TikTok's Somali Problem: When Live Streams Become Tools for Harassment: *Somali Social Media, Digital Violence Against Women*

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Abstract

Digital platforms have rapidly reshaped communication across Somalia and opened new social spaces for women. Many young women now share their voices online, build small businesses, speak about their experiences, and participate in public conversations. However, these platforms expose Somali women to extreme harassment, bullying, defamation, sexualized attacks, and character assassinations (UNESCO, 2025). Somali women are already battling with widespread physical violence, rape, and gender-based abuse, and digital platforms increase these risks exponentially. This research examines the patterns of abusive language targeting Somali women on TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Snapchat. Using lexical analysis, sentiment scoring, keyword frequency monitoring, and observational study of live-streamed content. This paper identifies platform-specific risks and high-intensity harassment environments. Findings indicate that TikTok live streams are hazardous for young women due to gaps in moderation systems in Somali language content. Live streamers often demand that their fellow streamers speak only Somali to avoid disruptions and comply with TikTok's streaming guidelines (waryaa Somali ku hadal). Snapchat is also used for direct harassment, private threats, and sharing compromising images. These images occur 100% of the time: screenshots and shared private stories with other users without the owner's knowledge.

Recommendations include culturally informed moderation, legal protections, digital literacy, and support networks for women at risk (Dr Nadia Al Sakkaf, N. A. S, 2024).

Keywords: Somali women, social media, online harassment, defamation, character assassination, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, digital violence

Introduction

The growth of social media in Somalia has created opportunities that earlier generations did not have. Young women can now express themselves, share their talents, and take part in discussions that shape public opinion. TikTok and Facebook have become daily meeting places for millions, while WhatsApp and Snapchat influence private communication and group behaviour. In many ways, these platforms have allowed Somali women to extend their presence beyond the limits of their physical environment.

However, the same digital spaces that provide visibility also expose women to new forms of harm. Somalia has struggled with extreme rates of gender-based violence for many years, and institutions are still developing the capacity to respond effectively. When this reality moves online, it creates a second layer of danger. According to AllAfrica (2025), women continue to face sexual violence and physical harm, and weak legal frameworks make it difficult to obtain justice. As a result, digital harassment often finds women who are already vulnerable.

Digital violence in Somalia takes many forms. It includes threats, sexual comments, public shaming, rumours, religious policing, and attacks on reputation. Sometimes a single comment can spread very quickly and damage a woman's standing in her

community. The Guardian (2024) shows that this kind of harassment has become common and can have severe psychological consequences.

Online harassment should not be seen as a separate problem. It is connected to cultural norms in which women carry the burden of family honour and moral reputation. When a woman becomes visible online, she enters a space where these norms are enforced through collective judgment. Social media magnifies what already exists. This research examines how harassment happens, which platforms are most involved, and what can be done to reduce the harm faced by Somali women.

Research Questions

1. What are the patterns and intensity of online harassment targeted at Somali women across TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Snapchat?
2. Which platforms present the highest risks for digital harassment and why?
3. How do cultural norms and language-specific content influence the nature of harassment?
4. What interventions can effectively mitigate digital violence against Somali women?

Literature Review

Scholars have documented digital harassment as a global problem that affects women in many societies. Citron (2014) shows how online spaces can become hostile environments where misogyny spreads quickly. Henry and Powell (2015)

highlight the connection between online abuse and real-world gender inequality. Jane (2016) notes that digital misogyny often reflects deeper social attitudes.

In Somali environments, online behaviour cannot be separated from cultural expectations. Ali (2021) explains that women who speak publicly may face criticism grounded in ideas of morality and honour. Mantilla's (2013) work on gender trolling helps explain organised attacks that target women who gain visibility.

TikTok introduces additional risks because its algorithm amplifies content rapidly, and its moderation tools struggle with languages like Somali. Newton (2022) and Horowitz (2023) show how young women face frequent harassment on TikTok due to poor content detection. Facebook and WhatsApp are widely used in Somalia for sharing information, but they also become tools for gossip and reputation attacks. BBC News (2023) and Reuters (2024) illustrate how misinformation spreads quickly on these platforms. Snapchat introduces private risks because its temporary messages encourage users to send threats or share sexualised content without leaving evidence. VOA Africa (2023) and AllAfrica (2025) warn that this type of harm is growing.

UNICEF Somalia (2024) reports that girls face particular dangers online, including intimidation, pressure, and threats. The lack of guidance, combined with the stigma surrounding sexual reputational harm, puts young women at high risk. International human rights standards such as CEDAW and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women place responsibility on states to protect women from violence, including in digital environments.

This study builds on this literature but contributes new data explicitly focused on the Somali online ecosystem. It provides an empirical overview of the types of harassment Somali women face and the cultural logic behind it.

Methodology

This study analysed 13,300 social media posts directed at Somali women over a six-month period. Data were collected from TikTok (7,000 entries), Facebook (2,300 entries), YouTube (2,000 entries), WhatsApp (1,000 entries), and Snapchat (1,000 entries). Posts were selected using a stratified random sampling approach to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and content types. Somali language and Somali English code-mixed content were included.

Data Analysis Techniques:

1. **Lexical Categorisation:** Posts were classified as sexual reputation attacks, insults, moral, religious shaming, gossip, or family dishonour threats. Inter-rater reliability was tested on 10% of the sample (Cohen's kappa = 0.87). Hand, M. J (1993).

2. **Sentiment Scoring:** Hostility, aggression, and threat intensity were quantified using NLP software and manually cross-checked.

3. **Keyword Frequency Analysis:** Key terms, including Garoob daalan, Fuusto ku riix, Cabtooy, Fadeexad, Feminist, Kufsiga, Dil, kabalaari, and Qarxis, were tracked.

4. **Observational Study:** TikTok live streams, WhatsApp groups, and Snapchat messaging were observed under ethical protocols ensuring anonymisation and no direct identification of victims (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

Results

Platform Distribution

Platform	Comments Collected	Percentage of Dataset
TikTok	7000	52.6%
Facebook	2300	17.3%
YouTube	2000	15.0%
WhatsApp	1000	7.5%
Snapchat	1000	7.5%

Observation: TikTok exhibited the highest frequency and severity of harassment;

Snapchat and WhatsApp facilitated private or targeted attacks.

Types of Harassment

Category	Count	Percentage
Sexual reputation attacks	7305	54.9%
Insults and name-calling	2196	16.5%
Moral religious shaming	1316	9.9%
Gossip and rumour spreading	1091	8.2%
Family dishonour threats	651	4.9%
Private threats (Snapchat, WhatsApp)	741	5.5%

Keyword-Based Findings

Keyword	Mentions	Negative Sentiment (%)	Notes
Garoob daalan	1500	60	Sexualized harassment
Fuusto ku riix	1200	55	Character shaming false narrative
Cabtooy	350	72	Gossip reputation attacks
Fadeexad	850	85	High intensity abuse
Feminist	200	90	Attacks on advocacy
Kufsiga	1000	98	Sexual assault threats
Dil	715	100	Direct murder threats
Ka balaari	500	80	Sexualized shaming threats
Qarxis	500	95	Violent threats

Observation: High negative sentiment indicates pervasive hostile online abuse, particularly on TikTok and Snapchat.

TikTok and Snapchat Analysis

- Nearly all TikTok live streams contained sexualized, abusive, or demeaning comments.
- Somali language use bypassed automated moderation systems.
- Aggressors shared women's photos in groups to humiliate and dehumanise victims.

- Snapchat allowed private harassment via ephemeral images, videos, and direct messaging.
- Moderation was largely ineffective, exposing women to immediate and sustained harassment.

Discussion

The findings show how digital violence in Somalia grows out of broader social norms. Women's behaviour is closely linked to ideas of honour and reputation. When a woman becomes visible online, she becomes a subject of judgment from strangers and acquaintances. Social media makes this process faster and more public. Sexualised insults, accusations, and threats reflect more profound anxieties about women's autonomy and presence in public life.

TikTok's rapid comment system and weak Somali language moderation make it a challenging environment for women. Insults can appear in large numbers within minutes, and the tone often becomes more aggressive as more viewers join. Snapchat and WhatsApp present private forms of harm that are equally dangerous. Sharing a woman's image without her consent can destroy her reputation, and fear of such exposure can silence women entirely.

The consequences include psychological stress, fear of public participation, social withdrawal, and long-term damage to self-confidence. These patterns match findings from UNICEF Somalia (2024) and other international studies. Digital violence should therefore be seen as part of the continuum of violence that Somali women face throughout their lives. International human rights standards require states to prevent this harm and hold perpetrators accountable.

Recommendations

1. Culturally informed moderation: Employ Somali-speaking moderators and AI capable of detecting code-mixed language abuse.
2. Digital literacy campaigns: Educate women on online safety, reporting, and risk mitigation and raise awareness.
3. Legal protections: Develop legislation addressing digital harassment, threats, defamation and non-consensual image sharing.
4. Support networks: Provide counselling, peer support, and legal assistance and provide a safe place to give them comfort.
5. Live stream and private platform monitoring: Implement proactive interventions on TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and WhatsApp.
6. Continuous research: Monitor social media to identify emerging patterns of abuse.

Conclusion

Digital violence in Somalia is now a significant challenge that affects the lives of many women. The combination of cultural expectations, weak legal protections, and rapidly expanding digital communication has created conditions where harassment spreads easily. TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and YouTube give women space to express themselves, yet these same platforms expose them to threats that can cause serious harm.

Protecting Somali women online requires a combination of legal reform, platform responsibility, education, and community action. Addressing this issue is essential

not only for women's safety but also for their ability to participate in public life and contribute to society.

Acknowledgments

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