This gender disparity may reflect broader socio-cultural dynamics in Somalia that influence both access to digital technology and participation in social research.

Regarding age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents were aged between 25–34 years (49.0%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (23.0%) and 18–24 years (22.0%). Only 6.0% of respondents were aged 45–54 years, indicating that the majority of participants were

young to middle-aged adults, who are typically more engaged in online activities and digital communication.

On the level of education, the majority of respondents (83.2%) had attained tertiary or university education, while 14.5% had completed secondary education. A smaller proportion had attained only primary education (2.0%), and just 0.3% had no formal education. This high level of education among respondents suggests a digitally literate population capable of engaging critically with social media content and platforms.

Occupationally, a significant portion of respondents were employed in the NGO sector (33.9%), followed by those in the medical profession (20.7%). Other occupations included students (12.2%), government staff (6.9%), teachers in academia (5.9%), and individuals engaged in business (4.9%). Additional groups included social workers (3.9%), wage earners/laborers (2.3%), and respondents from other occupations (4.3%), while 4.9% did not specify their occupation. This occupational diversity highlights the range of perspectives and experiences brought into the study from various professional backgrounds.

Regarding social media usage, an overwhelming majority of respondents (94.4%) reported being active users of social media platforms, while only 5.6% were non-users. This high prevalence of social media engagement underscores the relevance of digital platforms in shaping public discourse, identity politics, and community mobilization in the Somali context (Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (n=304)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age Group (in years)	18–24	67	22.0
	25–34	149	49.0
	35–44	70	23.0
	45–54	18	5.9
Gender	Male	222	73.0
	Female	82	27.0
Location (Selected Districts)	Baidoa District	33	10.9
	Heliwa District	27	8.9
	Hudur District	25	8.2
	Balad District	23	7.6
	Barawa District	22	7.2
	Hodan District	18	5.9
	Kismayo District	17	5.6
	Wadajir District	12	3.9
	Wardhigley District	9	3.0
	Daynile District	7	2.3
	Dharkenley District	8	2.6
	Waberi District	8	2.6
	Others (Remaining 43 Districts)	96	31.6
Level of Education	No formal education	1	0.3
	Primary	6	2.0
	Secondary	44	14.5
	Tertiary/University	253	83.2

Occupation	NGO staff	103	33.9
	Medical staff	63	20.7
	Students	37	12.2
	Government staff	21	6.9
	Academia staff - teachers	18	5.9
	Business	15	4.9
	Labourer - wage earners	7	2.3
	Social workers	12	3.9
	Others (unspecified)	13	4.3
	Not specified	15	4.9
Social Media Use	Yes	287	94.4
	No	17	5.6

Extent of Social Media Use in Escalating Inter-Clan Conflicts Over Resources

This section aimed to examine the extent of social media use in escalating inter-clan conflicts over resources such as land, water, and pasture. The data gathered provides valuable insights into the patterns of social media engagement, the nature of conflict-related content encountered online, and respondents' perceptions of the role of digital platforms in fueling inter-clan tensions in Somalia as summarized in Table 4.

Respondents were asked to indicate the social media platforms they frequently use, with multiple selections allowed. The findings reveal that social media usage is widespread and diverse among the sampled population. The most frequently used platform combinations of Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, accounting for 30% of the responses. This indicates a preference for platforms that offer both messaging capabilities and multimedia content sharing. Following this, 12.5% of respondents reported using both Facebook and WhatsApp, reflecting the popularity of these platforms as complementary tools for social interaction. A notable 11.2% of the respondents use only WhatsApp, indicating a segment that prefers direct messaging over broader social networking features. Meanwhile, 10.5% of respondents reported using all major platforms Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, TikTok, and YouTube demonstrating a comprehensive digital presence across multiple communication ecosystems. Another 9.2% indicated using only Facebook, showing a still significant but smaller segment that relies solely on this platform for social media engagement. Although Facebook and WhatsApp appeared most prominently across combinations, a significant number of respondents reported using multiple platforms concurrently. For instance, 6.6% used Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, while 3.3% used Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, TikTok, and YouTube. Less commonly used platforms such as Twitter/X, TikTok, and Instagram also featured in various combinations, albeit in smaller proportions. These results indicate a high degree of digital connectivity, with individuals engaging across multiple platforms to consume and disseminate information.

Regarding time spent on social media, 35.5% of respondents reported using social media for 1 to 2 hours daily, followed by 23.0% who used it for more than 3 hours, and 22.0% who spent less than 1 hour per day. Additionally, 19.4% reported usage of 2 to 3 hours per day. This distribution suggests that a substantial proportion of the population engages in social media for extended periods, potentially increasing their exposure to conflict-related content and narratives.

When asked whether they had ever come across social media content related to inter-clan conflict in Somalia, a majority 58.9% of respondents confirmed that they had encountered such content, while 41.1% indicated they had not. This suggests a high degree of exposure to conflict-related media content among users, raising concerns about the potential of social media as a vector for perpetuating divisions and tensions.

Respondents were further asked to assess the extent to which social media escalates inter-clan conflict. The responses were varied, but telling. 24.7% believed that social media contributes to conflict escalation to a great extent, while another 21.1% considered its role to be of a very great extent. 17.4% thought it escalates conflict to a small extent, and 12.5% to a moderate extent. Notably, 24.3% of respondents felt that social media does not escalate inter-clan conflict at all. These responses highlight divided perceptions among the public, though a cumulative 57.3% believed that social media plays a moderate to very great role in amplifying clan tensions, pointing to a significant concern over its influence in resource-based disputes.

A compelling finding emerged when respondents were asked whether they had ever witnessed live reporting of active clan conflict on social media. A significant majority, 64.4% responded affirmatively, while 35.5% reported they had not. This illustrates how social media has increasingly become a medium not only for discussion but also for real-time broadcasting of conflict-related events.

Among those who had seen live reports of clan conflict, the nature of content varied. 22.4% of respondents noted seeing general content (unspecified), 20.4% saw captured vehicles and assets, and 15.8% reported seeing retaken land or areas. Other notable observations included weapons captured (13.5%), others (14.5%), and combinations such as captured vehicles and weapons (3.6%), and captured vehicles, retaken areas, and weapons (7.6%). These forms of content reflect the militarization of digital narratives, with graphic displays of power dynamics, territorial conquest, and clan dominance being circulated online.

Table 4: Summary of Social Media Usage and Conflict Content Exposure among Respondents (N=304)

Category/Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Which social media platforms do you frequently use? (Select all that apply)		
WhatsApp only	34	11.2%
Facebook & WhatsApp	38	12.5%
Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube (various combos)	90	30%
All platforms (FB, IG, WA, X, TikTok, YouTube)	32	10.5%
Facebook only	28	9.2%
Facebook & YouTube	26	8.6%
Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube	20	6.6%
Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, TikTok, YouTube	10	3.3%
Other varied combinations	26	8.6%
On Average, how many hours per day did you use social media?		
Less than 1 hour	67	22.0%
1–2 hours	108	35.5%
2–3 hours	59	19.4%
More than 3 hours	70	23.0%

Have you ever come across contents related to inter-clan conflict on social media within the Somalia?		
Yes	179	58.9%
No	125	41.1%
In your opinion, to what extent does social media escalate inter-clan conflict?		
Very Great Extent	64	21.1%
Great Extent	75	24.7%
Moderate Extent	38	12.5%
Small Extent	53	17.4%
Not at All	74	24.3%
Have you ever seen active clan conflict being reported live on social media?		
Yes	196	64.4%
No	108	35.5%
If yes; what were they showing in the live reporting?		
General content (unspecified)	68	22.4%
Captured vehicles and assets	62	20.4%
Retaken land or areas	48	15.8%
Weapons captured	41	13.5%
Other content	44	14.5%
Captured vehicles & weapons	11	3.6%
Vehicles, retaken areas, and weapons	23	7.6%

In addition, interviews revealed that social media usage is highly prevalent among community members, especially among the youth who frequently access platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok using mobile phones. A community leader from Hudur supported this by indicating:

“Social media use among community members in this area is quite prevalent, with a significant portion engaging on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Many individuals utilize these platforms for communication, information sharing, and community engagement, particularly to stay connected during events or emergencies. This trend reflects a growing digital literacy among residents, making social media a vital tool for fostering community interactions and disseminating important updates.”

Also, a MEAL officer from Kismayo stated that:

“Social media use is growing, especially among youth and urban dwellers, with platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram being popular. However, access remains limited in rural areas due to connectivity issues, low smartphone penetration, and digital literacy gaps. It is mainly used for information sharing, community mobilization, and awareness campaigns.”

Further, a WASH officer from Baidoa stated that:

“Many community members, especially younger individuals, actively use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok for communication, information sharing, and social interaction.”

Social media often serves as a primary source of news and information, with many people relying on it for updates about local events and issues.

Many communities utilize social media groups or pages to foster connections, share resources, and organize events."

Clan Mobilization and Conflict Dynamics via Social Media

The analysis of clan mobilization and conflict dynamics through social media reveals a significant reliance on digital platforms for influencing communal behavior during periods of tension. A substantial majority of respondents, 72.7%, reported that they had either witnessed or heard of clan mobilization efforts taking place on social media. This indicates a widespread exposure to digital content related to clan affairs, underlining the critical role that online platforms now play in shaping sociopolitical discourse within communities. Only 27.3% of respondents indicated no such encounters, suggesting that such mobilization is not only prevalent but also publicly visible and widely recognized.

Among the various social media platforms, Facebook was identified as the most commonly used medium for clan mobilization efforts, with 64.4% of the respondents citing it as the primary channel. This was followed by TikTok at 19.7% and WhatsApp at 12.2%, indicating a growing shift toward instant and visual forms of communication. Other platforms such as YouTube (2.3%), Twitter/X (1.0%), and Instagram (0.3%) were cited less frequently, highlighting their relatively limited use in this context. The dominance of Facebook and the rising use of TikTok suggest that clan mobilization is facilitated through platforms that allow for both wide outreach and rapid content dissemination.

Interviewees noted that social media has been actively used for clan mobilization, particularly during periods of political tension or resource-based conflict. Platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were frequently cited as primary channels for rallying clan members around specific causes, grievances, or disputes. Mobilization often takes place through dedicated WhatsApp groups, Facebook posts, or community pages that disseminate information rapidly and coordinate collective action.

Some respondents highlighted the dual role of social media in both inciting conflict and fostering peacebuilding efforts. As one Protection Assistant from Baidoa explained, *"Yes, there have been cases where social media was used to mobilize clans."* Similarly, a MEAL Officer in Bardhere elaborated,

"Yes, social media has been used for clan mobilization, both to incite tensions and to promote peace. While some use it to spread propaganda and fuel disputes, others leverage it for peacebuilding, advocacy, and humanitarian support. Its impact depends on the intent behind its use."

Other informants underscored the strategic nature of digital mobilization. A Community Leader from Baidoa noted,

"Yes, there have been cases where social media has been effectively used for clan mobilization, allowing groups to organize quickly around issues of concern or

during conflicts. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have facilitated communication and coordination, enabling clans to rally support, disseminate information, and mobilize resources in response to perceived threats or grievances. This has often led to increased solidarity but can also intensify tensions with rival clans."

The influence of mobilization messages was also emphasized, particularly the spread of emotionally charged content. As one Protection Officer from Luuq stated, *"Calls for retaliation and solidarity are widely spread during times of tension."* These narratives contribute to escalating hostilities by reinforcing group identity and amplifying inter-clan divisions.

The nature of messages encountered during periods of clan tension varied widely, with calls for peace being the most frequent, reported by 34.9% of respondents. This is a positive indication of the presence of peace-oriented narratives even amid conflict. However, other messages reflected a potential for escalation, with 13.2% noting calls for clan unity or solidarity and 12.5% reporting calls for retaliation. Political propaganda was also prominent, accounting for 16.1% of the content encountered. Other notable messages included calls for government intervention (9.9%), resource or financial mobilization (7.9%), and appeals by civil society groups for the cessation of hostilities (5.6%). This diversity in message types illustrates the multifaceted use of social media in both conflict escalation and peace advocacy.

When asked about the role of social media in influencing community behavior during clan conflicts, most respondents viewed its impact as largely negative. A significant 45.7% described the influence as very negative, while 20.7% considered it somewhat negative. In contrast, only a small fraction viewed the influence positively, with 7.2% describing it as very positive and 5.6% as somewhat positive. Another 20.7% considered its role neutral. These perceptions suggest that while social media can be a tool for promoting unity and peace, it is more often seen as a platform that amplifies tensions and divisive rhetoric. Overall, the findings highlight the urgent need for digital education, responsible content sharing, and the development of counter-narratives that can mitigate the negative influence of social media on clan-based conflicts.

Table 5: Clan Mobilization and Conflict Dynamics via Social Media

Response Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Have you witnessed or heard of clan mobilization efforts happening through social media?		
Yes	221	72.7
No	83	27.3
If Yes; Which type of social media platform is mostly used for the clan mobilization efforts?		
Facebook	196	64.4
Instagram	1	0.3
TikTok	60	19.7
Twitter/X	3	1.0
WhatsApp	37	12.2
YouTube	7	2.3
What type of messages do you mostly encounter in the social media during clan-related tensions or conflicts?		
Call for clan unity/solidarity	40	13.2

Call for government interventions to stop the conflict	30	9.9
Call for peace	106	34.9
Call for resources/financial mobilization for each clan	24	7.9
Call for retaliation	38	12.5
Call for cessation of hostilities by civil society groups	17	5.6
Political propaganda	49	16.1
How would you rate the role of social media in influencing the behaviour of community members during clan conflicts?		
Very negative	139	45.7
Somewhat negative	63	20.7
Neutral	63	20.7
Somewhat positive	17	5.6
Very positive	22	7.2

Misinformation and Hate Speech via Social Media in Resource-based Conflicts

The findings in this section reveal a significant concern regarding the role of social media in fueling clan-based tensions and conflict. A substantial majority of respondents (70.7%) reported having encountered false information about other clans or conflict incidents on social media, indicating that misinformation is a pervasive issue within digital spaces. In terms of hate speech, 31.6% of respondents noted that they sometimes come across hate speech targeting specific clans, while 18.5% stated they often encounter such content, and another 12.8% indicated they see it very often. This suggests that social media is not only a medium for misinformation but also a channel through which hate speech is regularly disseminated.

Misinformation and hate speech were consistently highlighted by interviewees as significant drivers of clan-based violence in Somalia. Informants emphasized that such content spreads rapidly on social media platforms and is often interpreted as factual—particularly in rural communities where digital literacy remains low. The rapid dissemination of unverified information can exacerbate pre-existing tensions, distort perceptions, and catalyze violence among communities already facing resource-based grievances.

A Community Leader from Afgoye articulated the gravity of the issue, noting:

“Misinformation and hate speech play a highly significant role in fueling clan-based violence, as they distort perceptions and incite fear among community members. Such content can escalate tensions by promoting stereotypes and fostering distrust, leading to increased hostility and potential conflicts between clans. The rapid dissemination of these messages on social media amplifies their impact, making it crucial to address and mitigate their influence.”

Echoing this perspective, a Protection Officer from Kismayo explained:

“Misinformation and hate speech play a significant role in fueling clan-based violence by spreading false narratives, deepening divisions, and inciting retaliation. They amplify tensions, erode trust, and can escalate disputes into conflicts. Without proper fact-checking and regulation, these harmful messages spread rapidly, making violence more likely.”

Further elaborating on the mechanics of incitement, a Protection Officer from Bardhere emphasized how such content not only fuels resentment but also serves as a tool for manipulation:

“Misinformation and hate speech play a critical role in fueling clan-based violence, often acting as catalysts that escalate tensions and incite conflict. Their impact can be broken down into several key aspects: Mobilization for Violence—political leaders, warlords, or social influencers sometimes use misinformation to manipulate communities, portraying their own clan as under existential threat. This can lead to preemptive attacks or retaliation based on false claims.”

A concerning 61.5% of respondents believe that misinformation and hate speech have directly contributed to actual violence or conflict in their area. When asked how this content has contributed to conflict, responses varied, with the most cited effect being the creation of more hatred between clans, followed by re-igniting long-standing clan disputes, increased intensity of clan conflict, and in several cases, a resulting fear among the civilian population. There were also instances where misinformation and hate speech led to fights over access to public services such as water points, highlighting the tangible impact of digital narratives on physical resources and inter-clan relationships. Notably, some respondents cited complex combinations of these impacts, underscoring the layered and interconnected nature of misinformation-driven conflict escalation.

From the interviews, specific examples cited include the use of TikTok and Facebook to spread provocative content that triggered clan conflicts. Respondents described incidents where false information led to retaliation and disruption of peace efforts.

A community leader from Hudur indicated that:

“One noticeable example involved the sharing of fabricated stories about a violent altercation between members of different clans. As these posts circulated on platforms like Facebook, they fuelled existing tensions, resulting in retaliatory attacks and significant unrest in the area. The rapid spread of these false narratives highlighted the destructive power of misinformation in exacerbating conflicts.”

A Protection Assistant from Bardhere, also highlighted that;

“Yes, there have been incidents where false information and inflammatory posts on social media have triggered tensions and violence. For example, misleading reports about land disputes, political favouritism, or attacks on a specific clan have spread rapidly, leading to retaliatory actions. In some cases, edited videos or fake news have furred fear and mobilized groups, escalating conflicts before verification could occur.”

When identifying those responsible for spreading misinformation and hate speech, the majority pointed to social media influencers in the diaspora (45.1%), indicating that actors outside the immediate conflict zones play a significant role in shaping local narratives and tensions. Community leaders were also highlighted by 26.6% of respondents, with traditional elders

(11.5%) and government officials (8.6%) also contributing to the spread, albeit to a lesser extent. These findings underscore the critical role of both internal and external actors in perpetuating harmful content online, and the need for targeted interventions to mitigate digital incitement and its offline consequences (Table 6).

Table 6: Misinformation and Hate Speech on Social Media

Variable/Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Have you come across false information about other clans or conflict incidents on social media?		
Yes	215	70.7
No	89	29.3
How frequently do you encounter hate speech targeting specific clans on social media?		
Never	75	24.7
Rarely	38	12.5
Sometimes	96	31.6
Often	56	18.5
Very Often	39	12.8
Do you think misinformation and hate speech on social media have contributed to actual violence or conflict in your area?		
Yes	187	61.5
No	57	18.8
Not Sure	60	19.7
Who are the primary groups within populations that contribute to the spread of misinformation and hate speech?		
Social media influencers in the diaspora	137	45.1
Community leaders	81	26.6
Traditional elders	35	11.5
Government officials	26	8.6
Women leaders	11	3.6
Others	14	4.6

Analyzing the Responses of Local Communities and Authorities to Social Media-Driven Inter-Clan Conflicts

The analysis on community and authority responses to social media-driven conflict dynamics reveals a relatively divided perception among respondents regarding the proactive role of local leaders or authorities. When asked whether local leaders or authorities have responded to social media content that may cause or escalate conflict, 36.8% of the respondents indicated that no such responses have been observed, while 35.9% affirmed that responses had indeed been made. A notable 27.3% were uncertain, suggesting either a lack of awareness of such interventions or limited visibility of authority engagement on this issue (Table 7).

These mixed perceptions were echoed in the Key Informant Interviews, where respondents offered varied perspectives on how communities and authorities have reacted to the growing influence of social media in conflict contexts. While some informants acknowledged notable efforts by local leaders to promote peace, others highlighted the absence of effective responses or even instances where local actors contributed to the problem.

For example, a Community Leader from Hudur shared that some initiatives had been implemented at the grassroots level to address the issue:

“Local communities and leaders have responded to the challenges posed by social media in conflict situations by implementing awareness campaigns aimed at educating members about the dangers of misinformation.”

Adding to this, a Protection Officer from Afgoye described a more structured and multifaceted approach:

“Local communities and leaders have responded by promoting fact-checking, raising awareness, and encouraging dialogue to counter misinformation. Some have used social media for peace messaging, while others engage in community meetings and mediation efforts to de-escalate tensions. Additionally, religious and traditional leaders play a key role in disputing false narratives and advocating for unity.”

One Protection Assistant further emphasized the importance of engaging communities proactively, stating:

“As a Protection Assistant, my role involves ensuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable populations within the community. I monitor protection issues, advocate for individuals' rights, and collaborate with various stakeholders to enhance protective measures. Additionally, I engage with community members to identify their needs and provide training and resources to empower them, all aimed at fostering a secure and supportive environment.”

However, not all respondents shared the same optimism. A Health Information System (HIS) Officer from Kismayo expressed concern over the lack of action by community leaders, noting:

“No specific role for community or leaders found responding to the challenges posed by social media. It's witnessed that community or leaders use social media to incite or instigate conflict, but I have not yet encountered elders denouncing the negative impact of social media in fueling inter-clan conflict.”

Further insights were drawn from respondents' perspectives on the effectiveness of local mechanisms in countering conflict narratives emerging from social media as shown in Table 7. Here, 36.2% of participants perceived these mechanisms as very effective, indicating some level of confidence in existing efforts. However, 26.6% considered them only somewhat effective, pointing to room for improvement in strategy, reach, or execution. Meanwhile, 18.8% believed the mechanisms were not effective at all, and 18.4% admitted they did not know, further reinforcing the notion that communication or visibility of these countermeasures might be insufficient in some communities.

These quantitative findings were further echoed through qualitative insights from KII. Some respondents highlighted the mechanisms currently in place to detect and respond to harmful digital content, particularly misinformation and hate speech. A Community Leader from Hudur explained:

“Mechanisms to monitor and counter harmful content often include social media platforms' content moderation tools, which utilize algorithms and user reports to identify and remove misinformation and hate speech.”

Building on this, a MEAL Officer from Bardhere emphasized the growing role of institutional and cross-sectoral partnerships in addressing digital threats:

“Governments sometimes intervene, requiring platforms to take specific actions to combat harmful content like extremism, terrorism, or child exploitation. Many countries have enacted laws requiring tech companies to monitor and remove harmful content proactively. There are also international collaborations and guidelines, such as those between social media companies and regulatory bodies, to address harmful content at a global level.”

In addition, a Protection Officer reflected on the broader community-based mechanisms that complement digital regulation. Drawing from field experiences, they noted:

“As a Protection Officer, my role in community organizations involved safeguarding the rights and well-being of vulnerable groups. I conducted community outreach programs, provided support services, and ensured the implementation of child protection policies. I also collaborated with local stakeholders to raise awareness and deliver training sessions on protection and advocacy issues.”

Table 7: Community/Authority Responses to Social Media Content and Effectiveness of Local Mechanisms

Response Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Have local leaders or authorities responded to social media content?		
Yes	109	35.9
No	112	36.8
Not sure	83	27.3
How effective are local mechanisms in countering social media-driven conflict narratives?		
Very effective	110	36.2
Somewhat effective	81	26.6
Not effective	57	18.8
I don't know	56	18.4

Strategies for Mitigating the Negative Role of Social Media in Resource-Based Conflicts

The respondents were asked to give strategies that could help reduce the negative role of social media in fuelling clan conflicts. One of the most commonly proposed strategies was the promotion of targeted community awareness and digital literacy. Many respondents emphasized the need to educate communities, especially youth and social media users, on the responsible use of digital platforms. They believed that awareness campaigns focusing on the dangers of misinformation, hate speech, and online provocation could empower people to critically assess and counter divisive content. This grassroots approach was seen as fundamental in building resilience against online manipulation and fostering peaceful coexistence among clans.

In addition to awareness, respondents strongly advocated for the development of relevant policies and regulations to curb the spread of misinformation and hate speech. They expressed the need for clear legal frameworks and guidelines that define, identify, and penalize the use of social media for inciting clan-based animosity. Some respondents called for the enforcement of laws and the arrest of individuals who deliberately spread false or inflammatory content intended to incite conflict. Another key recommendation was the monitoring and regulation of harmful content on social media. Several respondents suggested that governments, civil society, and media watchdogs should work together to track, report, and remove content that promotes clan divisions or fuels violence. Some respondents also proposed the formation of dedicated bodies or task forces to oversee social media content and ensure compliance with peace-promoting standards.

There was also notable emphasis on engaging in dialogue between clans and social media influencers. Respondents pointed out that influencers have a powerful role in shaping public opinion and can either promote peace or escalate tensions. They suggested that peacebuilding actors and community leaders should work closely with these influencers to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and the dissemination of positive messaging. Another recurring theme in the responses was the involvement of technology companies. Some respondents felt that social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok must take greater responsibility in regulating content shared on their platforms. They urged tech companies to strengthen their content moderation mechanisms, partner with local actors, and adapt their policies to reflect the unique socio-cultural dynamics of conflict-prone areas.

Furthermore, several respondents proposed a combination of strategies, arguing that an integrated approach combining awareness, policy reforms, monitoring mechanisms, dialogue initiatives, and tech sector involvement would be the most effective in addressing the challenge. A few also recommended expanding peacebuilding programs, strengthening the role of traditional and religious leaders, and ensuring that findings from such studies are shared with communities to inform future interventions. Lastly, a small number of respondents emphasized the importance of tackling diaspora-based actors who use social media to incite tensions from abroad. They called for stricter monitoring and international collaboration to hold such individuals accountable; while also recognizing the positive role, the diaspora can play in peacebuilding if engaged constructively.

Also, these strategies were further elaborated upon by several key informants, each offering practical insights from their respective roles and experiences.

A Community Leader from Hudur highlighted the need for a proactive and inclusive strategy, stating:

"To mitigate the negative impacts of social media in resource-based conflicts, strategies could include enhancing media literacy programs that educate communities on identifying misinformation and understanding the consequences of sharing harmful content. Establishing robust partnerships between social media platforms, local leaders, and NGOs can facilitate rapid response mechanisms to address false narratives. Additionally, promoting positive storytelling that

highlights successful conflict resolution and cooperation can help counteract divisive content, fostering a culture of dialogue and trust among communities.”

Echoing the call for stronger institutional involvement, a Health Information System (HIS) Officer from Baidoa emphasized the role of government in regulation:

“Developing strategies in mitigating social media negative impact is paramount. The federal government should create policies and procedures that govern social media usage so that institutions can screen social media messages prior to posting.”

From a broader programmatic perspective, an NGO Official in Kismayo advocated for a multi-pronged approach that integrates technology, education, and community engagement:

“Mitigating the negative impacts of social media in resource-based conflicts requires a multi-pronged approach that combines technology, community engagement, policy, and education. For example, strengthening digital literacy and awareness through community training programs and raising awareness.

Additionally, a Youth Development Worker emphasized the need for legal enforcement and strategic partnerships with influential voices in the digital space:

“Law enforcement especially policies and articles that address digital sensitive content and hate crimes at both Federal Member State (FMS) and Federal Government (FG) levels is crucial. Moreover, using influential content creators, platforms, community leaders, and elders can contribute to minimizing this negative content.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of the Findings

The findings reveal that social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok are significantly used in Somalia, not only for communication but also for spreading conflict-inducing narratives. This aligns with studies such as Tähtinen (2024) which demonstrated how social media fuels ethnic and resource-based tensions in fragile contexts. Similarly, Ali et al., (2024) emphasize that online discourse often mirrors offline divisions, creating digital echo chambers that escalate local disputes. These findings validate the assertion that digital platforms have become potent tools for mobilization and incitement, especially in areas with weak governance and limited digital literacy.

Beyond general usage, the study found that social media enables rapid clan mobilization, reinforcing clan identity and enabling coordination of conflict actions. This is supported by Cariolle et al., (2024) who found that digital platforms provide a low-cost, high-impact mechanism for political and identity-based mobilization in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, research by Mohamed (2020) argues that while social media can intensify divisions, it also holds potential for fostering solidarity and positive mobilization indicating a dual-use dilemma. These perspectives suggest the need for a balanced regulatory approach to manage both the risks and opportunities associated with social media in fragile contexts.

The role of misinformation and hate speech is also strongly corroborated by literature. Ahmed and Yusuf (2023) observed that fake news and clan-based slurs on digital platforms are directly linked to conflict intensification in Somali regions. Further, a study by UNDP (2021) found that misinformation exacerbates pre-existing tensions by spreading fear and misrepresentation. Our findings agree with these observations, affirming that unregulated digital content amplifies grievances and weakens social trust, particularly in areas already affected by competition over limited resources and inter-clan rivalries. While some local actors are responding to digital threats, the study found significant inconsistency in institutional efforts. This is consistent with studies like Adan et al. (2022), which noted the limited capacity of local governments in East Africa to monitor and respond to harmful content online. Conversely, an evaluation by IREX (2020) highlighted promising community-led interventions in digital peacebuilding, suggesting untapped potential that could be scaled. Thus, our findings highlight both the existing gaps and the opportunities for more coordinated and community-embedded responses to social media-driven conflict dynamics.

Literature also supports the key strategies suggested in this study. A joint report by UNESCO and UNDP (2022) advocated for community-centered digital literacy, media monitoring mechanisms, and policy coordination to curb online incitement. Similarly, the African Union Commission (2023) calls for stronger legislation and content moderation partnerships to counter hate speech. Our findings reinforce these propositions, emphasizing the need for local-global collaboration to build digital resilience in conflict-prone regions and harness the power of digital platforms for positive social transformation.

Conclusions

This study provides compelling evidence that social media has become a significant driver of inter-clan conflict in Somalia, particularly in the context of resource-based disputes. The findings demonstrate that digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok are not merely tools of communication but are increasingly being weaponized to disseminate divisive narratives, incite violence, and facilitate clan mobilization. This reflects the evolving nature of conflict dynamics in fragile and conflict-prone regions, where virtual spaces now mirror and amplify offline tensions.

The study affirms that social media's rapid penetration, coupled with limited digital literacy and weak governance structures, has created fertile ground for the spread of conflict-inducing content. Social media echo chambers have entrenched pre-existing divisions and heightened community tensions. These findings are consistent with regional and global studies that highlight the role of digital platforms in escalating identity-based conflicts and resource struggles in low-capacity states. On the other hand, clan mobilization via social media emerged as a critical dimension of modern conflict dynamics. Digital platforms provide cost-effective and instantaneous means of organizing group actions, reinforcing clan solidarity, and perpetuating polarized narratives. While some literature notes the potential of social media for peacebuilding and solidarity, the Somali context illustrates that the dominant use remains skewed toward conflict escalation underscoring the urgent need for a regulatory and normative framework that addresses both risks and opportunities of digital communication.

Furthermore, the study reveals that misinformation and hate speech are deeply intertwined with the escalation of inter-clan tensions. Unregulated dissemination of inflammatory content

has not only weakened social trust but also triggered violent episodes, confirming that online narratives can rapidly translate into real-world consequences. This underscores the importance of robust mechanisms to monitor and counter harmful content. Also, institutional responses to these emerging digital threats remain inconsistent and underdeveloped. While some community and authority-led initiatives exist, their reach, coordination, and effectiveness are limited. The findings expose a gap between awareness and action highlighting the need for stronger policy frameworks, institutional capacity-building, and grassroots engagement in countering social media-driven conflict narratives.

Importantly, the study emphasizes that mitigating the negative impacts of social media requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Strengthening digital literacy, enhancing policy enforcement, empowering youth, engaging diaspora communities constructively, and fostering public-private partnerships for content moderation are crucial steps toward building digital resilience.

Recommendations

This study highlights the significant impact of social media-fueled inter-clan conflict in Somalia, revealing its role in escalating tensions, facilitating clan mobilization, and spreading misinformation and hate speech. The findings underscore the urgent need for improved digital governance, community-level awareness programs, and strategic partnerships to mitigate social media's negative impacts on conflict dynamics. The study recommends prioritizing digital literacy initiatives across communities, particularly targeting youth and vulnerable populations, to build resilience against misinformation and online incitement. Strengthening policy coordination between government institutions, NGOs, and technology stakeholders is also essential to develop mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and removing inflammatory content. A key actionable recommendation is the development and implementation of a multi-sectoral digital peacebuilding framework, which integrates education, regulation, media monitoring, and civic engagement. Such an approach would ensure learning continuity in conflict-prone areas, promote constructive online behavior, and foster inclusive digital spaces. Future research should explore the long-term sociopolitical effects of digital conflict narratives, evaluate the effectiveness of current mitigation mechanisms, and assess opportunities for enhancing digital governance through grassroots innovation and policy reform.

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