The Role of Facebook in Peace and Conflict

Case Study for Mogadishu City

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Introduction

Communication between communities is very important. Before the modern digital age people used face-to-face discussion to communicate and share ideas. After the revolution of technology the number of users increased dramatically to facilitate communications and society activities, and it plays an important role in facilitating between the communities. Social media is affecting not only for private enterprises, but also governments and policy decision makers, creating effects that have an impact on the global political arena in terms of peace building or creating conflicts. People who didn't used to have access to the Internet, including those who can't afford computers or laptops, are nowadays able to connect through devices such as cell phones

This research investigates: what is the role of Facebook in spreading peace and conflict in Mogadishu city, the capital city of Somalia?

Terminology of the Research

In social media, the definition of terms "social media" is: applications and sites such as Facebook and Twitter which facilitate communication between people in the world. This research we will investigate Facebook users' accounts only because most Somalis in general, including Mogadishu residents, use Facebook.

Objective of the Research

The purpose of this study is to find out about the role of Facebook site in peace or conflict in Mogadishu, Somalia and to identify different types of user accounts of Facebook in Mogadishu.

Research Question

What is the role of Facebook in spreading peace and conflict in Mogadishu city?

Research Methods

Using pre-defined questions asked after permission from the respondents was confirmed, research based on different primary sources of data collection was conducted using Semi structured interviews. These covered different types of community, gender and age in the different districts in Mogadishu city. During the data collection, qualitative methods were applied to understand deeply and to do an effective investigation. The total sample size was five people, whom the researcher selected purposively to meet the study objectives

Limitations of the Research

I interviewed only residents in Mogadishu the capital city of Somalia, from middle economic class and university level of education. So there are geographic limitations, and the interviewees were not reprehensive of all Somalis resident in the south and centre of Somalia. The other limitation of the Study is that all users are Facebook users only not other social media. Also we focused only on the impact in terms of peace and conflict issues.

Review of the Literature

There are few articles on the Internet about social media impacts on Somalis, either written by local authors from Somalia or foreign researchers. These articles show the need of Somali users of social media for consultation and orientation to build peace and unity among Somali people and reduce hate, conflict and war. The followings are some of these articles.

The Internet in Somalia (Ashkir 2012)

This article was written by Mr. Ashkir on the Aljazeera website and explored the stages of Internet usage in Somalia which started in 2000. He showed the speed of the growing use of Internet and explained the role of the Internet in education and economic sectors in Somalia, but he omitted the role of the Internet in peace and conflict and social activities.

A Forgotten Tweet: Somalia and Social Media (Dr. Skye Cooley 2013)

This research focused on crisis and disaster in Somalia and the role of social media in relief organizations: "The purpose of this study is to evaluate the crisis response message strategies put forth via social media from the leading Somali-based government agency" (Dr. Skye Cooley 2013)

The other point is that this research only concerns Twitter, not other social media like Facebook; also he collected data from two accounts belonging to English-speaking not Somali-speaking users.

"The crisis response strategies were coded from two English-speaking, Twitter accounts: The United Nations (UNHCR Somalia) and the African Union (AMISOM)".

"Both organizations were attempting to use Twitter as a means to spread word about the famine crisis, garner support, and encourage aid from individuals, organizations, and other countries"(Dr. Skye Cooley 2013).

The Role of Social Media in spreading violence and hatred (Anwar 2015)

This article was written by Mr. Anwar and is available on the Mogadishu Centre website. It only focused on one side; violence and hate – he did not consider its impact in promoting peace and reconciliation among Somali people.

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In my research, I will use social media users especially Facebook, because most Somalis use it to communicate and share content. Also, I will research the impact of social media in raising conflict as well as promoting peace and reconciliation. The other thing is that I will use a sample encompassing different demographics from which to collect data.

Finally, I will propose suggestions and recommendation to encourage and promote peace, and discourage hate and violence among Somalis. Also to conceptualize, produce and disseminate a campaign which aims to inspire positive social change through the power of storytelling, which I believe can play a

prime role in reducing conflict, counter violent and promote peace and development.

Fieldwork and analyzing data

The researcher selected personal interviews with key informants who were experienced in the field of social media and peace building and conflict issues. These informants where five persons: three male and two female. The age of the informants was between 20 and 35 years. Interview methods were used in the collection of data because it is the easiest method available for us. The interview took place at Hodan District in Mogadishu.

The interviews were conducted between the 10th and 15th of Augusta 2016 in Mogadishu city. The five people who participated were presented with an ethics form during the interviews phase. I drew up the list of suitable questions to ask each respondent. Below are the questions:

Q1: What do you think is the role of Facebook in peace and conflict?

Q2: What is the advance of Facebook compared with normal media or traditional forms of communication?

Q3: How have you seen people use Facebook to talk about issues of conflict?

Q4: What were the general reactions of people reading the posts? What were your reactions?

Q5: How have you seen people use Facebook to talk about issues of peace?

Q6: What role do you think Facebook has in conflict/peace? What are the limitations? What are the benefits?

Q7: Are there other social media that are used for conflict/peace? If yes, how? And how do they compare to Facebook?

Q8: What do you think is the role of social media in general for peace/conflict?

Results

Using the best way of analyzing qualitative research, I analyzed the answers of interviewees and classified the data based on their answers by considering differences and similarities.

Question 1: What do you think is the role of Facebook in peace and conflict?

Each respondent was asked this question and the results were as follows:

Three responded: "Facebook plays vital role in creating a peaceful atmosphere as well as fanning conflicts. It depends on the way it is used and methods employed" and Two responded: "it can contribute positively only in the society".

Question 2: What is the advance of Facebook compared to normal media or traditional forms of communication?

The responses are very similar and the answered as follows:

- "It is easiest one"

- "It is very fast"

- "It is attractive"

- "It can communicate directly"

The fifth user answered: "Facebook user content is generated automatically while traditional forms need gate keeping to filter the content it wants to share with the public"

Question 3: How have you seen people use Facebook to talk about issues of conflict?

The responses are very similar and agreed that when there is a war in Mogadishu, for example, social media especially Facebook escalates the conflict between factions, increases hate and spreads negative messages which in turn escalates the war dramatically.

Question 4: What were the generally reactions of people reading the posts? What were your reactions?

All responses were actually answered as "when people agree with you they tick like button but when they disagree with you they write comment to express their view and idea".

Question 5: How have you seen people use Facebook to talk about issues of peace?

Four responses agreed that Facebook could contribute to promote peace only when society is oriented to peace by conducting talks and workshops that emphasize the importance of peace for society. The fifth person said: "When there is a war Facebook is used to escalate it and spread rumours" which means that spreading negative messages and posts is easer that spreading positive messages and posts in Facebook.

Question 6: What role do you think Facebook has in conflict/peace? What are the limitations? What are the benefits?

All responses agreed that Facebook is two sides of the same coin; it can be used to promote peace or to escalate conflict and war because there is no filter. Also they agreed that the limitation of Facebook is the poor Internet connection of Mogadishu city as well as that a lot of the residents are not using it.

Question 7: Are there other social media that are used for conflict/peace? If yes, how? And how do they compare to Facebook?

Answers are different as follows:

- Three responses agreed that residents use only Facebook and do not know other social media.
- Two responses agreed that residents use Facebook as well as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Viber apps but most Somalis use only Facebook. They use these apps to communicate and share information.

Question 8: What do you think is the role of social media in general for peace/conflict?

Responses agreed that social media is a new mode of communication which has an important impact on the life of the people by sharing information, promoting peace or escalating conflict, and how it is used is dependent on the user's personality.

Two responses agreed that social media contributes to peace and conflict by sharing and spreading positive or negative information.

Another two responses agreed that "social media escalates conflict and war because users use it in spreading negative posts".

The fifth response said that "it is up to the people to decide what content they are going to share with the public. "

Summary and Conclusion

Responses from the informants show that most Somalis use Facebook and are not aware of other social media. The other social media they use are Twitter, WhatsApp and Viber. They use Facebook to communicate and share information. During stability Facebook can promote peace, unity and integration of the society but it is a means to spread negative information during conflict and war.

The impact of Facebook on peace and conflict is controversial among the informants. Mostly of the responses suggested that Facebook can spiral conflict and war because there is no authority that controls the posts on Facebook and filters the contents posted by users.

The responses of the informants shows a potential role for local authority, elders, and institutional foundations who could promote peace by conducting workshops and discussions that orient people on how to use social media like Facebook to in a positive way and share positive information than can contribute to the integration of society.

 At the end of this research it is important to emphasize the importance of expanding this research by widening the sample of the informants and involving

different informants from different regions to represent the whole nation of Somalia.

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