Original Article

The Impact of Facebook on Election Campaigns: (Case Study of Mogadishu Somalia)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, with a focus on identifying the positive and negative effects of using Facebook as a political tool. In Somalia, Facebook has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms, with a significant portion of the population using the platform to communicate and access information. As such, it has become increasingly important to understand the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu. Although Facebook has become a popular platform for political campaigning globally, little is known about the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. Given the country's recent history of political instability and the increasing role of social media in shaping public opinion, there is a need to study the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu. The article used a descriptive research design employing a quantitative approach to quantify occurrences, describe current conditions, and investigate the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. The target populations that participated in the study were the faculty of social science and other administration staff at Somali National University, with a total of 100 participants. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires, and SPSS was utilised for descriptive analysis. The research findings suggested that Facebook is a popular source of information and a common platform for receiving political messages during election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. The majority of the participants use Facebook almost daily, and a significant proportion have used it as a source of information for the latest election campaign. Additionally, many participants have encountered political posts on Facebook during the campaign, with the majority reporting seeing them with a range of frequencies. This study recommends that Facebook implement measures to combat online harassment and protect users' safety during election campaigns, given that a significant proportion of respondents have witnessed or experienced online harassment related to election campaigns on Facebook.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has played a significant role in promoting communication among people and assisted in the creation of collective identity. They have become a crucial part of modern political activity around the globe. They have paved the way for the involvement and participation of individuals in public processes (Orfan, 2021). Politicians and citizens use a wide variety of online platforms, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to speak about politics and engage in various political activities. Political parties and their followers have used social media to convey their agenda and programs to the citizens and persuade them to join the parties. Sayeed Naqibullah Orfan (2021). Presidential candidates have utilised social media to manage their public image in communications with their followers and journalists (Seungahn & Gregory, 2013; Sutkutė, 2016). Additionally, In Somalia, Facebook has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms, with a significant portion of the population using the platform to communicate and access information. As such, it has become increasingly important to understand the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu. Although Facebook has become a popular platform for political campaigning globally, little is known about the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. Given the country's recent history of political instability and the increasing role of social media in shaping public opinion, there is a need to study the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu. Also, there is a growing concern about the negative effects of Facebook on election campaigns, such as the spread of misinformation and the influence of fake news on election campaigns.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, with a focus on identifying the positive and negative effects of using Facebook as a political tool. The study was guided by two specific objectives. Firstly, the study aims to identify the positive effects of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu. This objective explored the ways in which Facebook can be used to engage with voters, promote political participation and foster democratic discourse. Secondly, the study aims to describe the negative effects of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu.

Overall, this study on the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu is important because it can help to inform policies and guidelines aimed at promoting responsible social media use and protecting democratic values. By understanding the positive and negative effects of social media on election campaigns in Mogadishu, this study can provide valuable insights into the ways in which social media can be leveraged to promote free and fair elections and encourage political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A wealth of literature has examined the way in which political parties use the online environment in election campaigns, and particularly whether the more interactive mode of communication that platforms offer is utilised to connect parties with

those they seek to represent (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Lilleker et al., 2017).

U.S. politicians are said to have a leading role in using social media, with the example of Barack Obama being able to successfully employ social media during his election campaign (Aharony, 2012; Wattal et al., 2010). A review of the evidence leaves no doubt that election campaigns do matter in a variety of important ways (Jacobson, 2015). A combination of complementary social media communication strategies has an effective impact on reputation and the number of interactions and the time taken to respond to customers' questions improve the reputation and provide communication that is more effective (Floreddu and Cabiddu, 2016). As suggested by Neti (2011), social media offers three advantages: listening to customers' grievances and suggestions, identifying various peer groups and influencers among groups, and all this can be done at nearly zero cost as most social networking sites are free (Martinović et al., 2020).

The use of Facebook for political mobilisation and contacting practices during the 2013 elections was largely due to the identification of the youth constituency as demographically superior compared to other age cohorts. As Hodzi (2014) points out, young people constituted most of the "first-time voters", who were inexperienced in the electoral process and therefore "swing" voters worth competing over. As a result, Facebook was used as a hunting ground by parties and candidates to reach out to youthful voters. Although opposition parties engaged in "permanent campaigning" (Larsson, 2015) on Facebook, it is arguable that they were preaching to the converted (mostly urban and diaspora voters), thereby failing to penetrate rural areas where they have consistently failed to make significant inroads (Admire, 2018).

Results of an experimental study of 61 million Facebook users indicate that political posts on social media can influence followers, their friends, and friends of friends (Bond et al., 2012). Thus, political communications occurring through Facebook appear to influence the real-world voting behaviour of millions of people by connecting a campaign to a wide range of 'friends' through an online contact person. Current research and theory suggest that politicians and their management teams can foster individualised collective action through social media sites (Bennett, 2012); the Facebook management team's different use of features has an effect on Facebook users' commitment to the site and that the information on Facebook can spread across a fan's network within a short period of time (Hsu et al., 2015).

The research on social media in the context of Poland's elections has thus far involved two distinct strands of research: first, analysing the adoption of social media into election campaigning by political parties and actors (Koc-Michalska et al., 2014; Koc-Michalska and Lilleker, 2014), and the latter, emphasising the role of social media for deliberative democracy (Jacuński and Baranowski, 2015). In Czechia, social media made its first notable entry into the sphere of politics with the 2010 parliamentary elections, which have altered a long-lasting pattern of power shift between two dominant political parties (Hanley, 2012). Following the 2010 elections, research has gradually started to explore the incorporation of social media into campaigning (Štětka and Vochocová, 2014; Macková et al., 2017).

According to Eurostat, the general trend for individual social network users in 2019 is that 55% use at least one social network (Eurostat, 2019a). This trend continues and grows in 2020. The research regards predominantly social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. According to the European Commission (2020), the model expected rise in the global number of users is 0.2 billion per year. According to Eurostat, in an average of 50% of E.U. users, the split is 90/10% between Facebook and Twitter (and other social networks) users. The use by Croatian businesses is a bit lower than the E.U. average, which is 50%, and for Croatia, it is 46% (Eurostat, 2019b). This should be important because it relates to political parties more correctly than the general population usage

(Martinović et al., 2020). Croatia has around 2 million users of social networks, and they split into 1.900.000 on Facebook, 100.000 on Twitter, and other social networks (Arbona, 2019). Complete data for 2020 are still not available, but some of them suggest that the average user spends at least 40% of waking hours on social networks (Smrekar, 2020). It is reasonably assumed that this number will rise due to various private and professional reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic and self-isolation measures. Some authors suggest that there is an "infodemic" going on parallel to the pandemic, such as Iwai in the paper "Harnessing Social Media for the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2020). Other sources based on statistics of use by the very social networks, such as Facebook, suggest a rise of 40% in use during the first three months of 2020 (Perez, 2020).

Research has shown that these platforms have enabled activists and social movements to mobilise their constituencies across space and time (Gerbaudo, 2012; Lim, 2012; Ndlovu and Mbenga, 2013). Digital platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have also enabled users in both democratic and autocratic contexts to perform a variety of political activities like posting, retweeting, quoting, or replying to tweets about politics and engaging politicians and political parties, allowing users to participate in political debate (Cohen and Kahne, 2012; Kamau, 2017; Mare, 2018). Unlike traditional media, digital media platforms enable individuals to circumvent traditional gatekeepers, shifting political power to ordinary citizens and giving them voice and potential influence through their capacity to reach sizeable audiences easily and quickly (Kamau, 2017).

Extant literature (Castells, 2012; Kahne and Middaugh, 2012; Westling, 2007) on the relationship between social media and politics from Western contexts has largely been framed within the contours of technological determinism. Some of these studies (Boyd, 2008; Gustafsson, 2012), originating from the global North, paint a mixed picture of how citizens use Facebook for political purposes. Others (e.g., Kahne and Middaugh, 2012; Olsson, 2007) argue that

citizens use Facebook to engage in participatory politics, for example, starting a political group online, circulating a blog about a political issue, commenting on a politician's page, or forwarding political videos to friends and to join with others to mobilise political action (Bosch et al., 2019).

Political candidates' use of a personalised social media account is expected to positively relate to their election outcomes. Media coverage can affect voters' choices and shape public opinion (Page & Shapiro 1992). Political campaigns are engaged to influence the decisions of voters, to promote the candidates, to publicise their positions and to claim credit for their achievements (Mayhew, 1974). Political candidates exploit any opportunity possible to contact voters, raise their profile and share their positions on key issues (Lassen & Brown 2011).

When looking at the answers given by the participants of the research, whether social media has an effect on Somali politics or not. The response given by the majority of participants was 77% ``Absolutely Agree" and 15% `` Agree`` which means that 92% of the respondents agree, showing the strong influence of social media on the politics of our country. Also, 94% (73% ``Absolutely Agree" + 21% ``Agree") of the participants of the research 'on whether or not social media has an influence on the decisions of Somali politicians agreed that social media directs political decisions. This answer is consistent with the answer given that social media has an influence on the politics of Somalia (Hassan, 2023).

When the participants of this research were asked the question of "what type of social media they would recommend that the Somali politician should increase its use in order to be in line with public opinion. The most common recommendation was to increase the use of Facebook (63%), followed by Twitter, which was recommended by 27% of respondents. So, when we consider the use of social media, the most used by Somali politicians at this time is Facebook because most of the society uses it, while Twitter users are mostly politicians (Hassan, 2023). The

research indicated that Former President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed had 362k while Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo IM and Current president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had 578k (Hassan, 2023). At the moment, the followers of Former President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed are 383k, while Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo 1M and Current president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud are 638k.

Impact of Facebook on Election Campaigns

Over the course of the last decade, social media have been gaining increasing importance as communication tools used by political parties and individual political actors to engage with citizens and to mobilise voters in election campaigns. The success of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign (Johnson and Perlmutter, 2010) sparked a wave of interest in the adoption of social networking sites for campaign purposes in other settings, a process that has arguably been stimulated and intensified by the growing penetration of social media platforms across the globe. According to recent estimates, there were over 2.8 billion active social media users at the beginning of 2017, nearly 2 billion of which are using Facebook as the globally dominant social network (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2017). According to the latest data released by parent company Meta, as of (Q4 2022), the number of Facebook users worldwide is 2.96 billion. This marks a marginal 0.17% increase from the previous quarter and a 1.75% year-over-year rise.

The 2008 U.S. presidential election continued a recent trend in political campaigning as candidates adapted their message to new communication tools. The popularity of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Myspace especially among younger voters—provided a highly visible environment for candidates to promote themselves, articulate their platforms, and interact with voters in fundamentally different ways than in previous elections. Likewise, these sites enabled users to interact with their peers about political issues and to share and discuss their opinions through a variety of formats (Vitak et al., 2011). Data from Pew Internet reveal that 65% of social network site (SNS) users aged 18–29 years engaged in at least one of five political activities on an SNS during the 2008 campaign, such as joining a political group on the site or obtaining information about a candidate (Vitak et al., 2011).

When Facebook opened its popular social network site (SNS) to anyone with a valid e-mail address in 2006, few could have predicted that it would accumulate more than 1 billion users within a decade and have a substantive impact on political and social life around the world (Chan 2017). From political engagement and contentious politics in democracies (Rainie et al., 2012) to social movements and protests in authoritarian regimes (Howard & Parks, 2012), Facebook has played an influential role in facilitating information exchange, expression, and collective action mobilisation for different political causes and purposes (Michael, 2017). Initial research and later meta-analyses on the political impact of SNSs have generally demonstrated positive effects on political attitudes and participation (e.g., Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2010). Yet only recently has scholarship begun to examine the conditions in which SNSs exert their influence (Tang & Lee, 2013; Valenzuela, 2013).

This work is important because SNSs like Facebook are characterised by their diverse affordances that facilitate a variety of uses. At its simplest, Facebook can be just another source of news appearing on a user's stream of Wall updates. But it can also serve as a platform for opinion expression, as well as provide users with linkages to individuals, groups, and institutions that have political and social influence. (Michael, 2016).

The most popular social media website, Facebook, enables individuals to connect with their current friends, reconnect with people they might have lost touch with and maintain existing relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook has become the chief medium for young adults to maintain their social presence and extend social networks (Feng et al., 2019). The use of social media in marketing is now acknowledged as a

research theme; however, there is a lack of theoretical and first-hand research into consumer psychology regarding the local usage of social media in political marketing strategies and practices (Aghara et al., 2005).

While Facebook, like all forms of media, is used by political parties to gain an electoral advantage (Lilleker et al., 2015), one of its key affordances in a campaign is the way in which it helps parties to extend their reach by mobilising their activist base to spread their message more widely and bypass the often-critical mainstream media. This two-step flow of communication, while a benefit of internet communication in the pre-social media era, has gained significant prominence with the arrival of social networking platforms (Norris & Curtice, 2008). Facebook, in particular, allows election campaigns to mobilise their supporters to become opinion formers within their networks and to take an active role in parties' message distribution (Gibson, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Method and Materials

The article used a descriptive design by using a quantitative approach to quantify incidences to describe the current conditions and also to investigate the impact of Facebook on election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. This study used self-administered questionnaires as the main tools for collecting data. SPSS was utilised for descriptive analysis. The target populations that participated in this article were social science students and administration staff at Somali National University. With a total of 100, the minimum sample size is 80 respondents and was computed using Slovin" s formula which is n= N/1+N (0.052), where n= sample size, N= study population and 0.05= level of significance margin of error (Amin, 2005).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characterisation of the Respondents

The study obtained demographic information from the respondents. The samples consisted of 80 participants; of these, 52 (65%) were aged between 18 and 34, 23 (28.8%) were aged between 35 and 50, and 5 (6.3%) were aged above 50. In regard to marital status, 36 (45.0%) were single, 39 (48.8%) married, and 5 (6.3%) were divorced. The results show that the majority of the participants are married. Education-wise, the majority of the participants had a Master's degree (39, 48.8%), 36 (45%) had a Bachelor's degree, and Only 5 participants (6.3%) had a PhD.

Facebook Usage and Political Influence

The respondents were asked how often they use Facebook; the majority of the participants indicated to use almost daily (27, 33.8%), 21 participants (26.3%) use Facebook rarely, 18 (22.5%) used it occasionally, and only 14 participants (17.5%) using it frequently.

In regard to the use of Facebook as a source of information for the latest election campaign in Mogadishu, the results show that the majority of the participants (66, 82.5%) used Facebook as a source of information for the latest election campaign in Mogadishu. On the other hand, only 14 (17.5%) used Facebook for other purposes. So that Facebook is a popular source of information for the election campaign in Mogadishu among the participants. Furthermore, out of the 80 respondents, 66 (82.5%) claimed to have met political messages while using Facebook during the last election campaign, whereas only 14 (17.5%) have not. So, Facebook was a common platform for receiving political messages during the last election campaign among the participants.

Figure 1: Frequency of meeting political posts on Facebook
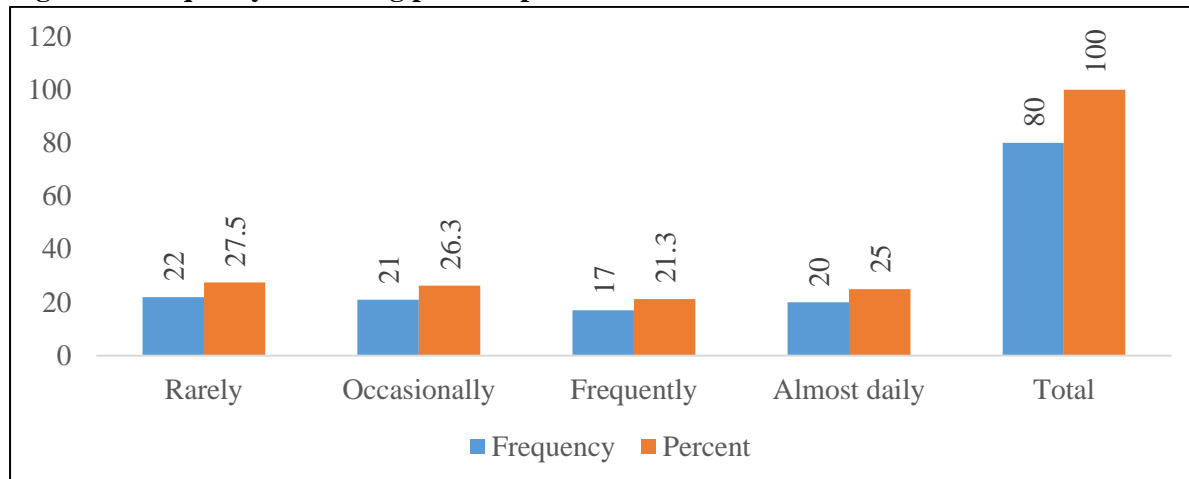
The researcher further asked the respondents how often they read political posts on Facebook. The majority, 22(27.5%), indicated that they rarely met political posts on Facebook during the campaign, 21 participants (26.3%) occasionally met political posts on Facebook during the campaign, while 17 participants (21.3%) frequently met political posts. Twenty participants (25%) met political posts almost daily on Facebook during the campaign (see *Figure 2*). The majority of participants who encountered political posts on Facebook during the last election campaign reported seeing them with a range of frequencies, with no one category having a significantly higher percentage than the others.

Figure 2: Facebook has a positive effect on election campaigns
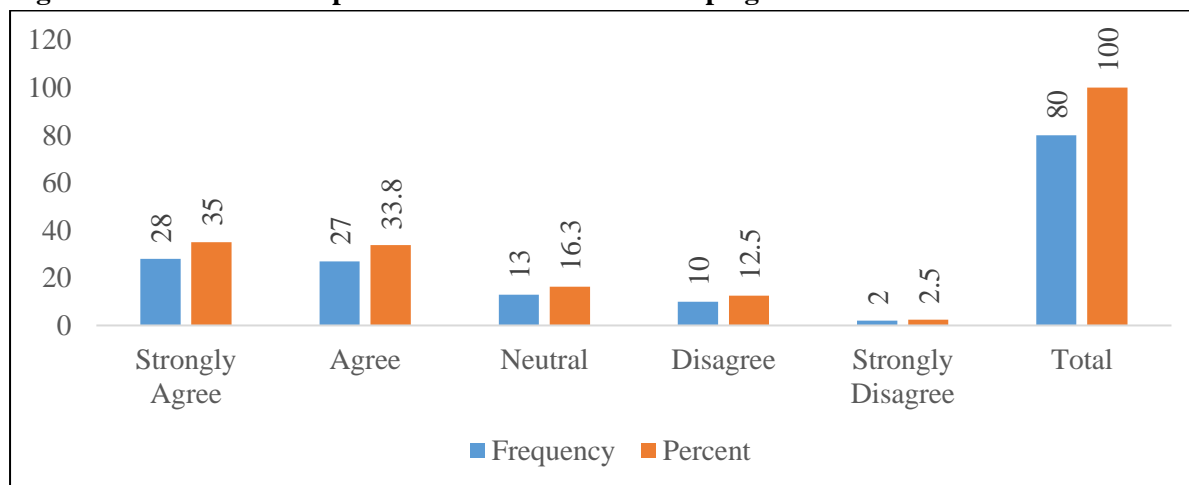
According to the question on whether Facebook has a positive effect on election campaigns, 28 (35%) of participants strongly agreed, and 27 (33.8%) agreed that Facebook has a positive effect on election campaigns. A smaller proportion of participants, 10 (12.5%) disagreed with the statement, while 13 (16.3%) remained neutral. Only 2 (2.5%) of participants strongly disagreed that Facebook has a positive effect on election campaigns (see *Figure 3*). So, the results show that out of the 80 participants, the majority (68.8%) opined that Facebook has a positive effect on election campaigns.

Figure 3: How do you think the use of Facebook by political candidates has affected the election campaign in Mogadishu
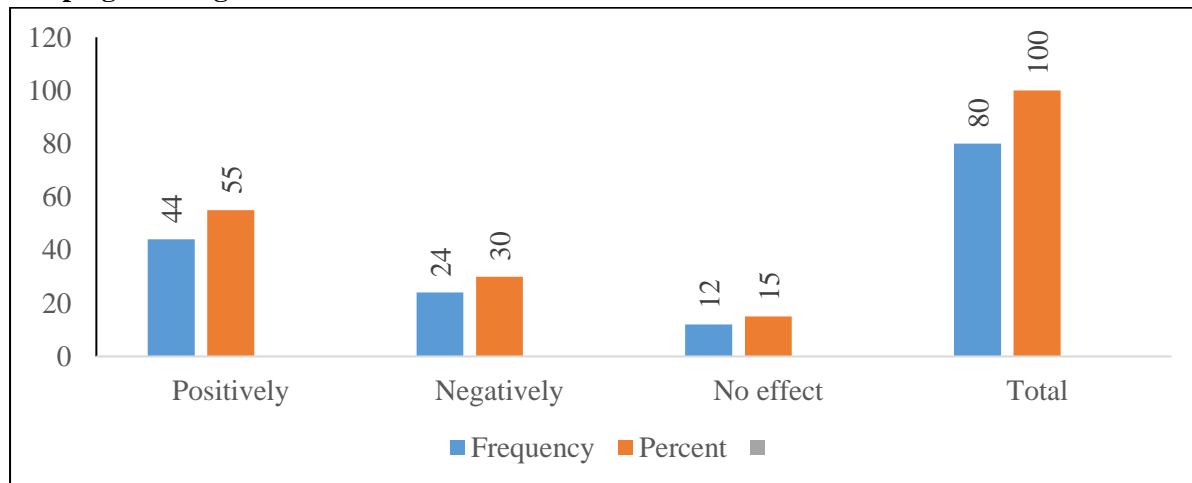

Figure 4 shows 44 (55.0%) of respondents believe that the use of Facebook by political candidates has had a positive effect on the election campaign in Mogadishu, while 24 (30.0%) believe it has had a negative effect, and 12 (15.0%) believe it has had no effect. The majority of respondents perceive Facebook to have played a positive role in the election campaign, possibly by allowing candidates to reach a wider audience and communicate their message more effectively.

Figure 4: Facebook has a negative effect on election campaigns
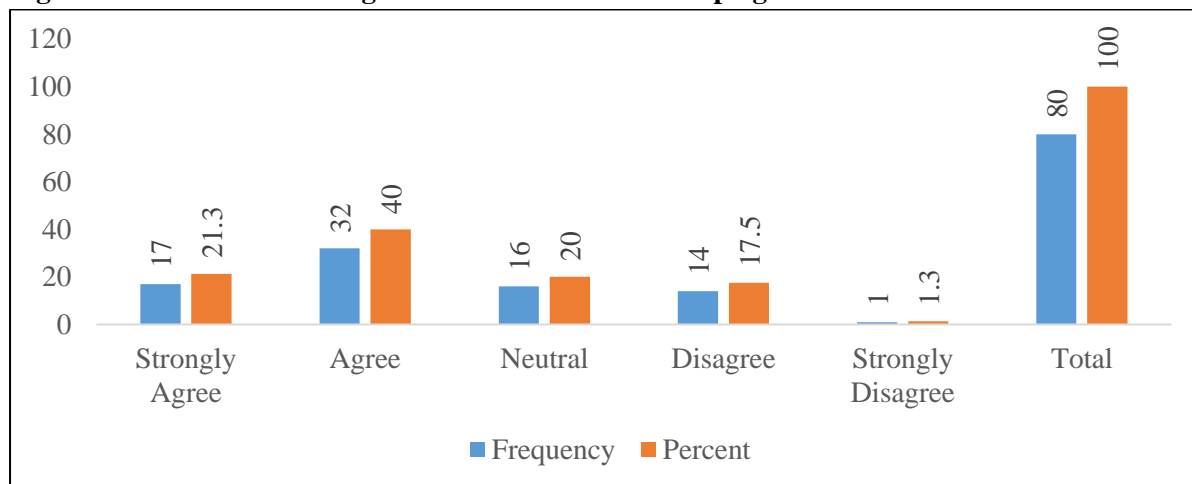
The respondents were asked whether they think that Facebook has a negative effect on election campaigns. Out of the 80 respondents, 17 (21.3%) strongly agreed, 32 (40%) agreed that Facebook has a negative effect on election campaigns, 16 (20%) were neutral, 14(17.5%) of participants disagreed and only 1(1.3%) of participants strongly (see *Figure 5*). Based on the data provided, 61.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Facebook has a negative effect on election campaigns, while 20.0% are neutral, and 17.5% disagree or strongly disagree. This suggests that a majority of respondents perceive Facebook to have a negative impact on election campaigns, with 61.3% expressing agreement or strong agreement. The reasons for this negative perception could include concerns about the spread of misinformation, the influence of social media on voters, or the potential for online harassment or abuse.

In response to whether the respondents had ever seen or experienced online harassment related to an election campaign on Facebook, 45 (56.3%) of respondents had seen or experienced online harassment, while 35 (43.8%) had not. This

suggests that a significant proportion of respondents have witnessed or personally experienced online harassment related to election campaigns on Facebook. In addition, the majority of the participants (41, 51.3%) noted they have changed their mind about a political candidate or party based on information they saw on Facebook during an election campaign in Mogadishu, Somalia, while 39 (48.8%) have not. It suggests that a significant number of participants may have been influenced by information they saw on Facebook, potentially indicating the importance of social media in shaping public opinion during the election.

Lastly, the majority of the respondents (70, 87.5%) believe that the spread of misinformation on Facebook can negatively impact election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia, while 10(12.5%) do not. So, the majority of respondents recognise the potential for misinformation on Facebook to harm election campaigns in Mogadishu, Somalia. The spread of false or misleading information on social media can create confusion, sow distrust in political processes, and influence voters in ways that may not be in their best interests.

CONCLUSION

The study offers a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants. A majority of respondents fell within the age range of 18 to 34, were married, and held either a Bachelor's or Master's degree, indicative of a relatively youthful and educated sample.

Furthermore, a significant portion of participants disclosed their almost daily use of Facebook, with a notable percentage designating it as their primary source for the latest election campaign information in Mogadishu. This underscores Facebook's prominence as a channel for political information dissemination. The study revealed that a substantial number of participants had encountered political messages on Facebook during the previous election campaign, emphasising the platform's pivotal role in political communication.

Additionally, a noteworthy majority of respondents expressed their belief in the positive influence of Facebook on election campaigns, with a significant proportion strongly agreeing or agreeing. This indicates a widespread perception that Facebook constitutes a valuable tool for political campaigning in Mogadishu.

Moreover, a majority of participants held the view that the utilisation of Facebook by political candidates had a positive impact on the election campaign. This observation suggests that they perceive Facebook as an effective means for candidates to reach a broader audience and convey their messages. Conversely, a considerable proportion of respondents expressed concerns about Facebook's negative influence on election campaigns. These concerns likely emanate from worries about the proliferation of misinformation, its potential impact on voters, and the risk of online harassment.

Significantly, a substantial percentage of respondents disclosed having witnessed or personally experienced online harassment associated with election campaigns on Facebook. This highlights the darker aspects of social media and its potential for abusive or detrimental use during political campaigns. Furthermore, a notable number of participants reported altering their opinions about political candidates or parties based on information encountered on Facebook during election campaigns, underscoring the platform's role in shaping public sentiment.

Finally, most respondents acknowledged the potential for misinformation on Facebook to detrimentally affect election campaigns. The dissemination of false or misleading information was perceived as a threat to the integrity of the electoral process.

Recommendation

Political candidates should use Facebook as a platform to reach a wider audience and communicate their message effectively, considering the majority of participants use Facebook daily as a source of information for election campaigns in Mogadishu. Facebook

should implement measures to combat online harassment and protect users' safety during election campaigns, given that a significant proportion of respondents have witnessed or experienced online harassment related to election campaigns on Facebook.

Facebook should take proactive steps to combat the spread of false or misleading information on the platform during election campaigns by implementing fact-checking and measures to flag and remove false information, as the majority of respondents recognise the potential harm of misinformation on election campaigns in Mogadishu.

Political candidates and election officials should play a role in educating the public on the potential negative impact of misinformation and online harassment during election campaigns on Facebook by encouraging responsible behaviour on social media and promoting online safety and security. Political candidates should provide accurate and reliable information on their Facebook pages to prevent misinformation from influencing voters' decisions, considering a significant proportion of respondents have changed their minds about a political candidate or party based on information they saw on Facebook during an election campaign in Mogadishu.

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