The Role of Citizen Journalism in Peace and Conflicts: The Case of Somalia

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Social media encourages people to be more understanding of one another's viewpoints because of current technologies. Social media is a contemporary means of communication that shares information and links individuals. Social media can therefore be a weapon for fostering peace and the avoidance of societal violence, or vice versa, as citizens utilize it to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about tolerance and the battle against prejudice and hatred among the people (Dr. Samar Galal, 2023).

The media frequently plays a major role in today's issues. They can essentially take on two different jobs. Either the media maintains its neutrality and forgoes being involved in the conflict in favor of working to resolve it, or it actively contributes to the conflict and bears responsibility for the spread of violence.

The definition of citizen journalism is the journalistic practice of nonprofessional communities inside society gathering data for stories and evaluating it based on public opinion in order to disseminate the news. This method consistently provides unbiased, real information for civic and democratic duties in society. Using the newest technology and the internet, the local community is creating its own networking organization to report any occurrence based on popular opinion. As the first responders to any event, they just use their smartphones to capture the action, post it on social media, and watch as it becomes viral. (Castells, 2004).

This paper pays particular attention to how citizen journalism might be used to report on conflict-related issues. Holding governments and security agencies accountable is becoming more and more dependent on citizen journalism, or the public's use of new technology like cell phone video

recording to capture events and post them online.

More precisely, this study will examine recent advancements in citizen journalism in Somalia and their connections to the ongoing conflicts and campaigns for security, justice, and human rights. In addition to how elders, non-governmental groups, religious institutions, etc. use citizen journalism contents to carry out justice. Also, it will look at state and non-state organizations and how they employ citizen testimony. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are being used more often than ever to document violent crimes. We'll examine how CCTV is used by government organizations, particularly courts, to protect human rights and testify against criminals.

Methodology

I will employ Qualitative analysis where I will be conducting an extensive review of academic literature, historical documents as secondary data, and other publications related to the subject matter.

Objectives

1. To find out the role of social media in peacebuilding and conflict in Somalia
2. To investigate the ways in which the Somali community employs citizen journalism as a means of reaching out to potential audiences, and exercising freedom of speech
3. How much do Somalia governmental institutions rely on data from social media as proof, particularly when it comes to peacekeeping efforts, justice and human rights?

This research paper will contribute to the limited knowledge about social media, especially citizen journalism, and how citizens use it as a way of communication. More specifically, it sheds light on how citizen journalism can be used as a media tool for peacebuilding efforts, conflict prevention, and safeguarding human rights.

Citizen Journalism vs Traditional Journalism

Now, citizens can use digital media accessible to them to challenge the status of the professional journalist as the sole "expert" or definer of social "reality," as the presence of elite groups and individuals has largely obscured citizens' visibility in the mainstream media." Through citizen journalism, regular people are encouraged to recognize and openly discuss how injustices and inequality have influenced their lives. Competitive elections provide voters with a platform to voice their complaints about these systemic injustices and inequality. Because humor can

juxtapose the bizarre with humor, it is considered a valuable weapon for peacebuilding. In an effort to raise public awareness and encourage more educated political decision-making, political memes are becoming a common satirical technique for mocking, criticizing, and challenging politicians during election seasons. Social media was ablaze with memes as Kenyans anxiously awaited the official announcement of the results of the August 8 presidential election (Jacinta Maweu, Admire Mare, 2022).

The Growing Usage of Technology in Courts to Present Evidence.

The use of video, text messages, audio recordings, photographs, and CCTV footage as evidence in court is one way that the digital revolution is transforming the gathering and application of evidence in the legal system. While citizen journalism has been more prevalent in Somalia, where people are reporting and covering events like the Pizza House Attack using social media and other new technologies, it has also been somewhat crippled, especially when reporting negatively portrays the government. The government has demonstrated a willingness to close websites and social media platforms believed to be spreading propaganda, hate speech, or even fuelling conflict. But a major challenge to verifying this evidence in court remains. The formal justice system is overstretched and has a limited reach. There is also limited technical expertise and capacity to engage with (including both interpreting and correctly using) digital evidence in a case or trial.

Case 1: The Police Commander Who Assassinated the Businessman

The Somali Military Court in Mogadishu has been handling one of the most brutal and complicated cases that was brought before the court. A police commander in Hiliwaa district in Mogadishu had engaged in a unique assassination case in his district. Abukar Ahmed Kabax, the slain man, was a businessman in a crypto currency company. Kabax has replaced Liibaan Mohamed, who was in charge of his position. Due to some illegal transactions made by Liibaan Mohamed, the crypto currency's company representative in the UAE, on December 26, 2023, the company fired him, and Kabax has taken on the new role. The police commanders in Hiliwaa district, Captain Abdifatah Qoslaye, and Liibaan have maternal connections. When Kabax, who took on the new responsibilities of the company, came back to Mogadishu on February 12, 2024, Liibaan contacted his cousin Qoslaye and they collectively have engaged in an assassination deal. Qoslaye and his team, comprising five members, had commenced planning to monitor Kabax's movements.

On February 14, 2024, Qoslaye and his group were captured on tape ordering five masquerades to kidnap the deceased businessman in a tailor's shop. Since then, Kabax has been the target of searches by captain Qoslaya and his armed militias. Kabax has also communicated with Qoslaye multiple times, offering to assist him with traffic-related problems as long as he is the district police commander. On February 21, 2024, Qoslaye and his group abducted the businessman and took him as hostage. They demanded that he unlock all of his accounts and give them all of his cryptocurrency profits, or else they would kill him. He opened his internet accounts, gave them and Liibaan, Qoslaye's cousin, continued to tell them that Kabax has more accounts, and urged them to ask him more. Ultimately, Captain Qoslaye and his group fired a final shot, killing the businessman. On 23rd February 2024, the first criminal was arrested by the police, and 25 February 2024 was arrested captain Qoslaye. This shocking tale took place from December 31, 2023, to February 22, 2024.

CCTV cameras and smartphones that recorded the offenders' movements made it easier to apprehend and examine the culprits under Captain Qoslaye's command. Locating the offenders and obtaining trustworthy proof were made possible in large part by citizen journalism.
All the movements of the culprits were recorded by the CCTV cameras. The judges of the military court have proofed efficiently in front of the court.

A lot of people were discussing this topic on social media in response to this isolated case. While some claimed that the CCTV, footage was insufficient and that the displayed evidences were more like fantasy, but the mainstream claimed it was a horrifying tragedy. On social media, a heated debate has started, to which a varied response has been observed. In addition, others had called the court's sessions unjust and incited animosity in the community. The way this incident was handled with the CCTV footage will help to improve social harmony and lessen the widespread violence in the country (SNTV, 2024)

Case 2: The Man Who Burned His Wife
This case was also disheartening incident where the entire Somali community have felt the pain. The pictures of the slain sister were shared widely in the social media platforms. Apart from the military court's hearings, the citizen journalism was instrumental in preserving the human rights.

The Somali mainstream have been a voice for the family of the slain sister. During the court's hearings livestream, the citizens have been participating it online, and voiced for their solidarity with the devastated family. For the period of the court public hearings, the pictures of the slain sister and her kids were viral in the social media platforms. This shows the peerless role of citizen journalism in human rights, peace, justice and making the perpetrators accountable.

Citizenship journalism is not only used to disseminate information among the community, but also stands for defending human rights, and advocates for the culprits to be accountable for their crimes (SNTV, 2024).

Freedom of Expression is Facilitated by Citizen Journalism.

Every nation in the globe is seeing a shift in the way that the general public uses new digital technologies to spread knowledge throughout their communities, whether they live in cities or rural areas. Smartphones have made it possible for ordinary individuals to report events in the same way as professional journalists (WACC, 2020). But the most challenges brought by the citizen journalism are, lack of credibility, unprofessionalism, unknown sources, and other factors.

The Role That Citizen Journalism Plays in Protecting Human Rights.

Around the world, there is a widespread violation of human rights, and traditional news channels frequently do not provide enough coverage of these abuses. Since citizen journalism allows regular people to report on situations that might otherwise go unreported, it has become a crucial instrument for preserving human rights. In a country which its public institutions are weak, the Somali army, especially the police and the intelligence entities abuse the ordinary citizens, especially the journalists. As Amnesty International reported, there were limitations on the freedom of expression, and journalists faced assaults, beatings, arbitrary detentions, and legal actions (Amnesty International, 2023). It is become commonplace for Somali soldiers to kill people without consequence. Human rights abuses are an everyday occurrence in Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu. Videos of Somali police intimidating, threatening, and mistreating members of the public have gone viral on social media multiple times.

Citizen Journalism Promotes Social Justice.

Social justice can also be advanced through citizen journalism, which gives marginalized communities a forum to tell their story. This can include those who have experienced marginalization because of their clan, color, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Citizen journalism may contribute to the dismantling of stereotypes and the advancement of an inclusive society by providing these groups with a voice. This can be particularly crucial in nations where those in power may control traditional news media outlets, making it harder for marginalized groups to tell their story (Murdell Walker McFarlin. 2015).

The Bad Side of Citizen Journalism: Fake News, Inflammatory Speeches, Civil Incitement, and others.

Of course, there are disadvantages to citizen journalism, such as the dissemination of occasionally provocative statements that may incite animosity within the community. Furthermore, it spreads deplorable ideas, propaganda, fake news, and provocation. For example, the Somali government recently gave the order to some people in Mogadishu, Somalia, to move government-owned buildings. Since the government issued this directive, a large number of people—particularly young people who use social media—have launched a campaign to criticize the decision made by the Somali government. They have been disseminating rumors that certain tribes or clans are being singled out by the Somali government. Their voices have reached many audiences on social media, and they have a sizable following. In the end, many of them have been detained by the Somali government, particularly the police, in an effort to contain their harmful and hateful contents in society.

Before any news is released in traditional media, a number of procedures must be followed, such as writing, editing, and publishing. Citizen journalism, in which one individual serves as the writer, editor, and publisher simultaneously, has taken the place of this standard. The public is better informed by ordinary people than by professional journalists thanks to cellphones. This has provided the general public with an unparalleled opportunity to educate themselves. In light of this, disseminating false information and misleading the public has become normal in a society where the literacy rate is so low. In addition to generating unnecessary information, the young

boys and girls who disseminate hate messages also posed a threat to national security insofar as they interfered with judicial judgments about the cases appeared.

The communities and governmental institutions are sometimes at odds with one another as a result of this incorrect attribution. Thus, cellphones and citizen journalism allow the unprofessional ordinary people to spread false information, mislead people, and endanger national security. Certain principles should be followed when using social media, particularly for Muslim communities like Somalis. These values include but are not limited to self-censorship, moral obligation, social decorum, and discipline.

Amidst the hate speech being disseminated by social media influencers, several people took guns, posted in the social media, and threatened to fight if the government attempted to evacuate them from their homes. This is the extent of the detrimental messages being disseminated in the social media. It was also a grave provocation against the Somali government, and poses imminent threat to the national security. For instance, there is a clip of video circulated widely in the social media, especially Facebook, of a young lady who says, if the court releases a death judgement for a man who was accused of burning his wife, then we will revenge, and kill the Somali president. This indicates how citizen journalism gives the ordinary people unrestricted access to the media, and how far the messages spread across the world. This is just tip of the iceberg. There are many similar cases where a simple civilian person being recorded a video threatening the instability, and insulting clans, and also criticizing the government or public leaders with vague arguments. And as a result, several times clans went a fierce fight among them.

Tribalism in Society is Being Propagated Through Social Media.

Conversely, social media is being used in Somalia to disseminate a clannish and tribal mindset throughout society. You witness someone openly announcing, and extolling his/her tribe, and at same time disparaging other tribes. In Somalia, social media usage of this has grown commonplace. On social media, we frequently witness people denigrating other tribes and displaying a well-known sense of tribal pride. Additionally, we saw a number of Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok celebrities encouraging people to declare their tribes and make fun of others

during live broadcast. People fighting as a result of the heated discussions in social media has also been witnessed. The community is unstable and prone to strife as a result of all these disgusting conditions. The recent conflict between two Somali clans in **Mudug** region is rhapsodized by the so-called social media influencers. They kept encouraging the warring sides to continue the fighting, and kill to each other.

Social Media May Also Give Terrorist Elements The Opportunity To Disturb The Security.

Terrorist elements may sometimes trigger a conflict within the community or with the government by spreading hate messages on social media. They may just pretend to be ordinary people and trigger conflict between two tribes or with the government while pretending to be civilians in order to manipulate and threaten national security. Terrorist elements mostly engage in any kind of intervention that can disturb the stability. Also, they have tech-savvy professionals who mislead and misinform the public. Those terrorist elements mostly capitalize and exploit the clueless youngsters who recklessly upload videos, or write down ant-specific clans' messages that can cause a direct confrontation among clans and communities.

Conclusion.

Somalia, as a country that is recuperating from the bad effects of the civil war that erupted in 1991 and lasted longer, there has been hostility and grievances among the community. With the invention of social media platforms that gave everyone limitless freedom, this may trigger other problems within society if it is not managed carefully. Somalis, as an oral society, the said word lasts longer. Surprisingly, social media platforms in Somalia have become unscrupulous tools for the community. It uplifts unethical manners to dominate the platform. It gives extracurricular independence for the ordinary people to spread information regardless. This has diluted the journalism profession. It created mistrust and dishonest environment where everybody can share something with the public whether it's true or vague. As a caveat, people should be vigilant on this, and check the sources of the information received.

Recommendations

1) The internet providers companies should at least limit this excessive freedom in the social media, and add applications that prevent civil incitement, ant-specific community messages, fake news, anti-security messages.

2) The religious leaders should offer awareness on the negative side of the technology, and urges the youngsters to avoid unethical, and anti-social etiquette messages in the social media as long as we are a Muslim people.

3) The Somali police commission should assign unit that monitors and prevents such individuals who mostly deliver detrimental messages and videos in the social media for the sake of the security.

4) Families have to monitor the movements of their kids; especially they should check their social media accounts and messages they deliver to the community.

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