

UBAH CONNECT

IMPACT REPORT

2026 INFORMATION, MEDUA AND TECHNOLOGY

Ubah media lab

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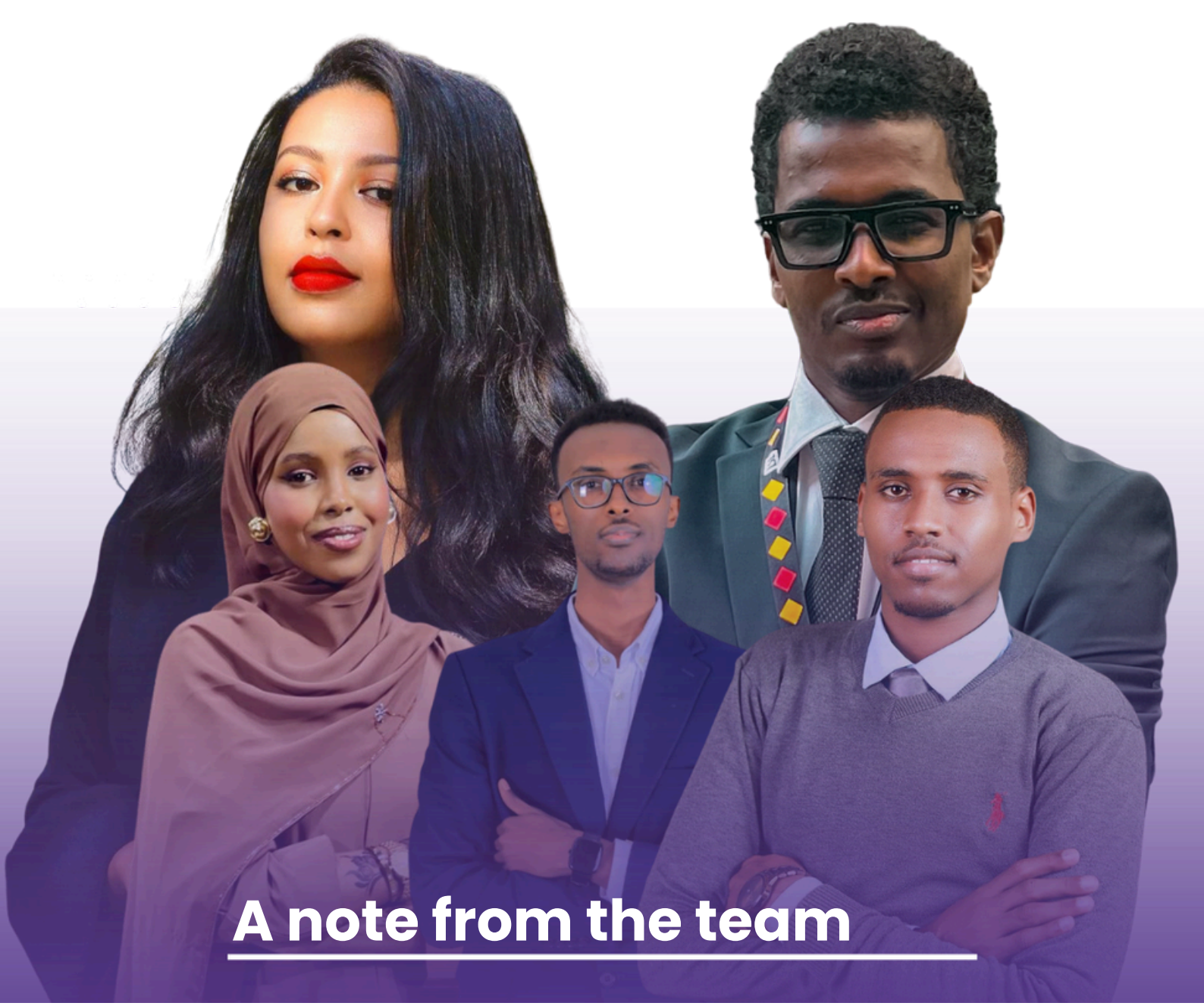
MEDIA ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME
AUGUST 2026



> We are building a new generation of ethical, creative, and digitally skilled storytellers who can contribute to informed societies, peacebuilding, and socio-economic development.
> — Said Isse, Founder of Ubah Media Lab

30
participants only

Head to the programme page at:
https://ubahmedialab.org/accelerator-programme/



A note from the team

At Ubah Media Lab, we see media as both a creative industry and a driver of social and economic value. It shapes understanding, influences decisions, and creates opportunities for innovation and growth. Our vision is to build a new generation of ethical, creative, and digitally skilled storytellers ready to thrive in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Over the past year, this vision has come to life through our Media Accelerator Programme. Participants engaged in hands-on learning, developing skills in digital storytelling while strengthening their ability to think critically, communicate strategically, and produce impactful content.

As the programme progressed, it evolved from training into a platform for innovation, collaboration, and real-world application. Participants worked on projects addressing social issues while demonstrating media's potential for professional growth and entrepreneurship.

Beyond talent development, Ubah Media Lab operates at the intersection of media, research, and strategic communication, generating insights into information ecosystems and how they can be strengthened in complex environments.

These experiences reinforce our belief that the future of media lies in combining creativity with responsibility and innovation with integrity. Looking ahead, we aim to scale our impact through expanded opportunities, partnerships, and sustainable models.

Ubah Media Lab

MEDIA ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME



The Media Accelerator Programme is a structured initiative designed to support and fast-track the growth of emerging media professionals, startups, and content creators. Through a combination of training, mentorship, and access to key resources, the programme strengthens participants' skills in storytelling, digital media, journalism, and content production. It places strong emphasis on practical learning, enabling participants to apply their knowledge through hands-on projects and real-world experiences.

Since its launch, the programme has engaged two cohorts of participants. The first cohort has successfully completed the programme, graduating with enhanced technical and creative skills, as well as developed media projects. Building on this foundation, the second cohort has recently begun, continuing the programme's mission to expand opportunities for young media practitioners and deepen its impact.

The programme focuses on fostering innovative, ethical, and impactful media practices. It supports participants in navigating key challenges such as misinformation, digital safety, and audience engagement in an increasingly complex media landscape. By combining skills development with critical thinking and collaboration, the programme empowers individuals and teams to create sustainable media solutions that contribute to social change, community engagement, and socio-economic development.



THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE ACCELRATOR PROGRAMME

The Ubah Media Lab Media Accelerator Programme is designed in response to a critical gap between digital potential and real opportunity for young people in the Horn of Africa. While many youth are active on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, very few have access to structured support that can transform their creativity into sustainable impact or income. Most operate in isolation, without mentorship, business knowledge, or an understanding of how digital ecosystems—such as algorithms, audience engagement, and monetization—actually work. As a result, promising talent remains underdeveloped, and the digital space is often dominated by low-quality, harmful, or purely entertainment-driven content that fails to contribute to social or economic development. The Media Accelerator Programme is therefore built to bridge this gap by identifying emerging creators and equipping them with the tools, guidance, and resources needed to grow into purposeful and professional digital media actors.

At its core, the programme goes beyond content creation to position youth as innovators, entrepreneurs, and agents of change within the media landscape. Through a combination of intensive training, mentorship, production support, and exposure to industry networks, participants learn how to develop high-quality content, build sustainable personal brands, and create value-driven media products that address real community issues. The accelerator also integrates digital safety, ethical storytelling, and critical media literacy, ensuring that participants not only succeed individually but contribute to healthier and more inclusive digital spaces. Ultimately, the rationale of the Media Accelerator Programme is to transform informal digital participation into structured pathways for employment, entrepreneurship, and social impact—creating a new generation of media leaders who can shape narratives, influence public discourse, and drive socio-economic transformation in their communities.

MEDIA ACCELERATOR **IN NUMBERS**

The journey so far



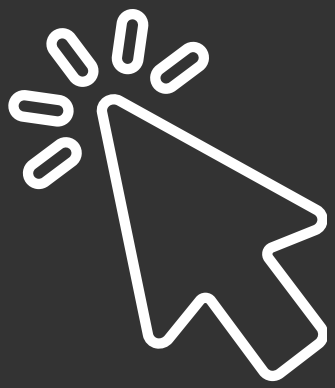
270 applicants

The Media Accelerator Programme has attracted over 270 applicants across two cohorts, demonstrating strong demand among young people



140 shortlisted

The programme shortlisted 140 candidates, reflecting strong interest and competitiveness across diverse youth communities and backgrounds.



80 selected

The programme selected 80 candidates, ensuring a competitive and high-quality cohort with diverse skills, backgrounds, and strong potential.

PLATFORM JOURNEY



Kowsar Mohamed participated in the Media Accelerator Programme, successfully completing it and developing one of the MVPs at Ubah Media Lab: Miiska Podcast, an audio-visual platform dedicated to researching and presenting key political and social issues impacting Somali youth.

MEDIA ACCELERATOR GRADAUTE

How I Turned an Idea into a Media Platform at Ubah Media Lab

I sincerely appreciate my journey at Ubah Media Lab as part of its first pilot Media Accelerator Programme. Only 30 participants were selected for an intensive eight-week program focused on learning, collaboration, and professional growth. This program offered specialized media training, helping students acquire essential media literacy skills and gain firsthand experience working on real-world media projects.

Participating in this experience was much more than simply attending structured training sessions. It was a deliberate process of development and self-assessment. Being chosen for such a limited group was both an opportunity and a responsibility, and I approached it with clarity and purpose.

One particular moment that stands out was the challenge of planning and producing a podcast episode. This task pushed me to refine my storytelling skills and demonstrated the importance of engaging audiences through meaningful content. It reinforced my gratitude for the program and strengthened my commitment to purposeful growth.

At the outset of my journey, I posed a critical question to myself: Would this simply be an experience to complete, or could it serve as a meaningful platform to intentionally strengthen my skills and confront my limitations? I made a conscious decision to pursue the latter, focusing on professional growth rather than mere completion. My objective was clear—to build genuine competence in the media field through hands-on exposure and disciplined effort.

From the very beginning, the program environment required me to step outside my comfort zone. It challenged me to be creative, adapt quickly, and communicate with a precision. Although I was passionate about media, I soon discovered that I faced difficulties with the technical side of things, such as using video/audio editing softwares and organizing content for digital platforms.

My first attempt at editing an audio segment stands out; I felt overwhelmed by the unfamiliar tools and frustrated by my lack of fluency. Instead of avoiding these gaps, I made the decision to confront them directly. I dedicated extra hours to exploring tutorials, sought advice from teammates, and kept practicing until editing became second nature.

This proactive approach gradually transformed my weaknesses into strengths. I began contributing to group projects with greater confidence and eventually took the lead on a the production of Miiska Podcast, which received positive feedback from both my peers and mentors. By openly facing my challenges and prioritizing growth, I gained valuable skills and developed a mindset equipped for success. I am proud of the progress I achieved through this journey.
My time at Ubah Media Lab gave me hands-on opportunities to shape content from the ground up. For example, when I helped develop a content calendar for our podcast series, I realized just how much thought goes into each step: choosing topics that matter, mapping out release dates, and coordinating with our team to ensure our messaging was both timely and relevant.

One of my biggest learning curves was mastering audio editing. I vividly remember my first attempt at editing a raw interview: the background noise was overwhelming, and I struggled to maintain the clarity of my guest's voice. Determined to improve, I spent extra evenings experimenting with editing tools and watching tutorials online. Over time, I learned to clean, organize, and enhance audio tracks until they met professional standards.





Throughout the program, we were encouraged to reflect on our reasons for pursuing media. My own motivation has remained clear: I aim to use media to inspire hope, empower youth, and serve as a strong voice for my community. These words guided my actions and shaped my contributions. For instance, I now leading youth empowerment initiative, planning production of podcast episode where local young leaders discussed the significance of civic engagement. We hope this episode would spark meaningful conversations.

I am deeply grateful to our mentor, Said Mohamud Isse, whose encouragement and structured guidance provided a foundation for our growth. His advice during the podcast initiative—"Make your message count and let every voice matter"—continues to resonate with me, serving as a reminder to ground my work in authenticity and purpose.

As my journey progresses, I remain committed to advancing my skills through ongoing learning and practical experience. Recently, I enrolled in an advanced audio production workshop to further sharpen my technical abilities, with the goal of elevating the quality of future projects. I have also begun planning a youth-centered podcast series designed to spotlight local entrepreneurs and activists, providing a platform for young voices to inspire others. My dedication to ethical storytelling has grown stronger; when producing content on sensitive issues like mental health, I now actively seek input from community leaders and subject matter experts to ensure both accuracy and respect. These experiences have underscored the responsibility and the profound impact that comes with shaping narratives. Every piece of content represents a chance to inform, uplift, and build trust with the audience. My overarching goal is to create media that is not only creative and purposeful, but also produces measurable positive outcomes and is firmly rooted in integrity.

Looking to the future, I aim to further strengthen ethical storytelling, enhance production quality, and develop collaborative projects that drive education, economic awareness, and youth empowerment. For example, I plan to partner with local organizations to co-create educational campaigns on digital literacy, thereby expanding the reach and impact of our media efforts. Additionally, I am developing a series of workshops for aspiring content creators, offering practical guidance on responsible media practices and technical skills. Achieving sustainable growth in this field requires discipline, accountability, and a clear vision—qualities I am dedicated to nurturing each day. I believe that continuous effort, honest reflection, and collaboration are essential to creating media that truly matters, and I am prepared to pursue this path with unwavering consistency and heart.

Since my first day at Ubah Media Lab, my perspective on media has evolved significantly—from viewing it as a mere tool to recognizing its potential as a catalyst for meaningful change. Whether it involves leading youth discussions, producing impactful audio content, or collaborating on community-driven campaigns, each experience has deepened my skills and fueled my passion.





I am thankful for the growth, discipline, and renewed commitment I have gained, and I remain dedicated to using media to amplify voices and create lasting, positive impact. This journey is ongoing, and I look forward to the next chapter with hope, determination, and a clear sense of purpose.

PHOTOS BY MOHAMUD JAMA



I Didn't Just Learn Media, I Found My Voice



Amplifying Youth Voices: Reflections on the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence



Media Accelerator Programme – Profile Story With Participant Voices



ALSO STORIES OF OTHER GRADAUTES

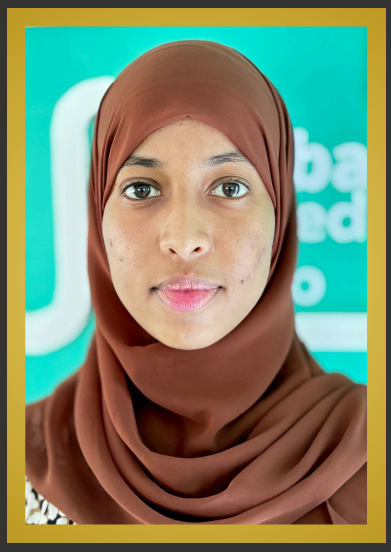
Sharing their experiences, stories, and reflections on media and digital innovation."

COHORT ONE GRADAUTES



YACQUUB MOHAMED

Cohort I



MARIA AHMED

Cohort I



ABDULLAHI MOHAMED

Cohort I



KOWSAR MOHAMED

Cohort I



BISHAARO ABAS

Cohort I



ABDULLAHI MUSE

Cohort I

COHORT ONE GRADAUTES



IDIL ABDILKADIR

Cohort I



MOHAMED AHMED

Cohort I



NADA ABDULLAHI

Cohort I



SAID MOHAMED

Cohort I



IQRA JAMA

Cohort I



ANISA ABDIRISAK

Cohort I

COHORT ONE GRADAUTES



SAYTUN FARAH

Cohort I



FAAISO JAMA

Cohort I



AISHA

Cohort I



NASTEEHA AHMED

Cohort I



FADUMO MOHAMED

Cohort I



MOKHTAR MOHAMED

Cohort I

COHORT ONE GRADAUTES



SUNDUS SULEYMAN

Cohort I



HODAN ABDIAZIZ

Cohort I



IBRAHIM JAMA

Cohort I



IKRAN OSMAN

Cohort I



MOHAMED KEYSE

Cohort I

Media Acelarator Fellowship

The Media Accelerator Fellowship is advanced hands-on programme designed to support emerging digital creators in developing their storytelling, content creation, and digital media skills. Top-performing participants from the Media Accelerator Programme are selected to continue into a six-month mentorship with Ubah Media Lab, where they receive deeper support to advance as media professionals and changemakers.

It provides training, mentorship, and practical experience to top-performing gradautes create meaningful, high-quality content that reflects their communities and ideas. Fellows are guided to grow their creative voice, understand digital platforms, and explore opportunities for impact and income.



Welcome message

Dear Inaugural Media Accelerator Fellows,
Welcome to a journey of growth, creativity, and purpose. You were chosen because your voice matters—use it boldly, learn deeply, and support one another. The stories you tell can shape the future.
With pride and belief,
Ubah Media Lab

POLICY ANALYSIS



Our featured analysis was written by Mohamed Malin, Policy Analyst at Ubah Media Lab, and Said Isse, Media, Communication, and Policy Strategist, and Founder of Ubah Media Lab.

WHY SOMALIA 4.0 SHOULD DRAW INSPIRATION FROM SOMALI AMERICAN POLITICS?

"Observing Somali communities abroad broadens understanding of how systems shape success. Structure, discipline, and opportunity create different outcomes."

Although a 35-year-old's ambition to lead Somalia may seem like a distant dream, understanding successful campaigns such as Omar Fateh's run for the Minneapolis mayoral seat provides valuable insights for anyone envisioning Somalia's future. By examining Fateh's campaign strategies, this commentary highlights key lessons that could shape Somalia's political landscape and offer practical approaches to building a more inclusive and progressive society.

In particular, Fateh's emphasis on grassroots mobilization and media branding can be adapted to Somalia's unique political environment to foster greater public engagement. In this analysis, Ubah Media Lab's policy and Strategic Communications team explore how Fateh's leader-centric, progressive, and community-driven campaign, combining personal identity, policy vision, media outreach, and public involvement, can inspire consensus and drive political acceptance in Somalia 4.0.

Somali Community in Minnesota

Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population in the United States, making it a vibrant center of Somali culture and community outside the Horn of Africa. Over the past several decades, the state has welcomed thousands of Somali immigrants and refugees who have established thriving neighborhoods, businesses, and community organizations. This strong presence has not only enriched Minnesota's cultural landscape but also made it a significant hub of Somali American life.

A landmark political achievement for Minnesota's Somali community came in 2018, when Ilhan Omar was elected as the **first Somali American and one of the first Muslim women to serve in the United States Congress**. Omar's victory marked a historic milestone, breaking barriers for immigrants, women, and Muslims in American politics. Her role as a trailblazer has inspired many within the Somali diaspora and beyond, underscoring the importance of representation and civic engagement.



The highlight of his journey has been exploring Somali and diaspora media spaces. It has been the most eye-opening experience, sparking a deeper understanding of digital narratives and their impact.

Figure 1

Omar Fateh and Ilhan Omar taking a selfie with a young voter during a community engagement event. Photo credit: Omar Fateh Facebook page.



The early 2000s where a turbulent period for Somalia and its diaspora, shaped in part by the Ethiopian military intervention in 2006. Ethiopia's invasion, aimed at ousting the Islamic Courts Union and countering rising extremism, led to prolonged conflict and instability. This upheaval had far-reaching effects, including on the Somali community in Minnesota. During this time, some Somali Minnesotans returned to their homeland, with a few joining rebel groups or militant organizations that emerged amid the ongoing conflict. These developments highlighted the deep and enduring ties between Minnesota's Somali community and events in the Horn of Africa.

Today, Minnesota's Somali heritage is visible across many aspects of public life. The state boasts two Somali American state senators, one of them being Omar Fateh, several city council members, and Somali representation within local police departments. Due to this strong influence and vibrant community presence, Minneapolis is often affectionately called "Little Mogadishu." The nickname reflects both the city's rich cultural diversity and its ongoing connection to Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa region.

Somali American Political Inspiration for Somalia 4.0

Somalia stands at a pivotal crossroads, grappling with political polarization and deeply entrenched clan-based politics. By examining the experiences and successes of Somali American politicians such as Ilhan Omar and Omar Fateh, Somalia can uncover pathways toward building a more inclusive, democratic, and resilient society. The historical and political journeys of these leaders offer valuable lessons for shaping the nation's future.

Somalia's modern political identity is rooted in a complex history shaped by colonial legacies and regional alliances. The region known as Somaliland, formerly a British protectorate, united with the former Italian Somaliland in 1960 to form the Somali Republic. However, decades later, political fragmentation began to take hold. Following Somaliland's declaration of independence in the late 1990s, the eastern regions, working in collaboration with three southern regions, established Puntland State in response to growing instability and to preserve unity within their territories.

Many Somali Americans, including prominent leaders like Omar Fateh, trace their heritage to these eastern regions that played a crucial role in the founding of Puntland and in preserving Somalia's territorial integrity and unity.

Parallels Between the Somali Americans and Somalia

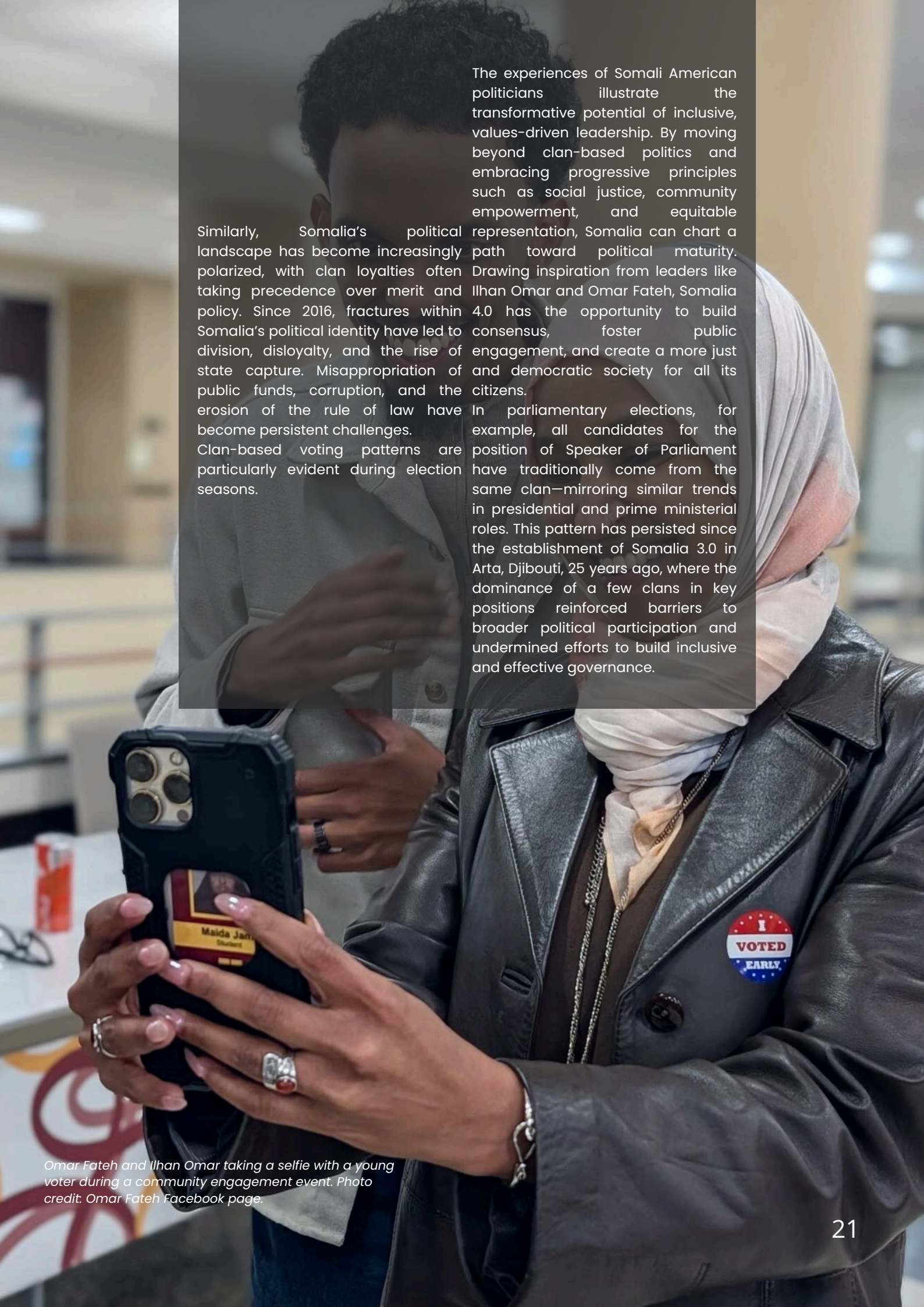
Although the contexts of the United States and Somalia are vastly different, both societies have experienced deep political polarization, often fueled by identity politics and social divisions. In the U.S., Ilhan Omar has frequently been the target of political attacks and smear campaigns. During her tenure in Congress, she faced public threats and calls for deportation from President Donald Trump, who sought to undermine her legitimacy based on her migrant and Muslim background. These attacks serve as stark reminders of the dangers posed by exclusionary politics and social fragmentation.

Similarly, Somalia's political landscape has become increasingly polarized, with clan loyalties often taking precedence over merit and policy. Since 2016, fractures within Somalia's political identity have led to division, disloyalty, and the rise of state capture. Misappropriation of public funds, corruption, and the erosion of the rule of law have become persistent challenges.

Clan-based voting patterns are particularly evident during election seasons.

The experiences of Somali American politicians illustrate the transformative potential of inclusive, values-driven leadership. By moving beyond clan-based politics and embracing progressive principles such as social justice, community empowerment, and equitable representation, Somalia can chart a path toward political maturity. Drawing inspiration from leaders like Ilhan Omar and Omar Fateh, Somalia 4.0 has the opportunity to build consensus, foster public engagement, and create a more just and democratic society for all its citizens.

In parliamentary elections, for example, all candidates for the position of Speaker of Parliament have traditionally come from the same clan—mirroring similar trends in presidential and prime ministerial roles. This pattern has persisted since the establishment of Somalia 3.0 in Arta, Djibouti, 25 years ago, where the dominance of a few clans in key positions reinforced barriers to broader political participation and undermined efforts to build inclusive and effective governance.



Omar Fateh and Ilhan Omar taking a selfie with a young voter during a community engagement event. Photo credit: Omar Fateh Facebook page.

A framework for Somalia 4.0

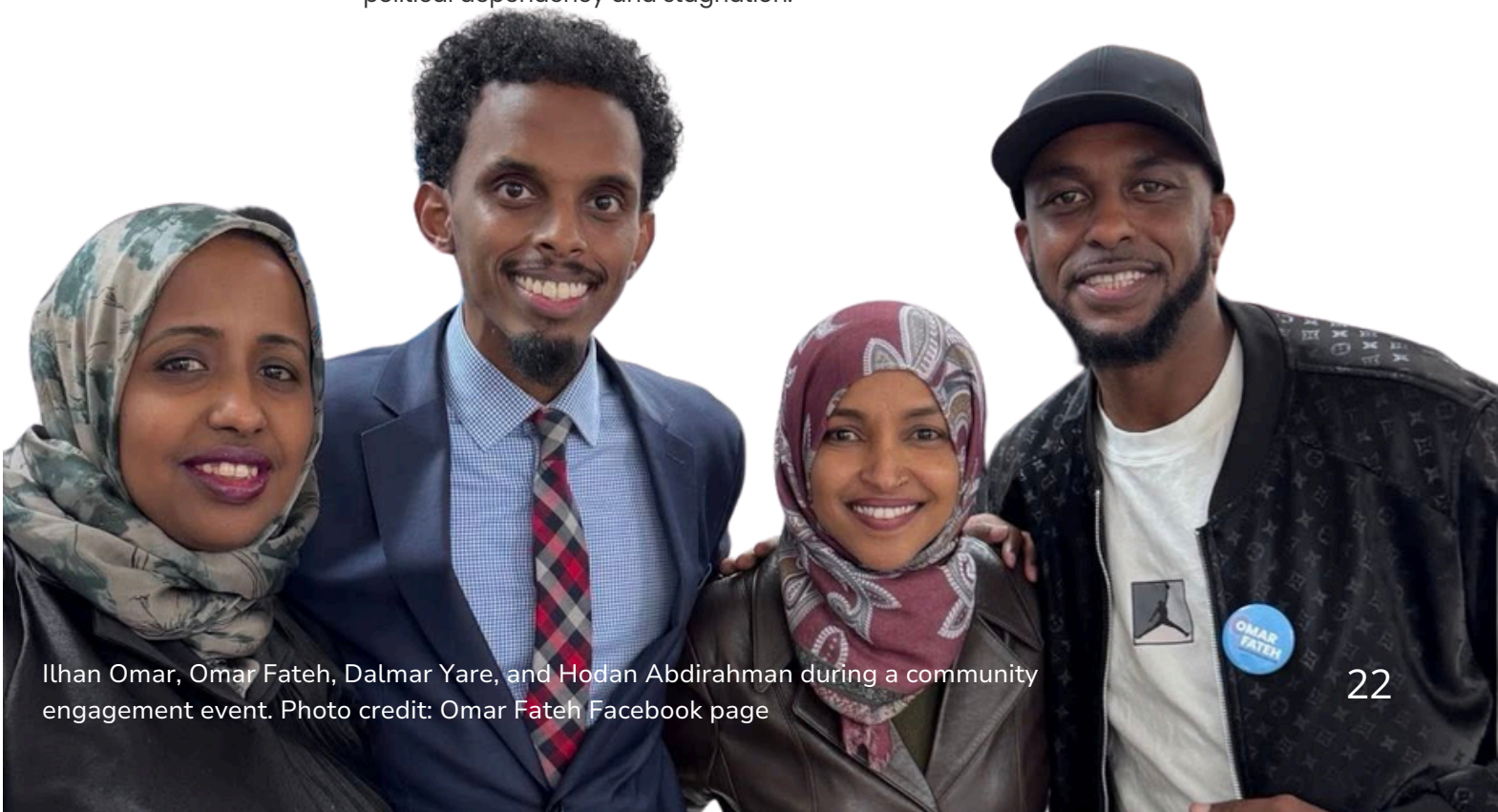
According to recent UN reports, Somalia's unemployment rate stands at around 70 percent, with roughly 75 percent of the population under 30. UNICEF data further indicates that 63 percent of school-aged children are out of school. These figures underscore a nation grappling with poverty, limited educational access, and heavy dependence on external aid.

Yet these social and economic challenges are compounded by a political system that prioritizes clan identity over competence, making it difficult to implement effective policies. The 4.5 power-sharing model, which allocates representation based on clan affiliation rather than merit or expertise, has entrenched political favoritism and hindered inclusive governance. In this system, education, professional skills, and leadership potential are secondary to clan loyalty, creating a cycle of political dependency and stagnation.

Breaking this cycle requires a shift toward merit-based governance, inclusive participation, and values-driven leadership, principles exemplified by Somali American leaders like Ilhan Omar and Omar Fateh.

Omar, a leading voice in the U.S. Congress, embodies progressive, inclusive politics rooted in her Somali, migrant, and Muslim identities. She has used her platform to champion social justice and equality, co-sponsoring landmark legislation such as the Medicare for All Act and advocating for immigrant and minority rights. Her leadership demonstrates how personal experience, when guided by conviction and public purpose, can drive systemic change.

Similarly, Minnesota State Senator Omar Fateh has shown how community-centered politics can inspire civic engagement and advance progressive reform. His work on renters' rights, education equity, and youth participation reflects a commitment to amplifying marginalized voices and building coalitions across communities. His rise from grassroots organizer to state legislator illustrates how authenticity, service, and communication can translate into tangible policy outcomes.



Ilhan Omar, Omar Fateh, Dalmar Yare, and Hodan Abdirahman during a community engagement event. Photo credit: Omar Fateh Facebook page

Media Branding and Political Communication

Two Somali girls smiling while using a phone together.



In the contemporary political arena, media strategy is indispensable for electoral success and public engagement. Political campaigns that effectively leverage both traditional and digital media can shape public perception, mobilize supporters, and define policy narratives. The media strategies employed by Omar Fateh and Zohran Mamdani offer actionable lessons for enhancing media engagement within Somalia's political landscape.

Fateh and Mamdani exemplify how strategic media use can transform political campaigns and drive grassroots movements. During his mayoral campaign in Minneapolis, Fateh utilized social media platforms to mobilize young voters and build a robust online community. His content resonated with working-class constituents, renters, and immigrants, often featuring co-created material with supporters to foster authenticity and shared ownership. His media outreach blended personal storytelling, clear policy vision, and active community engagement.

In contrast, political communication within Somalia remains underdeveloped, with many politicians lacking coherent media strategies. While social media usage is increasing, it is often characterized by fragmented messaging, absence of clear manifestos, and limited constituent engagement. Many candidates rely on sporadic posts highlighting personal achievements or clan ties rather than articulating unifying visions or addressing public needs. The result is a proliferation of content that projects authoritarianism, egocentrism, and individualism rather than relatable and transparent leadership.

This disconnect is further exacerbated by the absence of storytelling techniques that humanize candidates and connect with diverse audiences. Without strategic media planning, Somali politicians risk misrepresenting their platforms and alienating potential supporters, undermining both their campaigns and the broader pursuit of inclusive governance.



TO IMPROVE, SOMALI POLITICIANS SHOULD:

- Develop concise, accessible manifestos outlining clear policy goals.
- Communicate regularly with constituents online to build trust and accountability.
- Use storytelling and local engagement to create emotional connections with voters.
- Seek professional guidance for consistent branding and message development.
- Integrate traditional media (radio, television) with digital outreach to reach diverse audiences.



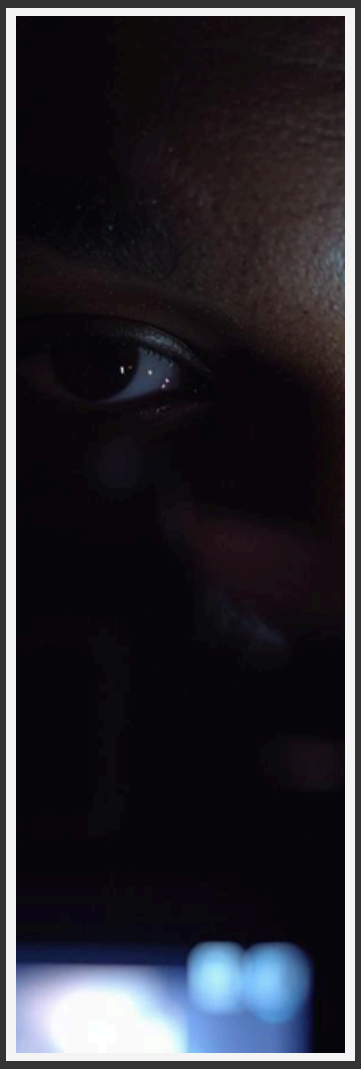
Is Livestreaming Court Cases in Somalia a Dangerous Shift Toward Spectator Justice?



Amplifying Youth Voices: Reflections on the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence



Media Accelerator Programme – Profile Story With Participant Voices



Somali Digital Media Habits: Trust, Platforms, a nd the New Politics of Information

ALSO IN UBAH CONNECT

sharing insights, stories, and updates on media, and digital inno



OUR CRITICAL MEDIA RESEARCH

FEATURED RESEARCH

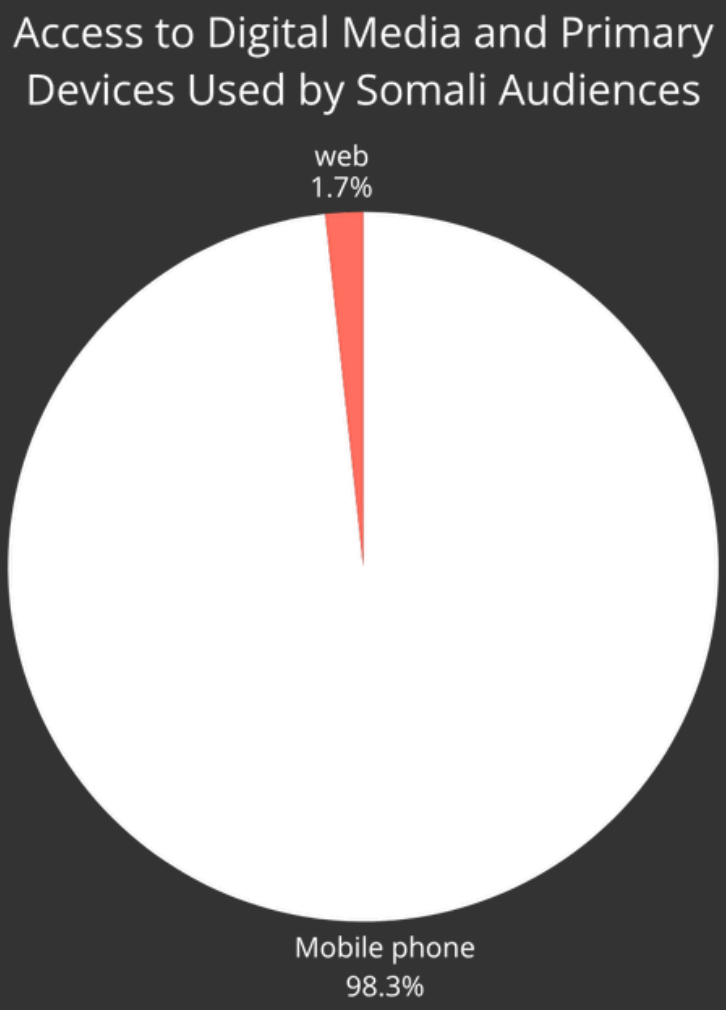
SOMALI DIGITAL MEDIA HABITS

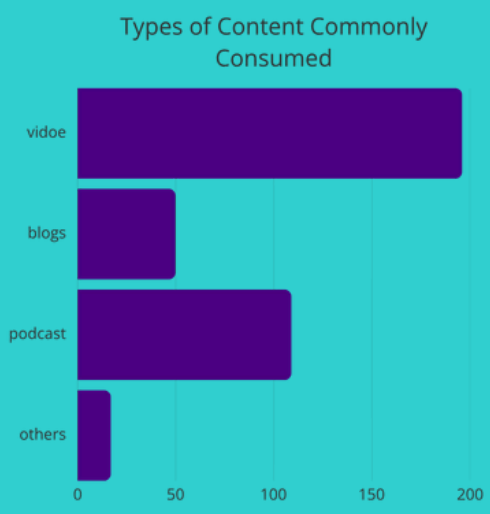
TRUST, PLATFORMS, AND THE NEW POLITICS OF INFORMATION

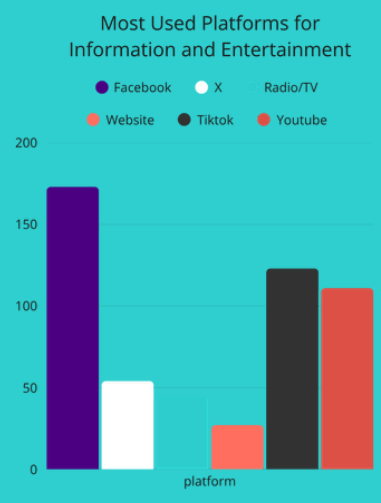
Somalia's contemporary media environment cannot be understood without recognising its political and institutional history. Following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, formal media institutions weakened, regulatory frameworks disappeared, and public trust in official information channels eroded. In this vacuum, communication became decentralised, informal, and deeply relational. Radio stations, diaspora websites, clan networks, religious authorities, and later social media platforms filled the space once occupied by state and professional media.

Today, digital platforms sit at the centre of Somali public life. Smartphones have become the primary gateway to information, social connection, and political engagement. However, this expansion of access has not produced a stable or trusted information environment. Instead, Somalia's digital sphere is characterized by high participation alongside deep mistrust, rapid circulation of information alongside widespread disengagement, and unprecedented visibility alongside growing silence.

The Somalia Media Habits Survey, conducted by Ubah Media Lab in 2025 with 239 respondents, provides insight into how Somali audiences navigate this complex landscape and what this means for policy, governance, and strategic communication.







MEDIA USE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Survey data confirms that mobile phones are now the dominant media infrastructure in Somalia. Most respondents rely on their phones as their primary source of news, communication, entertainment, and learning. Social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook, have overtaken traditional media in everyday relevance, while radio retains importance for older audiences and religious programming.

This shift reflects more than technological adoption. Somali audiences use media strategically, selecting platforms based on trust, familiarity, and social relevance rather than institutional authority. WhatsApp functions as a semi-private information space where news circulates through trusted networks. TikTok has emerged as a powerful platform for storytelling, performance, and influence, particularly among youth aged 15–34, who constitute the majority of survey respondents. Facebook continues to serve as a hybrid space for news sharing, political discussion, and community debate.

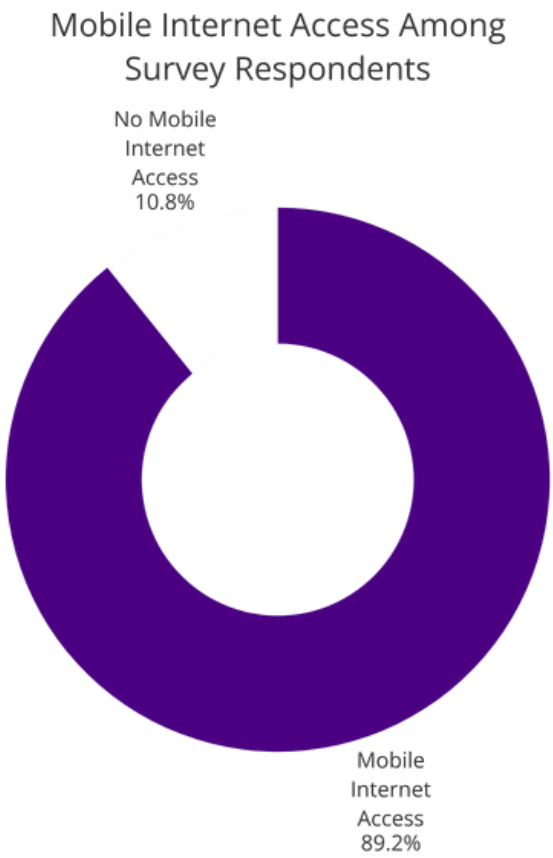
Media use, however, is not synonymous with participation. Many users consume content without engaging publicly, particularly on political or sensitive issues. This selective engagement is a defining feature of Somalia's digital environment.

TRUST AS THE CENTRAL CONSTRAINT

One of the most consequential findings of the survey is that mistrust is the primary barrier to meaningful media engagement. A significant proportion of respondents report that they do not trust media sources in general, and mistrust is cited more frequently than high data costs or poor connectivity as a reason for disengagement.

At the same time, social media platforms are identified as the most trusted sources of information. This is not because platforms themselves are seen as reliable, but because they enable relational trust. Information is validated through family members, religious leaders, diaspora contacts, and familiar online personalities rather than through institutions or professional standards.

This shift represents a structural transformation in Somalia's information order. Authority has moved from institutions to networks, from editorial processes to social proximity. Trust is negotiated continuously, contextually, and emotionally. For policymakers and communicators, this has profound implications: credibility can no longer be assumed through official status alone.



DIGITAL INEQUALITY BEYOND CONNECTIVITY

The survey challenges conventional digital inclusion narratives that equate access with participation. While mobile phone ownership is widespread, engagement is uneven and often constrained by non-technical factors. Respondents report limiting their online activity due to fear of misinformation, online conflict, harassment, and reputational harm.

Political discussions, in particular, are avoided by many users despite high consumption of political content. Silence and withdrawal function as protective strategies in an emotionally charged and polarized digital environment. This pattern is especially pronounced among women, who face additional barriers related to online harassment, social surveillance, and cultural expectations.

Digital inequality in Somalia therefore operates at psychological and social levels as much as material ones. Confidence, safety, and perceived risk shape participation more decisively than bandwidth or devices.

INFLUENCERS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF AUTHORITY

As institutional trust declines, social media influencers have emerged as key intermediaries in Somalia's media ecosystem. Influencers interpret news, frame political events, and mobilise public opinion. Survey responses indicate growing reliance on these figures as sources of explanation and guidance.

This development mirrors global trends but carries heightened risks in fragile contexts. Influencers operate with limited accountability and are embedded in platform economies that reward emotional intensity, controversy, and speed. While they can amplify marginalised voices and expand participation, they can also deepen polarisation and distort public understanding.

For strategic communicators, influencers are no longer optional actors. They are central nodes in the information environment, capable of shaping narratives faster and more effectively than formal institutio

STRATEGIC AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the Somalia Media Habits Survey point to several critical implications for media development, governance, and strategic communication.

First, connectivity-led interventions are insufficient. Expanding internet access without addressing trust, safety, and confidence risks reinforcing disengagement rather than inclusion. Trust must be treated as a policy objective in its own right, requiring long-term relational investment rather than short-term messaging.

Second, media literacy strategies need fundamental rethinking. Imported, text-heavy models are poorly suited to Somalia's oral and audiovisual media culture. Effective interventions should prioritise context relevant content, visual and audio formats, and everyday practices such as voice notes and short-form video. Media literacy must address emotional manipulation, algorithmic amplification, and social verification, not only factual accuracy.

Third, engagement strategies must move beyond institutional channels. Influencers, religious leaders, and community figures occupy central positions of trust and must be engaged deliberately and ethically. This engagement should be guided by clear standards to avoid reinforcing unaccountable authority or sensationalism.

Fourth, online safety must be recognised as a participation issue, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Silence should not be misinterpreted as lack of interest; it often reflects rational risk assessment. Policies that promote safer digital environments through moderation, norm-setting, and platform accountability are essential.

CONCLUSION

Somalia's digital media landscape is vibrant but unstable, participatory but uneven. The Somalia Media Habits Survey shows that Somali audiences are neither passive victims of misinformation nor fully empowered digital citizens. They are strategic navigators of a fragmented information environment shaped by historical mistrust, social inequality, and algorithmic pressure.

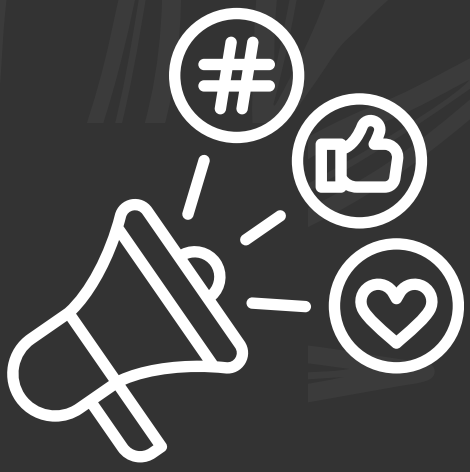
For policymakers and communicators, the challenge is not simply to inform, but to rebuild trust in an environment where authority is relational, participation is risky, and silence is meaningful. Managing this reality requires moving beyond technical solutions toward culturally grounded, trust-centred, and ethically informed strategies.

The future of Somali public communication will be shaped not only by technology, but by how effectively institutions learn to engage a society that listens carefully, speaks selectively, and trusts cautiously.

UPCOMING RESEARCH PROJECTS

a data-informed media and technology

Echo Chambers and Political Reporting in Somali Media





Adoption of Paid Digital Marketing Services in Somalia

Digital Parenting Practices in Somalia: Understanding Children's Digital Media Habits. Unpublished research project. Somalia.



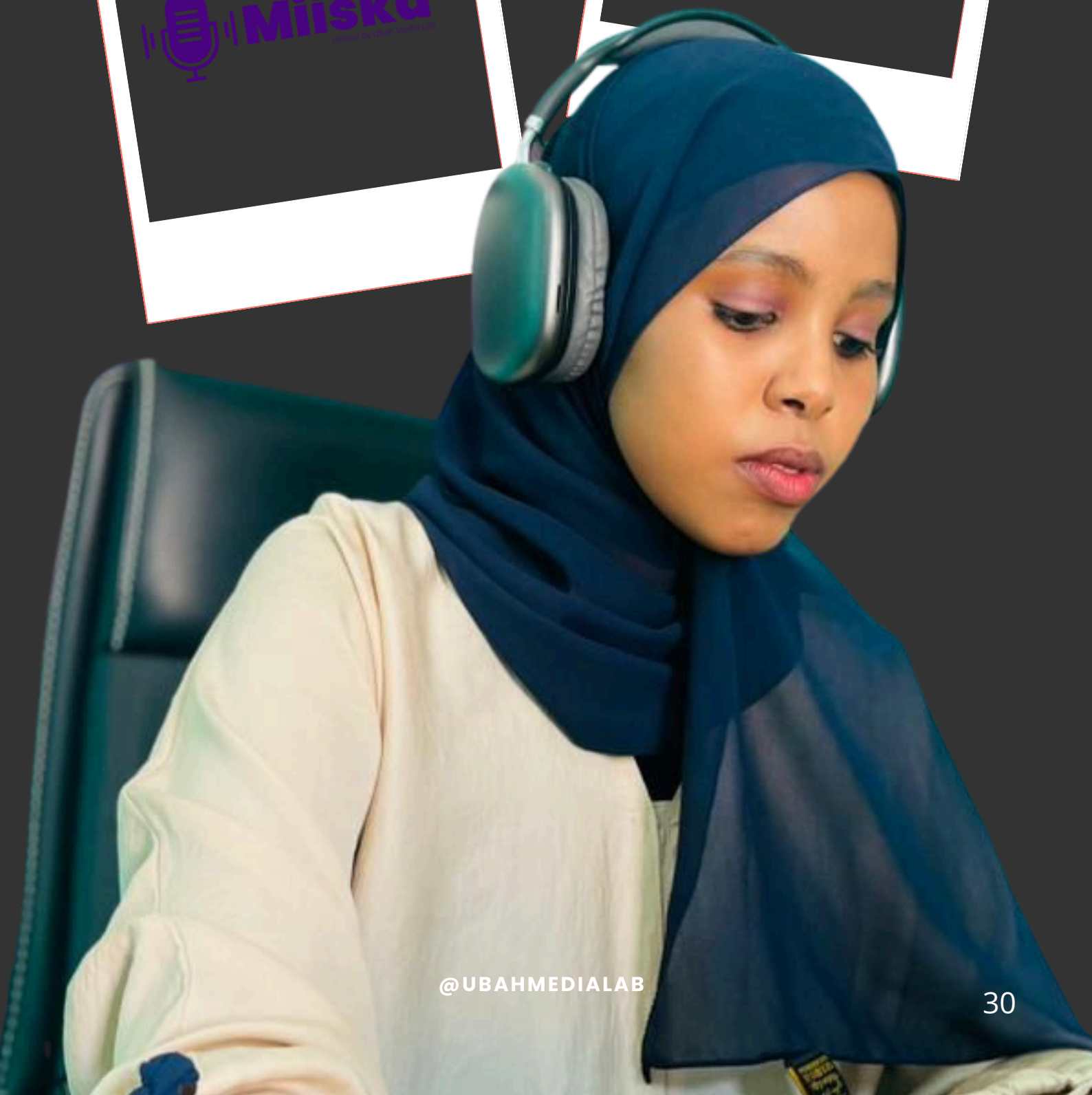
Unlocking Youth Employment Through Digital Skills in Somalia



COMING SOON

Miiska

Ubah growth lab



MEET THE TEAM BEHIND UBAH MEDIA LAB

Ubah Media Lab is a social enterprise dedicated to empowering young people in the Horn of Africa with the digital and media skills they need to thrive in an increasingly connected world. The initiative focuses on bridging the gap between access to technology and the ability to use it meaningfully, by building digital literacy, fostering critical thinking, and amplifying youth voices. Through its work, Ubah Media Lab uses media as a tool for social change, policy influence, and community empowerment, creating platforms where young people can tell their own stories and shape their futures.

Ubah Media Lab was founded by Said Isse, a media and communications specialist with extensive experience in humanitarian and development contexts, particularly through his work with Save the Children International in Somalia and South Sudan.

He holds an MSc in Media, Communication and Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science and an MA in Global Diplomacy from SOAS University of London. Drawing on both his academic training and field experience, Said established Ubah Media Lab to equip young people with the skills, tools, and opportunities needed to navigate and influence the digital world.



SAID ISSE, FOUNDER, TEAM LEADER



MEKDIM HAILU, CO-FOUNDER, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS



MOHAMED MALIN, POLICY ANALYST



KOWSAR MOHAMED, MARKETTING AND GROWTH CORDINATOR



IBRAHIM ABDI, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

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Garowe, and Mogadishu, Somalia
+252907847640 / info@ubahmedialab.org

WWW.UBAHMEIDALAB.ORG