



# **Managing Public Political Opinion on Facebook:**

## **Political Discussion and the Somali Experience**

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This study investigated why Somalis discuss their political issues on Facebook pages, how those page managers manage these discussions, and to what extent do both managers and participants believe that these discussions influence the political discourse in Somalia. A mixed methods research design was used in this study, in the form of both qualitative and quantitative online surveys. A total of 142 respondents participated in this study: 139 of ordinary Facebook users answered an online quantitative questionnaire, and 3 Facebook page managers, a qualitative email survey. The study found that Somalis use Facebook for political discussions because it is the easiest, most effective and often the only way that they believe they can influence the political process in their country. The result suggests that the political discussions on the Facebook pages by the Somalis are perceived to have an impact on the political decisions in Somalia. Also, the findings show that there are difficulties when managing a Facebook page in this nature, because of poor conduct, negative critique and online harassment. Finally, the study found that Facebook was, and is, used as an alternative to traditional political participation forms in the Somali context.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are one of the modern means of communication that emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century. They have invaded the various spheres of our social and political life as a means of communication and exchange of ideas and information. They become essential news channels and political platforms. In the political sphere, social media has opened a new wave of opportunity for citizens, politicians, and civil society organizations to engage in an open and transparent discussion that are relevant to the enhancement of democratic values in the society. The Internet has the potential to support democracy by providing new forums for political deliberation (Papacharissi, 2002). Unlike traditional media (such as newspapers, television, and radio), which have been used as a one-way communication tool for political information from the government and politicians to the electorate, the Internet opens broader horizons for two-way communication between political entities and the electorate on the one hand, and voters with each other, on the other. The platforms also create discussion opportunity for those who were previously silent about the political issues, in other words, it gives a voice to the voiceless.

The impacts of social networking sites are now more apparent on political and social life around the world. Previous studies (Di Pace, 2016; Gire, 2017) have shown that these sites influenced political elections and led to social changes in many countries of the world, such as USA, Egypt, Tunisia, and others. Facebook, one of the first social networking sites launched in 2004, has played a crucial role in the way in which news and information are circulated and consumed in the societies, as well as how political discussions are carried out. Nowadays, a large number of citizens get the political news from Facebook. Research conducted by Pew Research found that Facebook was the top source for political news among millennials, 61% of millennials gained their news about politics from Facebook (Mitchell, Gottfried, & Matsa, 2015). Facebook profoundly impacts the way society interacts within the political arena. It enabled the citizens to follow the current political state of the country efficiently and to discuss it, with the decision makers and with their peers. The platform provides the users with the opportunity of interacting

freely with prominent political figures and engaging with them in online political discussions. This fosters the overall volume of discourse around political issues. It also gives the politicians and candidates the opportunity to reach the potential voters easily and to provide information about their policy at no cost. Many politicians also rely on Facebook for their election campaigns. Like any other societies, Somalis use social media and social networking sites for different purposes. Although there is a lack of data and figures in this regard (Dhaha & Igale, 2013), it was observed in recent times that they use Facebook massively, especially for political discussions. Both locals and expats use the platform frequently when engaging the local politics, thus, this study will investigate why Somalis use political Facebook pages to express their political opinions, and how page organizers manage the information and debate on their pages.

## **1.1 Research problem**

There is a tremendous Somali presence on Facebook, and, although the exact number is unknown, the overall number of users continues to grow overwhelmingly. They actively use the site for different purposes and motives (Dhaha & Igale, 2014) such as to keep in touch with family and friends, and to obtain news from their country. But nowadays it has been observed that the number of political discussions on Facebook among Somalis has increased. There is a high turnout on the pages of political leaders, political activists, and other forums, to discuss the political issues in the country. Thus, this study will investigate reasons why Somalis choose to use political Facebook pages to express their political opinions. The study will include three Facebook pages for analysis, managed by Abdirahman Abdishakur Warsame (a Somali opposition party leader), Hanna Abubakar (an influencer) and Faca Rejada (a political activist).

## **1.2 Research questions**

To understand this phenomenon, the following questions are considered:

- Why do Somalis engage in political discussions on the Facebook pages?
- How do the page managers/owners manage the information on their pages?
- To what extent do participants and organizers believe these pages influence political discourse in Somalia?

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Political discussion**

Political discussion, in general, refers to communication between people about public affairs. The definite meaning of the term, however, tends to fluctuate, but it includes both political conversation, which involves informal social interactions, and political talk, which is the more formal exchange of arguments (Scheufele, 1999; Kearney, 2013). In this study, political discussion is meant, Computer-mediated political discussions that occur in the Social networking sites, particularly in Facebook. In other terms, we mean online conversations that take place on Facebook pages and forums that people usually discuss issues related to politics.

### **2.2 Social media**

No discussion about social media is complete without mention of the Internet—the delivery method for all those blog posts, pictures, videos, and Tweets. The Internet is a worldwide network of computer networks linked through high-speed, high-volume telephone lines and cables, as well as via Wi-Fi connections. It has come a long way from its start in the early 1960s when the US Department of Defense decided to set up the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) to protect the communications network during the war. At the time, military institutions used it. The Internet was rapidly developed during the 1980s and is being used in various areas of life. In 1983, the ARPANET was divided into two different networks: the ARPANET, dedicated to the civil use, and the MILNET, which was allocated for military use, but were connected so that users of the two networks could exchange information among themselves. In this stage, the Internet entered its commercial phase (Cohen-Almagor. 2011). Today, the Internet is open to everyone, and it is a significant destination for information, commerce, entertainment, and communication (vault.com: Social media, n.d.).

By social media, “we mean those Internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online” (Okoro and Nwafor, p. 33). Also, Kaplan and Haenlein (2012, p. 101) described social

media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.”

Many of us use the terms social media and social networking as if they have the same meaning. Although the difference is subtle, they are not the same. Social networking is a subcategory of social media (Daniel, 2018), and refers specifically to the online platforms that people use to build social networks or relations.

Social media has become important for every aspect of life and affects how nearly every industry does business. People use social media to stay informed, compare and buy products, and keep in touch with family and friends. Companies also use social media to reach their customers. They have in-house social media departments or hire consulting firms to help them develop a social media strategy, market their products, and manage their profile across different types of social media. Nonprofits and government agencies use social media to spread information about their programs and services.

Generally, social media has been around since the beginning of the Internet, but Six Degrees was the first social-networking site, launched in 1997. It allowed users to create a profile and make a connection with other users. In 1999, the first blogging sites, like Open Dairy and Live Journal became public, creating a social media sensation that is still well-liked today. After the innovation of blogging, social media began to grow more popular. Sites like LinkedIn and MySpace gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Flickr and Photobucket facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube came out in 2005, creating a new way for people to communicate and share across great distances (vault.com: Social media, n.d.). Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) identify six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flickr), social-networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life).

Over 3 billion people are logging onto social media accounts around the world (wearesocial.com, 2018), meaning that almost half of the world's population spends at least part of their day updating their status or story.

### **2.2.1 Facebook**

Facebook is the most popular social networking website on the Internet today with 2.2 billion monthly active users around the worldwide (Statista, 2018) since its launch in 2004. The site provides services of acquaintance, and allows users to share information, photos, videos, files, with friends, families, co-workers, classmates and makes connections easier in a short time. It creates the possibility of working groups of friends under common themes and provides services in the areas of work, education, and others. Registration is required to access and browse the site.

The Facebook life story began from a simple site called 'Facemash', invented by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg along with three of his classmates at Harvard- Chris Hughes, Dustin Moskovitz, and Andrew McCollum (techspirited.com, 218). The site was used by the students as entertainment to evaluate the level of beauty as "attractive" or "no" by placing the photos of two-person next to each other and then having people vote for the hotter one, in a dormitory for students at Harvard University in 2003. But it quickly evolved into a form like its current form 'Thefacebook.com' (techspirited.com, 218). Initially, the network was a social networking tool for Harvard students only, but gradually, it was expanded to other universities and colleges in the Boston area, as it became popular in secondary schools and eventually all US universities.

Facebook continued to be limited to university and high school students for two years until Zuckerberg decided to take another step forward, to open his doors to anyone who wanted to use it. And as of September 2006, the network was extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with a registered email address. The result was a surge in the number of users, rising from 12 million in December 2006 to more than 50 million by the end of 2007 (Boyd, 2018). At the same time, Mark Zuckerberg also decided to open the doors of the site to the programmers to provide new services to visitors and enter into contracts with advertisers seeking to benefit from the broad base of the masses.

Also, the rapid success of the site has naturally attracted the attention of the information industry and investors what led to Microsoft buying 1.6% stock in the company for \$240 million (Stone, 2007). An online marketplace, in June 2010, reflected a valuation of \$11.5 billion, for private Facebook stock (Morgan & Hodges, 2011) – and in November 2018, \$139.53 billion (finance.yahoo.com, 2018). In December 2011, Facebook was the second



most visited website in the world after Google (Boyd, 2018), as it is kept growing year after year regarding user engagement and in the market share until today, to become first social networking in the world.

### **2.2.2 Facebook as a political platform**

Digital platforms have become an increasingly substantial part of the daily lives of billions of users on the planet, it has transformed the way in which we manage in every aspect of our life, and politics is no exception.

Nowadays, social media are said to have a profound impact on public discourse and communication in the society, as it is changed the way in which political discourse carried out. Its influence on politics has become the new trend as it grows in importance as a platform for political activism.

Different social media platforms that exist today like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube provide new and innovative ways to motivate the citizen's engagement in political life and are believed to have the potential for increasing civic participation. Internet users are enabled to create content on their own by using political blogs or discussion forums, what boost the political awareness of the citizens.

An American study has found that engaging in political activities via social networks can lead some users to expand their political activity outside the Internet. According to study from the Pew Research Center, entitled "Civic engagement in the Digital Age," 43% of social networking users decided to expand their knowledge of a political or social issue after first seeing it through social media sites (Smith, 2013).

One of the major engines behind the advancement in social and political communication capabilities is Facebook. Although opinions on whether Facebook is an ideal platform for political participation are varied, , we cannot ignore its importance when it comes to how it promotes civic engagement among its users and its ability to bring people together and help organize. Facebook allows users to interact freely with political leaders (by commenting on their posts or attending virtual events through live streaming), participate in political discussions in groups and connect with other like-minded individuals. It gives

the individuals the opportunity of expressing their political thoughts and concerns freely, without leaving their workplace or living rooms, as it gives citizens a straightforward and simple way to join political parties or groups and to engage the politics. Also, it plays an essential role in shaping political awareness by providing political information to its users and contributes to the rapid response to political events.

The era of Facebook is characterised by an individual's ability to influence others, through low-cost and widespread means of expression and the increasing strength of civil society and the political awareness among citizens in an unprecedented manner. This has a positive impact on encouraging citizens towards civic engagement, and can bolster the role of regional and international institutions in helping citizens to participate in making the public policies of their countries.

Facebook as a platform gives both politicians and the ordinary citizens the opportunity to practice their civic rights in a way, which the traditional media platforms could not offer. It lets the ordinary individuals discuss their concerns about the political issues and interact with the decision makers. The platform also allows the politicians to mobilize supporters on the ground and to reach out to potential voters wherever they are. This platform can provide citizens with new channels to participate in political activities, which makes politics a public affair practiced by most people without being limited to certain groups. It also encourages individuals who are not politically active to participate in political events, so that, it can say that it can be a political voice for ordinary and extraordinary citizens.

Expressing the political opinions in Facebook is as easy as just pressing the 'like button' updating your 'status' to inform the other users what you have in your mind or sharing a political party's views in your 'Timeline'. The platform creates more opportunity for the voters to interact more easily with the political entities and to give feedback at the same time. On the other hand, Facebook allows the political groups or parties to advertise their campaigns and political ideas without paying for it, as it enables the politicians to reach larger target groups and audience at zero cost. Features like 'share' in the platform increase the opportunity of political ideas and campaigns to go viral and reach different target groups easily.

Kushin and Kitchener (2009) examined the use of Facebook for online political discussion by citizens, and their results indicate that Facebook is a legitimate location for discussion of political issues and explored how Facebook serves as a platform for political debates.

### **2.2.3 Facebook and Arab spring**

The role of Facebook, and other social media, came to the fore in the Arab context, where communication through social networking sites played a prominent role in uprisings and revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Algeria and Bahrain in the first few months of 2011, to mobilize public opinion on several political issues. In Egypt, for example, social networks, led by Facebook, created protests and encouraged strikes, from the April 6 Youth Movement, or " We are all Khaled Said page" to demonstrations on January 25, 2011, which sparked the Egyptian revolution. These examples embodied the ability of these sites to mobilize the public, and to move from the virtual phase to the realistic stage 'on the street'.

In his book "The Facebook Revolutions", Mus'ab Katalouni (2014) stated that the social networks played an active role in the Arab Spring and turned from being social networking sites for making friendships, exchanging jokes and side conversations to sites exploited by its visitors and activists for political work. It discussed working conditions and common concerns, with a record speed of action and pressure on governments and political systems, as happened in Egypt, Tunisia and other countries in the region.

Facebook contributed to, as noted by Katalouni (2014), breaking the barrier of fear, and the formation of an interaction between peoples, as it uncovered the errors that occurred in the political systems and documented by fixed and moving images and turned into a source for the mass media and satellite channels.

At a time when the official media in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria underestimated the protests in the street and simplified the popular movements, Facebook played a crucial role and covered the events. It enabled the journalists to over-

come the obstacles and barriers of publishing laws, the restrictions of the ruling authorities, and technical problems, and the citizens became a journalist who conveys information and news to the audience.

Nadeem Al Mansouri, a professor of social sciences at the Lebanese University, summarized the advantages that made Facebook the best medium in moving revolutions: speed of communication, ease and low cost, ease of use, multilingualism, continuous presence, mobilization and globalism (Katalouni, 2014).

In many countries of the world, this site has become vital to the prosperity of political activity. It exceeds the borders and the control. It has become platforms for political movements, demands for reforms and rejection of injustice in all fields of life. It is the ideal platform for civic engagement when living in undemocratic societies. In the third world for instance, where the freedom of expression means and political participation channels are limited, Facebook is vital.

#### **2.2.4 Facebook and political campaigns**

The internet has changed the political world likewise to how it has changed our lives. It has transformed the way we deal with politics by creating a new civic culture and providing new campaign platforms that are accessible 24/7 (all the time).

Since their emergence, social networks have become an essential platform for launching and managing political campaigns in different forms. That has moved the political campaigns from the traditional media outlets, streets and public squares, which were the most prominent areas of campaigning, where politicians used to try to convince voters of their electoral programs, to the social networking platforms. That is to the benefit of the broad user base and innovative nature of the internet to reach millions of voters in a short time and a lower cost.

Since 2008, the new media began to dominate the political campaigns. This trend was highlighted by the campaign of Barack Obama, which changed forever how political campaigns are run (Di Pace, 2016) and was one of the reasons for his arrival at the White House. "President Obama wasn't the first to explore social media as a campaign tactic"

(Hellweg, 2011, p.22) but his campaign was the first to do so with that level of success, and it is clear their work transferred into actual votes (Vonderschmitt, 2012).

Obama's campaign used Facebook as a significant political campaign platform (Smith, 2011). The campaign used the platform effectively, in an unprecedented way and it took advantage of the potential that Facebook had to engage with young voters who were disaffected with the political process and reach out to the other potential voters in a short time with less cost. Facebook groups like (One Million Strong for Barack) which was one of the first pro-Obama groups on Facebook, founded in 2007 by Farouk Olu Aregbe, have played a crucial role in the campaign by mobilizing many volunteers, collecting funds and gathering support for the candidate (Smith, 2011). Facebook's most interesting aspect is that whenever someone writes a post, shares a video or joins a group his entire network is notified. Facebook is therefore, a perfect platform for the diffusion of content which can easily become a viral phenomenon (Di Pace, 2016), and Obama's campaign workers realized this and utilized it.

At present Facebook is a tool no candidate should be without (Sue and Carmine, 2011). Political parties across the globe now realise that they must invest in the new media especially Facebook for their campaigns to compete with their rival parties. As a campaign platform, Facebook provides political parties with a range of new capacities that can enhance their campaigns. Facebook allows the candidates to connect with voters wherever they are, and to create vast networks through sharing, comments, and reactions (Dommett and Temple, 2018), and it can be said that Facebook has a substantial role in the political realm and a future in political campaigning.

In spite of the fact that Facebook played a crucial role in the political realm since its emergence, there are challenges related to how this technology is used within the political arena. Some studies revealed how the platform had been used for negative ways. For instance, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) found that some candidates misused social media including Facebook during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The study shows that some candidates used the platform to attack their rivals, spread false rumors, hatred and inciting messages which were believed to have sparked to the violence and tensions witnessed before and after the elections in many parts of Nigeria.

The platform was allegedly exploited by the Russians to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election. They are accused of spreading fake news and promoting fake pages on Facebook to affect the public sentiment (Kennedy, 2018). In 2018, more attention is given to how Facebook should manage public sites in order to avoid hate speech and incitement to violence.

### **2.3 The Somali Context**

Somalia, officially the Federal Republic of Somalia, is located in the Horn of Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden in the north, Djibouti in the north-west, Ethiopia in the west, and Kenya in the south-west, in east it borders the Indian Ocean, and it shares maritime borders with the Republic of Yemen. With a 2018 population estimated at 15.18 million, up from the 2013 estimate of 10 million (worldpopulationreview.com).

The country covers an area of 637,657 km<sup>2</sup> and has the second longest coastline in Africa just behind Madagascar (4828 km) about 3025 km. (countrywatch.com 2018, p. 5). The coast is mainly shared with the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden. The country's capital and largest city is Mogadishu. Spoken languages are Somali (official), Arabic, Italian and English and dominant religion in the country is Islam (countrywatch.com, 2018).

Somalia gained its independence from both Britain and Italy colonials. Italian Somaliland (the south) became independent 26th of June 1960, and British Somaliland (the north) became independent 1st of July in the same year and united with the Italian Somaliland to form the Republic of Somalia (Lewis, 2003). Adan Abdulle Osman became the first elected president of Somalia and Abdul-Rashid Ali Sharmarke was appointed the first prime minister (Ingiriis, 2017).

In 1967, the president Aden Abdulle was defeated in elections by his former prime minister Abdul-Rashid Ali, to become the second president of the republic. After two years, on 15th October in 1969, President Abdul-Rashid was assassinated by one of his bodyguards while he was visiting the northern part of the country (Ingiriis, 2017).

In 21st of October 1969, just a few days later after the assassination of the elected president, General Mohamed Siyad Barre the leader of the army took control in a bloodless

coup (Ingiriis, 2017) and placed the republic under a military rule of the supreme revolutionary council (SRC). He declared Somalia to be a socialist state, backed by the Soviet Union, bringing an abrupt end to the process of constitutional democracy in Somalia.

In January 1991, Siyad Barre's regime was overthrown by armed opposition groups, and the country descended into civil war and anarchy, resulting in the arrival of a UN peace-keeping mission, which operated in the country between 1992 and 1995 but failed to bring stability.

In October 2000, a Transitional National Government (TFG) was formed in Arta, Djibouti with broad representation of all Somali clans and was elected Abdulqasim Salad Hassan (former interior minister and deputy prime minister at Barre's regime) as a president, hoping to end a decade of political turmoil, civil war, and humanitarian crisis. President Abdulqasim had a three-year mandate to lead the country to a permanent national government, but he could not succeed because of the warlords that opposed to his administration (Webersik, Hansen and Egal, 2018), when he moved to the capital Mogadishu.

In another attempt of restoring Somali central government in October 2004, was elected Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as a president of new transitional federal government, which were established in Kenya. In 2005, the elected president and all TFG members were returned from Kenya to Somalia, but they faced the same challenges that former government faced or worse than that.

In 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) took control of most of central and southern Somalia, imposing a harsh interpretation of sharia law over the areas it ruled. The embattled TFG was relegated to control over only a small part of the capital. Ethiopian troops intervened later that year to fight ICU forces (Aljazeera, 2012).

In January 2009, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former ICU leader was elected president and he vowed after he is sworn, to form a broad-based government and invited all armed groups in the war-ravaged Horn of Africa nation to join the UN-sponsored reconciliation effort. President Ahmed and his administration moved to Somalia from Djibouti where he was elected, and the situation seemed little better than previous governments as he worked in the capital Mogadishu and he had the privilege of the organizing the first presidential elections held in the country since 1991 (Webersik, Hansen and Egal, 2018)

In September 2012, Somali parliament members elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (an academic and civic activist) as the country's new president in Mogadishu. It was the first time for years that a president has been elected on Somali soil, a sign of improving security and the political process. As president Mohamud mentioned in one of his interviews, his government laid a foundation of some political stability and revived several institutions that serve the Somali people, as his administration succeeded in implementing to some extent the federal system that was limited to paper for years.

In February 2017, Hassan Sh. Was defeated in second elections held in the country, by the former prime minister and dual US-Somali citizen Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed to lead the country until 2020, (countrywatch.com 2018, p. 5), with aiming to have complete democratic elections of one person one vote, throughout the country, by the end of his period

Somalia is facing a lot of challenges today, such as corruption, unemployment, terrorism, poverty, and hunger, what raised the number of the citizens fleeing from the country and immigrating to the other world seeking for a better life.

According to Transparency International's latest Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 2017 report published 21st February of this year (2018), Somalia was ranked one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In Somalia, corruption affected almost all government institutions. It affected the office of the president, the prime minister, the parliament members, the governor of the capital, security agencies as well as humanitarian aid. The corruption penetrated almost all government branches. Government bureaucrats consider as pejorative taking bribes and embezzling government assets. They excuse their actions as the government's inability to pay them.

On the other hand, citizens became immune to corruption. The officials seek their clan's protection if they are accused of bribery or breaking the law. Thus, corruption in Somalia is institutionalized, protected and quasi-legalized (Diis, n.d.).

One of the most challenges that Somalia faces today is lack of security. Several factors mainly determine the general security situation in Somalia. The main factor is the long-term armed conflict between the Somali National Army (SNA), supported by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and anti-government elements or insurgents, the



foremost being Al-Shabaab—the militant jihadist group--that pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2012, (EASO, 2017), and continues to attack in densely populated areas, including the capital. Last year, more than 500 people were killed in a double truck bomb attack in Mogadishu. The other factors are intro- and inter-clan violence, private militias, and criminals. These factors are often inter-linked and hard to distinguish (EASO, 2017).

Also, the unemployed youth population (about 67%) in the country contributes significantly to irregular migration and participation in extremist activities, including Al-Shabaab, which is viewed as another form of employment (IMF, 2017).

### **2.3.1 Current political context in Somalia**

The political system in Somalia is complex and still in the process of development and construction. It is composed of a tribal parliament, which consists of 54 members of the Upper House of Parliament and 275 members of the House of the People (Webersik, Hansen and Egal, 2018). Through this parliament, the head of state is selected, who in turn chooses the prime minister. The prime minister will form a consensual government with the confidence of parliament, which will ensure that tribes are equal in their representation in the government.

Members of the parliament were not elected in direct elections, where 54, members of the Upper House are nominated by the regional states, while 14,025 Somali citizens elected 275 Lower House members. The 135 traditional elders representing all clans selected these 14,025 (Webersik, Hansen and Egal, 2018).

This clan-based governance system has kept most Somalis out of the political process for decades, as most citizens have never participated in direct elections.

If voting is the only form of political participation, in which citizens as individuals can directly influence elections, government policy and legislation, most of Somalis do not have that right yet, after more than two decades of civil war in the country. Therefore, many of Somalis use alternative channels to have an impact on the political decisions in the country. One of the channels that Somalis use massively to engage in local politics is Facebook, where they discuss in the current political issues in the country and try to influence the decision makers.

Facebook had a prominent effect on the Somali political scene. For instance, it played a significant role in the last presidential elections when some Somali MPs conducted polls on their Facebook pages asking the public who they want as their next president among the 24 presidential candidates. Among the MPs who conducted polls was Muna Key, the young Somali fashion designer and newly elected MP. Most of her followers voted for Farmaajo (the current president). She later posted on her Facebook page thanking her fellow MPs for voting according to the hope of the majority and not driven by selfish motives.

Although most of the pre-election analysis had not favored a Farmaajo's win but agreed that he was the most popular candidate with the public, Facebook is said to have had a role in changing the decision of many MPs. So, we can say that the platform was one of the deciding factors in the last presidential election in Somalia (radiodalsan.com, 2017).

### **3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory**

In its theoretical framework, this study depends on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). This theory explains the actual role of the public in the communication process by perceiving it as an active audience, diverging from other media effect theories that view the audience as passive objects of media (Tanta, Mihovilović & Sablić, 2014). The goal-directedness of the audience is what differentiates U&G theory from early communication theories (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010). UGT is seen as an essential turning point in the history of the media, where the main question turned from: What does the media doing to the public? To: what do the people do with the media? The theory is “based on two core questions: 1) why are people attracted to certain media? and 2) what kind of satisfaction does media provide for people?” (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016, p. 2). It puts forward that people use media to fulfil specific gratifications and choose a particular media outlet or content to satisfy a specific need.

The UGT assumes that the audience makes a media selection for meeting five different needs (Katz, Gurevitch, Haas, 1973, in Tanta, et al., 2014. p. 87):

- Cognitive needs-- The viewer/ reader wants to acquire information, knowledge and to explore new things.
- Affective needs-- The viewer/ reader seeks for example pleasure or emotional satisfaction.
- Personal identity-- The viewer/reader cares about self-confidence, integrity, and self-respect.
- Integration and social interaction--The viewer/reader seek relationships and affiliations.
- Escapism-- The viewer/reader needs to escape real problems and tensions, for example playing games.

Despite disagreement by communication scholars as to the exact roots of the UGT (Ruggiero, 2000), Elihu Katz was the one who officially outlined it in 1959 (Rizkallah and Razzouk, 2006) in his response to Berelson, who said that the communication research seems to be in a bad situation (Dhaha & Igale, 2013). Katz proposed that field should reverse the traditional question and instead of asking what the media do to people, should ask what people do with the media (Rizkallah and Razzouk, 2006).

Later, Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1973) developed the approach by suggesting four tenets of the UGT: The first tenet proposes that media use is goal-directed. Audience members actively select specific media or content to satisfy their particular expectations. It means that members of the public have an active and positive reception of the message and are not merely negative receptors to the media. They are exposed to these means to satisfy their needs and desires from the media. The second tenet suggests that the connection between the desire to fulfil particular requirements and the choice of a specific means of communication that is due to the audience and defined by individual differences. The third emphasizes that the public is the one who chooses the methods and content that satisfies their needs. It is the individual who uses the means of communication and not the means of communication that uses individuals. Fourth, the public is aware of the benefit that accrues to it, and its motives and interests (Rizkallah and Razzouk, 2006).

In the beginning, UGT was used to understand the consumption of radio and newspapers, and through the decades, it has been applied to different media such as television, magazines, video games and more recently, social media. Thus, researchers have made many efforts to examine the reasons why users use social media or related communication technologies and what satisfaction they obtained from using different social media platforms. For instance, Tanta, Mihovilović & Sablić (2014) studied the benefits of Facebook use

among adolescents as well as to discover which of their needs are gratified by using this platform. The study finds that most adolescents use Facebook for socializing and communicating with their friends, for discussing school activities, setting up meetings and dates with friends as well as obtaining information about social events. The study explored that the use of Facebook primarily gratifies youngsters' need for information, integration, social interaction, and understanding of their social environment. This is consistent with the findings of Dhaha & Igale (2013) which concluded that the Somali youth use Facebook because of the needs to obtain information, friendship, entertainment, and other factors. Also, a study carried out by Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, (2009) identified four primary needs for participating in groups within Facebook: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information.

One of the studies on the UGT as a theoretical framework in the social media, study (Raake & Bonds-Raake, 2008), which sought to understand what motivates the college students to use social networking sites, through comparing Facebook and MySpace. The study concluded that most gratifications resulting from the use of these networks are social interaction and communication with friends.

Furthermore, Uriste, Dong & Day, (2009) explored in their study which they tried to explain the use of Facebook and MySpace sites by the youth in the context of the UGT, that the young people use Facebook and MySpace as a way of obtaining information and Entertainment. As well a study by Quan-Haase & Young (2010) revealed that graduate students used Facebook, to have fun, maintain a social network and knowledge about the social activities.

A study aimed to explore why users choose to use some particular social media, Gan & Wang (2014) examined the gratifications sought from using two popular social media in China: Weibo and Weixin. The results revealed three general gratifications for usage of both Weibo and Weixin: Social interaction, information sharing, and social networking.

In a study sought to understand why people in general use social media, Whiting & Williams, (2013) identified ten uses and gratifications for using social media:

expression of opinion, information seeking, social interaction, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, information sharing, and knowledge about others.

Applying the uses and gratification theory in this study, users of Facebook as a political discussion platform are active users, and they can choose the appropriate tool for their activity. Both Facebook users and page managers in this study are not passive media consumers, they are active and intentionally seek the suitable media platform for their needs. In that sense, this study contributes to the rapidly growing literature on the Facebook Uses and Gratification perspective.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

A mixed methods research design was used in this study, in the form of online surveys. The online survey has many advantages, including the ability of the Internet to access different groups and individuals at the same time, who would be difficult to reach through other channels. As well it is time-saving, and it allows to reach the research population in a short amount of time, despite possibly being separated by vast geographic distances (Kevin, 2005). The survey gives the respondents more freedom as they are the ones who decide where and when to complete the survey and how much time it is going to take (De Leeuw, cited in Dhaha and Igale, 2013).

The data in this study was collected from two categories of respondents: Ordinary Facebook users, and political Facebook page managers via an online survey.

For the ordinary Facebook users, a convenient sample was employed that all genders and age groups could participate in the study. An online quantitative questionnaire with ten questions (see appendix A) was created using a [drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com), and the URL was posted on selected Facebook pages which usually people discuss political issues and the survey was available from September 20, 2018, to October 4, 2018. The link also was posted on the researcher's personal Facebook page and was sent through the Facebook messenger to some friends who were involved in a political discussion on Facebook. One hundred and thirty-nine (139) participants filled this questionnaire.

Concerning the page managers, purposive sampling was utilized, considering the nature of the study the researcher selected three (3) Facebook page managers/owners to respond to the survey, and they were sent to a qualitative email survey which consisted of seven open-ended questions (see appendix B), and they gave their responses within a week.

The three managers were selected based on; their network size, their activities, and researcher's accessibility to them. The managers who have given their permission to be named are 1) Abdirahman Abdishakur Warsame, who is an opposition party leader and manages a page carry the same name, with 221,488 followers. 2) Mohammed Adaani, a political activist who manages a page, titled ' Faca Rejada Soomaaliyeed.' with 33,588 followers, and 3) Hanna Abubakar, an influencer who manages a page with the same name, with 101,670 followers

Both respondent groups (the Facebook users and the managers) were briefed about the study purposes and confidentiality issues by the researcher using their language for deep understanding. Ambiguous questions have avoided, and the surveys were pilot-tested with 13 Facebook users to improve its validity, and t the quality of the survey questions.

The collected data were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and Google Forms, and summarized in tables and under the emergence themes.

## **5 FINDINGS**

The essence of the survey was to understand why Somalis use Facebook for political discussions and how Facebook political page managers/owners manage these discussions on their pages. It also set out to determine to what extent do participants and organizers believe that these discussions influence political discourse in Somalia. Therefore, both page organizers and participants were approached through two different online surveys: an online questionnaire for the participants; and an email survey for the page organizers:

### **5.1 The Online Questionnaire for Participants**

A total of 139 respondents participated in the online questionnaire. The respondents have not answered all the questions, so each question in the questionnaire may have different response numbers from the others. However, for the purposes of this study, all answers have been included to establish trends and patterns of use and to understand what motivates the Facebook users, in the context of UGT. The data is summarized and presented

under three themes: 1) Location demographics of the respondents, 2) Patterns of Facebook usage for political discussions, and 3) reasons why Facebook is used for political discussions.

The following table shows findings concerning the place of residence of the respondents.

**Table 1:** *Geographic distribution of the respondents*

<b>Demographic location of the respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Where do you live now?		
1) Somalia	63	47%
2) Outside Somali	70	53%
Total	133	100%

Data shows that 53% of respondents are living outside Somalia, while 47% are living in Somalia.

The result in table 2 illustrates the patterns of Facebook usage for political discussions. Here, more than two-thirds of the respondents (72%) have been using Facebook for political discussions more than 3 years, followed by those who have been using between 2-3 years (13.6%), and those who have been using for 1-2 years with 4.8%, as well those who have been using for less than one year with 9.6%. In terms of how often respondents participate in political discussions on , data shows that almost half of the respondents (46.5%) stated that they engage in political discussions on the Facebook sometimes, and nearly one-fifth (17.3%) said that they usually participate in political discussions on Facebook. As (16.5%) were answered that they rarely engage in political discussions on Facebook, followed by (15%) who mentioned that they always participate political discussions on Facebook, and (4.7%) who said they never discuss political issues on Facebook.

In terms of if the participants start the political discussions on Facebook or only make comments, more than half of the respondents (56.1%) said, they sometimes start the political discussions on Facebook, where more than a quarter (28%) answered that they just comment on other posts, followed by (15.9%) who stated that they always start a political

discussion on Facebook. Regarding whether the participants use their own Facebook page for political discussions or whether they just engage discussions in other pages, almost two-thirds of respondents (63.9%) expressed that they use their own Facebook page for political discussions and at the same time engage in the discussions on the other pages. Other (36.1%) respondents said they only participate in the discussions on the other pages.

**Table 2: Patterns of Facebook usage for political discussions**

<b>Patterns of Facebook usage for political discussions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>How long have you been using Facebook to engage in political discussions?</b>		
1) 0-1 year	12	9.6%
2) 1-2 years	6	4.8%
3) 2-3 years	17	13.6%
4) More than 3 years	90	72.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>How often do you participate in political discussions on Facebook?</b>		
1) Always	19	15.0%
2) Usually	22	17.3%
3) Sometimes	59	46.5%
4) Rarely	21	16.5%
5) Never	6	4.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Do you start political discussions on the Facebook or you just make a comments?</b>		
1) I start always	21	15.9%
2) I start sometimes	74	56.1%
3) I just comment on other posts	37	28.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Do you use your Facebook page for political discussions or you just engage in discussions on the other pages?</b>		
1) I just participate in discussions on the other pages	48	36.1%
2) I use my page and for political discussions and also engage in discussions in the other pages	85	63.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 displays the motivations behind the use of Facebook for political discussions by the respondents. The figures show that more than one-third (44.3%) of the respondents chose Facebook to discuss political issues because they believe it is the only way that they can influence the political process in their country as they do not have actual voting rights. Whereas almost one-third (32.8) chose the platform to express their political views



and to share with others. Followed by those who selected the platform to participate in the political process in their country (15.3%), and (10%) who motivated by other reasons. Data shows that most of the respondents (78.5%) believe that Facebook is the easiest way to engage in political discussions, while less than a quarter (21.5%) do not think so. Also, more than half of the respondents (60.7%) consider Facebook as the most effective way to engage in political discussions, with (39.3%) who do not believe that. More than two-thirds of the respondents (67.2%) answered they believe that online political discussions may lead them offline political activities, while 32.8% do not suppose that. The collected data shows that the majority (83.7%) of respondents believe that the political discussions on Facebook influence the political decisions in Somalia, whereas only 16.3% were denied that.

**Table 3:** *Reasons why Facebook is used for political discussions*

Reasons why Facebook is used for political discussions	Frequency	%
<b>Why did you choose on Facebook to <u>discuss</u> your political opinions?</b>		
1) To express my political views and to share with others	43	32.8%
2) To participate the political process in my country	20	15.3%
3) I believe it's the only way that I can influence the political process in my country, as I don't have the right of actual voting	58	44.3%
4) Other	10	7.6%
Total	131	100%
<b>Do you think Facebook is the easiest way to engage <u>in</u> political discussions?</b>		
1) Yes	106	78.5%
2) No	29	21.5%
Total	135	100%
<b>Do you believe Facebook is the most effective <u>way</u> to engage in political discussions?</b>		
1) Yes	82	60.7%
2) No	53	39.3%
Total	135	100%
<b>Do you believe that the online political <u>discussions</u> may lead you to other offline political activities?</b>		
1) Yes	90	67.2%
2) No	44	32.8%
Total	134	100%
<b>Do you believe that the political discussions on the <u>Facebook</u> influence the political decisions in Somalia?</b>		
1) Yes	113	83.7%
2) No	22	16.3%
Total	135	100.0%

## **5.2 The Result from the Page Managers**

This section contains qualitative data collected from three Facebook page managers through a qualitative email survey. It is very brief as most respondents gave short answers, and irrelevant responses were excluded. The data analysis process in this section was divided into four steps which apply to most qualitative methods as suggested by Creswell (Creswell, cited in Chen and Sali 2010):

- Data arrangement into several forms (i.e. database, sentences or individual words)
- Reading the data groups several times to gain a complete picture or overview of what it contains. During the process, the key points that suggest possible categories are summarised.
- Identifying of general categories or themes and classifying them accordingly, what will help the researcher to see a pattern or meaning of the data obtained.
- Finally, the data is summarised for the audiences.

Three themes emerged from an in-depth analysis of the results to answer the research questions: 1) Quality of Facebook as a platform, 2) Difficulties in managing, and 3) Political impact.

### **5.2.1 Quality of Facebook as a platform**

All the three respondents believed that Facebook by its nature is an ideal platform for political discussions because:

"it is free and cheap." (respondent #1)

"Another reason could be that the Somalis are oral society, which means they will probably value videos and short messages over long articles." (respondent #1).

"It is a quick, easy and modern platform." (respondent #2).

The respondents perceived Facebook as a perfect tool to discuss in the situation about their country, because of the high number of users, as mentioned by respondent #2.

"Somalis use Facebook considerably, especially those in the diaspora; therefore, it is a perfect channel to discuss in the situation of the country."

The respondents were convinced that Facebook enables its users to connect different people in different places at the same time and gives more freedom to connect and discuss. Respondent #3 believed that the importance of Facebook as a tool lies in its global scope that allows reaching out different target groups in various places on the planet at the same time.

Mainly I can engage many people who live in different places on the planet through the Facebook platform. It is less cost and more freedom." (respondent #3).

### **5.2.2 Difficulties in managing**

From the management aspect, the three respondents mentioned that there are difficulties in managing public political opinions in the Facebook pages such as; lousy behavior (respondents # 2,3), negative critics' (respondents # 1,2), and hacking threats (respondents #2).

As the respondents mention, one of the most difficulties that online political discussion managers face is keeping the participants on the topic; respondent #1 said:

"the difficulties lie in the ability (or lack of it) to stay topical, neutral, honest and rational. It is so easy to get carried away by the emotional currents that are so prevalent in Somali politics".

one of the difficulties is that the participants do not accept the dissenting views readily, as respondent #3, said:

"our people are not familiar with political discussions and accepting different viewpoints, so there is always disagreement, abusing and incidents.".

The respondents expressed that they used to manage these difficulties in different ways:

"We always tell the participants that we have got rules concerning the discussions on our page, and if someone violates them we remind him/her again, but if he/she keeps doing so, we consider removing him/her from our page." (#1).

Respondent #2 said also in this regard:

" it depends on the situation; sometimes we remove some posts from the list, and sometimes we have to block some contacts, but we try to give more chances as much as we can.".

The three respondents a said they respect and welcome all viewpoints when managing political discussions on their pages,

" People tend to either agree with me or oppose my point of view. I accept both views as valid and respect those who disagree with me. I tend to value those who hold opposing views, as they are the ones who show me my faults and blind spots." (respondent #1)

" We always welcome different ideas and show more patient upon the critical stage" (respondent #2).

"We exchange different views freely so that we can find useful conclusions in a specific topic (Respondent #3).

### **5.2.3 Political impact**

Regarding if the political discussions that occurred on their Facebook pages influence the Somali political scene, the three respondents believed that it has impact. Respondent #1 said:

"I have some influential people, some in the parliament others in the cabinet, who, occasionally, send me private messages telling me that they welcome my view."

"we have been influencing the countries politics for more than one decade and we have strong supports in every province." (respondent #2).

While respondent #3 mentioned that sometimes the decision makers adopt their view-points,

" Several times we criticised some issues, and we suggested the solution, we noticed that both government and opposition leaders realised and accepted later our arguments."

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The data generated in this study provides insights into why Somalis use Facebook for political discussions, and how the Facebook political page organizers manage the conversations that take place on their pages. It also considers to what extent both participants and managers believe these discussions influence the political scene in Somalia.

In conducting the study, the researcher considered it necessary to first identify the place of residence of the respondents. This decision was aimed to test if there is a difference regarding usage between those who are living in the country, and those who live outside the country. The data shows that there is no significant difference as 47% of respondents said they live inside the country, while 53% of them said they are living outside the country, therefore, the place of residence seems not to be a driving factor. This is interpreted

as the participants having the same motives to use Facebook for political discussions regardless of the place of residence. The results suggest that both local and diaspora respondents view Facebook as an essential platform when it comes to engaging in Somali politics.

As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of the respondents have a good experience about the political discussion on the Facebook as more than two-thirds of them were engaging in political debates on Facebook for more than three years; this suggests that the phenomenon is not new. It could also be interpreted as an indication of the importance of Facebook as a political platform. Results also show that most of the respondents use their own Facebook page for political discussions, and also engage in discussions in the other pages. What means that they are not satisfied only to express their opinions on their pages, and they intentionally seek political forums and pages to engage in large-scale political discussions. In Somalia, traditional media sources are either owned by businesses, or controlled by the government. Therefore, citizens turn to social media especially to Facebook to discuss their concerns about politics. The platform enabled the citizens to share their political ideas with a broader audience domestically and globally. It allowed them to engage directly with the decision makers as Somali politicians seem to also use Facebook to find out what people think and believe about their activities.

Almost half of the respondents believe Facebook is the only way they can influence the political process on their country as they do not have the right of actual voting. This is interesting, especially when we reflect on the political context of Somalia and think about the fact that citizens do not have the right of actual voting and the means to directly affect the political process in the country. Therefore, many of Somalis may use alternative channels to have an impact on the political decisions in the country. Thus, the result suggests Facebook as one of these channels. The political system in Somalia is clan-based in which clan elders appoint or select parliament members, and they in turn elect the president. Hence, the rest of the citizens have no direct access on the political process in the country.

Moreover, most of the respondents used Facebook for political discussions because they believed it is the easiest way to engage in political conversations. A possible explanation of this can be related to the nature of Facebook as a tool and its quality as a platform. Since it is free, easy to use and it enables us to connect different people in different places

at the same time to engage discussions with them. Also, the result the majority of the respondents see Facebook as the most effective way to participate in political discussions, what can be explained that the respondents see Facebook as an ideal platform for political debates in comparison with the other social media platforms. Facebook is well known amidst Somalis, especially between the young generation. Although there is a lack of accurate data about the number of Somali Facebook users, it is one of the most used social media platforms amongst Somalis. This significant presence of users makes the platform a perfect way to get your message out and to share with others.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents were convinced there was an impact of these discussions on the political scene in Somalia. This indicates how influential Facebook has become in Somali political arena, and how citizens become dependent on it when it comes to participating in the political process in the country. This supports our claims of Facebook role of last presidential elections in Somalia.

The data collected from the page managers through the email survey shows that the three respondents look Facebook as a perfect platform for public discussions. They mentioned the technical aspect of the platform and how it is easy to use and support for online debates. They considered it modern, accessible and suitable for the Somali context.

The result also provides us with significant insights into how a managing public discussion on Facebook is not an easy task. All the respondents reported that they exposed to online harassment, poor conduct, insults and hacking threats while managing public discussions on Facebook. The results suggest the importance of knowing how to deal with such difficulties when managing political discussions on Facebook.

The data shows how managing public political opinions on Facebook needs some rules in place. The study reveals the importance of having regulations concerning abusive behavior, the disputes between visitors, illegal or dangerous activities or contents, and any inappropriate manners.

As the result suggests, having a fruitful and constructive discussion environment on such pages requires managers to be patient with the participants who commit mistakes, and give them more chances to correct their participation. It needs to remind the contributors of the page rules or to give a warning before considering removing or blocking them.

Also, from the management perspective, the results suggest the need to accepting of dissenting views while managing the discussions. People are different and could have different ideas about the same topic; some have a strange way to express what on their minds and some of them may insist on staying out of the discussion topic, so it is vital to know how to manage these differences and difficulties.

The main research question was, "Why Somalis discuss their political opinions on the Facebook?" Based on these findings, it is evident that it is the one easiest and most effective way that they can participate in the political process in their country. Previous studies (Effing, Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011; Tang & Lee, 2013; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012; Vitak & et al., 2011; Skoric & Grace, 2011) found that there is a positive relationship between Facebook use and political participation, but current study goes beyond that, and it poses Facebook as an alternative to traditional political participation forms.

This study has some limitations. It cannot be generalized to all Somali Facebook users since a convenient sample is used and the population is not well represented. The result of this study provided useful insights into the importance of Facebook in the political realm. It contributes to the rapidly growing literature on the relationship of Facebook and political participation.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

In this study, we discussed the Facebook phenomenon and its use for political discussions by the Somalis. The result proposes Facebook as an alternative to traditional political participation forms, in the sense that most respondents perceived it as the only means that they can participate and influence the political process in their country. Moreover, the study suggests that Facebook could be a handy political participation tool among less-democratic societies.

This study relies on the Uses and Gratifications Theory that was used as the base for this study. The approach suggests that media consumers are active and are selective in their media usage according to their needs. Thus, the study found that Somali Facebook users are active media consumers, and they could and have selected the best media tool that suits their needs at this time.

The results of this exploratory study provide a basis for further future studies on Facebook use for political discussions among Somalis, as this was the first attempt to understand the phenomenon.

The study shows that critical lessons could be learnt from the Facebook use experiment for political discussions by the Somalis, such as that it gives a voice to the voiceless in the political realm, and it promotes political participation and democracy, among others.

From the results, I suggest the following recommendations for managing political discussions on Facebook:

- Online media managers should be aware of the important role their page plays for Somalis to express their political opinion in the absence of the right to vote.
- Online media managers should have a set of relevant rules or guidelines, to avoid hate speech, online harassment and poor conduct.
  - These rules or guidelines should be accessible to all users.
- To lead fruitful online political discussions, online media managers should be patient and understanding the nature of the sphere.
  - This environment of tolerance should be communicated to participants in the rules or guidelines.
- When encountering people who do not obey the rules or guidelines, page managers should:
  - Clearly indicate to the participant that their contribution is unacceptable.
  - Remind them of the rules or guidelines for engaging on their page.
  - Allow the participant one more chance to contribute in a more constructive manner.
  - If there is a repeat of the poor conduct, the participant should be informed and blocked.



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## APPENDICES

### A) THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY QUESTIONS

#### 1- Where do you live now?

Somalia

Outside Somalia

#### 2- Why did you choose on Facebook to discuss your political opinions?

To express my political views and share with the others.

To participate in the political process in my country.

I believe it's the only way that I can influence the political process in my country, as I don't have the right of actual voting.

Other:

#### 3- How often do you participate in political discussions on Facebook?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

#### 4- How long have you been using Facebook to engage in political discussions?

Choose:

0-1 Year

1-2 years

2-3 years

More than 3 years

#### 5- Do you start political discussions on the Facebook or you just make a comments?

I start always

I start sometimes

I just comment on other posts

#### 6- Do you use your own Facebook page for political discussions or you just engage in discussions on the other pages?

I do not use my own Facebook page for political discussions, I only participate in discussions on the other pages

Yes, I use my own Facebook page for political discussions and also engage in discussions in the other pages.

**7- Do you think Facebook is the easiest way to engage in political discussions?**

Yes  
No

**8- Do you believe Facebook is the most effective way to engage in political discussions?**

Yes  
No

**9- Do you believe that the online political discussions may lead you to other of-line political activities?**

Yes  
No

**10- Do you believe that the political discussions on the Facebook influence the political decisions in Somalia?**

Yes  
No

#### B) THE EMAIL SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Why did you decide to create a Facebook page?
- What is the importance of engaging people in political discussions on the Facebook?
- Do you create new discussion themes or you only re-post/share content related to the current political events for discussion?
- How do you manage the political discussions on your Facebook page?
- Do you think the opinions expressed on your page influence the Somali political process? Explain why?
- Is the main purpose of your page achieved in the type of political discussions that occur there? Explain your answer.
- What are the difficulties in organizing a Facebook page of this nature?