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Role of social media in Ethiopia's recent political transition

Adamu, Meseret Assefa

Department of Information Science, Faculty of Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

This research aims to explore to what extent the popular social media positively and negatively affected Ethiopia's recent political transition. Further, the research focuses on how the social media played a role in leading to the overthrow of the state capture by the authoritarian and how they are playing role in the process since then. Qualitative research and analysis have been applied to depict the impact of social media on Ethiopia's recent political transition. The findings of this research have revealed that a large number of the literature as stated positive feedback about the role of social media on Ethiopia's political transmission such as mobilizing people to stand against the overthrown government, support the reformist actions, expose illegal actions, criticizing all the dangerous movements and creating awareness among the community easily and promptly. Some of the literatures stated the negative impacts of social media networks such as spreading/disseminating fake news from fake accounts, rumors, individual opinions/feelings and ethnic-based information that leads the community to unrest, challenge the current political transition in Ethiopia. To control bad actors over the social media, the government should do many things beyond and aforementioned promulgating laws. Future researches also recommended on social media analytics aiming at collecting, storing, monitoring, analyzing, and summarizing politically relevant user-generated content from social media.

Key words: Social media, political transition, social media for politics, role of social media, Ethiopian politics, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, social media are said to have an impact on the public discourse and communication in the society (Virgiano, 2011; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In particular, social media are increasingly used (Mary, 2019). They are an integral part of our day to day activities and used for online marketing, job portal, religious stages, academic platform, and social discussion forums.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2012), the term "Social Media" refers to websites and applications used for social networking. Furthermore, social media is defined as forms of electronic communication, such as websites through which people create online communication to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc. (whatis.com, 2019, Downes, 2005; Siemens, 2006). Social media contains several channels

E-mail: meseretassefa93@gmail.com.

(Urista et al., 2009) like audios/videos callings, blogging, communicating, texting, sharing contents all over the world and so many characteristics (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Keith, 2016).

More recently, popular social medias, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Knight-McCord et al. 2016; Maisam, 2019) are believed to have the potential for increasing political participation (Surjit and Manpreet, 2013; Ahmad, 2011). While Twitter is an ideal platform for users to spread not only information in general but also political opinions publicly through their networks, political institutions (e.g., politicians, political parties, political foundations, etc.) have also begun to use Facebook pages (Brenner and Smith, 2013). Other groups use social media for the purpose of entering into direct dialogs with citizens and encouraging more political discussions (Stieglitz, 2012; Keith, 2016; Sajithra and Rajindra, 2013).

These social media uses are increasing rapidly by the activists, youth and politicians. Social networking is sometimes used by the political parties and their leaders to advertise and spread their views and opinions (John, 2017; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Tayeebwa, 2015). On the other hand, the public uses the same media to share their views and use it against undemocratic rule and anarchy (John, 2017). Hence, we can understand that social media networks nowadays are the most important tools used by the society, politicians, activists and political parties to actively participate in political activities and impact the political journey.

One of the earliest impacts of social media on politics was felt in Philippine. According to Raul (2012), at the turn of the century, a president was ousted from his rule only through the use of text messaging on January 17, 2001, during the prosecution trial of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside proof against him. Within two hours, after the congress decision was announced, thousands of Filipinos, gathered on crossroads in Manila with the help of forwarded text messages to express their anger to their corrupt president. And in the next few days, over a million people gathered in downtown Manila to continue their protest (Raul, 2012). The country's legislators were startled by immense and speedy reaction from public and they reversed their decision and allowed the evidences to be presented for the court. Estrada's fate was sealed and he had to quit. In this way, social media had helped to force out the national leader (Shirky, 2011).

According to Onyedikachi et al. (2017) the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times. In America, Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purpose during the 2008 and 2012 USA Presidential elections (Roman and Jákup, 2014). Many nations and politicians across the globe have also continued to embrace the social media platforms to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process.

Nigeria also had the first real test of social media use for political participation during the 2011 General Elections (Onyedikachi et al., 2017).

Social media in the Arab world have also been increasingly used to inform, mobilize, and increase awareness among people with regards to issues, such as human rights, corruption and democracy. According to the Sedra's Report to World Bank (2013), pro-democracy movements and social media groups, such as *Kefaya (enough)*, "*We are all Khaled Said*", *Shayfeencom (We're Watching You)* and other movement in Egypt have made extensive use of blogs and social media (Sedra, 2013).

Furthermore, new media (Social Media) helped activists to mobilize hundreds of people and sparked widespread protests in the streets, which led to the outbreak of a revolution at different countries. The protest carried out at Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, Tahrir Square in Cairo, Pearl Square in Manama, and the University Quarter in Sana have ultimately brought the fall of entrenched dictators, such as Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, and Muammad Gaddafi of Libya (Arafa and Armstrong, 2016).

The aforementioned events in world politics clearly demonstrate the role social media are playing in politics. These events are not limited to any one part of the continents but spread over different parts of the world. In Ethiopian recent political transition, both positive and negative impacts of social media have been observed. As a positive impact, social media took the lion share in mobilizing the youth and realizing the expected political reform. Many politicians are recognizing this new and powerful medium to interact with the masses and make them participate and thereby enabling better communication and understanding of the situations. In fact, there were several Ethiopians who condemn the impact of social media on our political transformation. These groups only pointed out the negative impact which actually was created due to irresponsible/bad actors on social media who posts wrong information that led the society to conflict or unrest.

As a hypothesis to be tested, the researcher believes that even thought, there were serious negative impacts because of the bad actors, social media have played an indispensable role in Ethiopian recent political transition and there has to be a national policy to control the bad actors in social media networks. It is, therefore, the aim of this study to investigate the positive and negative impacts of these social media on the recent/April, 2018 Ethiopia's political transition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literatures examining both social media impacts and political participation generally employ a qualitative based research design and observation (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019). Request were sent to Ethiopian bloggers, activists and random social media users who have many followers, active in social media activism to give

information, and most of them showed their willingness and were interviewed face to face. Some of them responded online for the questions posed.

Mainly, the researcher conducted a thorough and systematic social media sites analysis and observations. Social media sites were selected based on user's potential to meet the research objective and examined how people respond to specific political messages online using social media buttons (Like, Comment, Share) as metrics of political engagement. Based on this context, social media interactions, such as liking, commenting and sharing are part of the everyday conversation that represents and shapes individuals' political attitudes; and the number of interactions on social media posts focusing on the Ethiopian recent political transition more or less reflects what captures followers' attention, at least at a basic quantitative level.

Hence, known activist pages, bloggers, political party sites, and followers were selected purposely and qualitative content analysis was conducted to meet the objective of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethiopia's recent political transition

As stated by Abreham and Tibebe (2019), before Facebook become popular in Ethiopia, people preferred to listen to radios and watch TVs broadcasted from outside the country, such as Voice of America (VOA) and Duetchevelle (broadcasted in Amharic from Germany) radio stations. But nowadays, anyone can use his/her mobile or tablet to get any news from social media. Even those traditional media are also available in social media by having Facebook pages. Anyone can get those local traditional media news as well as political activists and Diaspora based media which are always willing and interested to transmit news to protest against the overthrown Ethiopian government. Consequently, social media in Ethiopia have become a preferred media outlet which can present political news from the government supporters, activist, journalists as well as from opposition groups of the government.

Since 1991, Ethiopia has been ruled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) functioned as a de facto one-party state. Until 2012, the country was led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, a cunning hardliner who consolidated power around one ethnic group, the Tigrians, and cemented Ethiopia's political order. After his sudden death six years ago, he was replaced by Hailemariam Desalegn, who largely continued practicing Meles's Legacy which led the country in a crisis of legitimacy (Aljazeera, 2018; Fortune, 2018).

Historically, Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups were subjugated and politically marginalized. This was primarily felt among the two largest groups, the Oromos (34%) and the Amharas (27%). Crafty legislation, like the 2009's anti-terrorism law, silenced criticism of the political order. Prisons became crammed with bloggers, activists, opposition politicians and journalists who reported governmental abuses. Tsedale Lemma, the

editor-in-chief of Addis Standard interviewed by Aljazeera stated, "Critical media was being decimated one way or another, and journalists were leaving the country, we became at some point, the second-largest country producing journalist asylum seekers".

According to Mulualem (2019), in Ethiopia, the December 2015 Oromo protest by students and farmers on the new master plan of Addis Ababa and around Oromo regions, made headlines in the world news. Ethiopian government blamed opposition parties for facilitating and organizing the protest via Facebook.

Consequently, the state had been rocked by opposition for about three consecutive years. Especially, the Oromo and Amhara youths called "*Qerro*" and "*Fano*" respectively protested against the violation of human rights and over anarchism, which led to the declaration of two emergency decrees. Lives were lost and property damaged. The intractability of political stalemates led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn.

Additionally, during those periods, in Ethiopia, the right to information and the role of media was restricted. Private media were blocked. Journalists, bloggers and activists were arrested by the autocrats. The printed media, TV and radio and other medias were controlled by the authoritarian government. The private media were hushed, blocked or highly restricted to report the problems. Hence, the people of Ethiopia did not trust the reports made by these media, and prefer to gather up-to-date and relevant information from social media posted by political activists, bloggers and journalists. During this time, social media, like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube played a vital role in reporting the real problem or addressed the right information for the right users (society) at the right time. Thus, activists, journalists and bloggers who live abroad, used social media as an indispensable tool to share information about the day to day government practices, political activities, anarchism, human right violations, corruptions, and set strategies to mobilize the society for freedom and democratic reformation. All these activities led to the current newborn political situations in the country at large.

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia's newborn political transition was no coincidence; it was the culmination of hard-fought political activism, youth protest and pressure of internal reformist group that forced the authoritarian regime to restructure its leadership. Finally, the anticipation ended, and Abiy Ahmed was elected by EPRDF as a Prime Minister of Ethiopia on Monday, April 2, 2018 (Ethiopian Herald, 2018). Abiy became the third chairman of the ruling collation party that has been at the helm of politics for the past three decades and the first Prime Minister from the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) latter changed to Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) (Fortune, 2018) and now united with other parties and changed to Prosperity Party.

When Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed delivered

his inauguration speech on April 2, 2018, the bold rhetoric suggested a political revolution for Ethiopia in particular and the East African nations in general. Abiy's speech promised a new era for the unity of Ethiopia, democracy and freedom of speech/media. It was reported as a radical departure for a country embroiled in long-standing ethnic and political divisions (Aljazeera, 2018).

Social media on Ethiopia's political transition

Out of the total of hundred million people more than twenty million Ethiopians use Facebook in Amharic, English, Oromiffa and other languages. Statistics shows that social media users for political participation and news, especially Facebook and YouTube users increased by 14.1% after the political unrest, which is 94.6% of the total internet and smart phone users. Data on Ethiopia shows the annual growth of internet users is estimated to be around 37% and the number of active social media users is growing by 20%. Research findings show that majority of Ethiopians access the internet from a mobile device (Staff, 2018). The three top most searched teams on Google are 'Facebook', 'News' and 'Ethiopian'. Most of the user's age groups range from 16 to 40 years old, that is, the youth and adult group that cover the majority of the total population in the country (Africa Internet Usage, 2019).

It was the first time in Ethiopian history that events of the transition were mainly covered and reported by ordinary citizens via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs rather that the main stream media. As per the Aljazeera news/information collected from different journalist, activist and politicians, social media played a significant role for Ethiopia's political transition.

Jawar Mohammed, the founder of the Oromia Media Network and Diaspora based in Minnesota, USA, played major role in the Oromo protests and exemplified how social media could mobilize a large number of people and bring a change. He took advantage of social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, to bypass strict government censorship and organize protests. In an interview with Aljazeera (2018), Jawar Mohammed "You cannot imagine this revolution, this change without social media," through these mediums, Jawar orchestrated demonstrations and broadcasted undeniable proof of the government's abuses to millions of people or to his followers Jawar further described how he and his followers used the social media as follows "People from all corners of the world will snap a picture, record a video and send it to us through WhatsApp or through Facebook. We take that, we verify it, we edit it and we air it back to them."

With regard to the role played by social media, via our email communication Mukerrem Miftah stated that: "Social media facilitated effective and instant information sharing possible in Ethiopia's politics. This means that it allows the young/youth age-group to be actively involved in politics. Even if youth participation was relatively normal in Ethiopian political history since the 1960s, the intensity, size, and level of youth political participation, such as activism, blogging, audio/video communications, message exchanges through viber, WhatsApp, IMO, Facebook, Paltalk, telegram, and Skype tremendously increased very icing recently. This is a new political experience in Ethiopia".

During the transition period, prominent opposition political members, such as Andargachew Tsige, Andualem Arage, Merara Gudina as well as journalists and activists such as Eskindir Nega and Temesgen Dessalegn were released from prison; critical websites and blogs were unblocked. In an interview with Aljazeera, regarding the recent Ethiopia's political transition and the role of social media, Eskindir Nega, an Ethiopian journalist who was released recently after six years of imprisonment stated "If Abiy Ahmed does not deliver the democracy he promised, then we'll be back to social media". He asserted his position by saying "I'm prepared to go back to prison again. So, whether there's democracy or no democracy, it's back to work (social media). There's no choice." Finally, Aljazeera (2018) concluded that the use of social media in Ethiopia has contributed essentially to the success of the protest.

Positive roles of social media on Ethiopia's political transition

According to the findings of this research, the following are the positive roles of social media on Ethiopia's current political transition.

Mobilizing people

Social media sites allow the people of Ethiopia to mobilize challenges and stand against the autocracy of the government. During the protest to the ruling government, cell phones and social media were widely used to communicate straightaway with a large numbers of people, form ad hoc teams at a very large scale and exchange crucial information in a timely manner. Especially, activists living abroad were the one who used social media to set strategies and mobilize the youth to collaborate and say NO for the government illegal actions. Street demonstrations were organized and led by activists in different cities like Gondar, Ambo, Bahirdar, Woliso, Debremakos and other cities at the same time and Facebook profile pictures were changed to show the protest.

For instance, in 2017/2018, a powerful Facebook group named "OroMara" was created. The name was coined by blending the ethnonyms "Oromo" and "Amhara" which

Image 1. The Medemer Banner wildly spread over the social media in support of the reform.

are the two main ethnic groups in terms of population size. The group was created mainly to bring together the alliance of the people of the two regions and stand together for freedom and strengthen the movements of the 'Qerro' youth of Oromia and 'Fano' youth of Amhara regions.

Once the OroMara alliance was created, a number of Facebook and Twitter pages like #OroMaraኦሮማራ, #ኦሮማራ-OroMara, #Oromo Protest, #Amhara Protest with a significant number of followers were created. Once the page is created, political activists and youths from both regional states discussed and exchanged information about the strategies to throw out the authoritarian group who captured the government power. Therefore, popular social media, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter created a platform for rapid interaction which helped various groups to communicate easily and organize demonstrations how, where and when to oppose government forces.

Support the reformist actions

As stated earlier, the political transition in Ethiopia became real not only by the activist, bloggers and youth protests, but also by the sum of internal reformist struggle called "Team Lemma". The "Team Lemma" was composed of the internal reformists organized secretly to over throw the authoritarian ruling group and bring democracy to the people of Ethiopia. The communities, who need political transformation, fully supported the reform activities and stand along with reformists. For instance, on June 23, 2018, when supporters of the reformist group called a demonstration at Meskel square in Addis Ababa, a large number of people, especially the youths, from all corners of the country were informed through social media and gathered to show their strong support for the political transformation. Furthermore,

youths at different towns, cities and villages used Facebook as a platform to organize demonstrations to show their support to the political transition. Slogans, such as "*we support you", "we are united", "You are our hero", "we are with you", "Ethiopia is an addiction", "One love, one Ethiopia"* and the pictures of the reformations were prepared by the organizers and shared through social media. Also, demonstrators wearing T-shirts with the photos of the reformists printed on it and holding banners gathered around the streets to confirm their support. The demonstration was also to appeal to all Ethiopians living worldwide to break the silence and speak out against the social injustice and brutality done by the ousted political leaders.

Furthermore, like that of the speech made by Martin Luther King "*I have a dream*" and Barack Obama's "*Yes We Can*", leader of the Ethiopia's current political reformist group Abiy Ahmed come with a new slogan or concept of 'Medemer/ መደመር''[1] which means synergy, unity, inclusion, unification and envisioned to bring pragmatic and inclusive change in Ethiopia (Yilma, 2018; Mulualem, 2019).

This slogan was widely and quickly spread over the different social media and almost every individual who use social media networks owned the idea of '*Medemer',* and changed his/her profile picture with the *medemer* slogan in different formats such as a banner or T-shirt with a slogan '*Tedemiryalehu*' meaning '*I am united*'. Image 1 show one of the banners/picture which was widely spread over the social media. According to a small number (10) selected Facebook users assessment made, the picture was shared, commented and liked over 6.8 million, 12.5 million and 13.1 million times, respectively. There were a number of different groups created to support the reformist groups, such as የ ዶ/ር አ ብይ አህመድ

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[1]*latter the concept converted into a book by prime Minister Abiy Ahmed with same title in Amharic and Oromifa languages and used as a political roadmap or philosophy for the reformist group.*

Image 2. Mob killing of innocent man in Shashemene.

ደጋፊዎች/ Dr. Abiy Ahimed supporters, which was created on April 3, 2018 and have over 284,140 followers.

Exposing and criticizing illegal actions

During the recent political transition period in Ethiopia, social media users were curious for the change to progress. According to the assessment made by this study, the transformation was not smooth and easy at all. Some groups and individuals were not happy with the change, and they tried to terrorize and create obstacles so many times. The damages done by the reactionaries include killing groups/individuals, pushing different groups for conflict, illegal gun and money smuggling, etc. Following the political transition, ethnic violence and mob attacks across the country have resulted in the death of innocent citizens.

For instance, in the Somali region churches were burnt, priests, deacons and congregates were killed, and many displaced and properties damaged by reactionaries on July, 2018. During that time, social media were widely used by almost all Ethiopians who use social media to condemn such evil actions and support those who were in danger.

On the other hand, as shown in Image 2, in Shahemene, Southern Oromia region, an innocent man was killed by mob attack. The case was like this, in accordance with the call made by a reformist Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, a number of exiled political groups and activists returned home. Jawar Mohammed, an Oromo activist who was based in USA also came to Ethiopia. On August, 2018, a rally was held to welcome Jawar Mohammed in Shashemene. The mob attacked the young man, accusing him of carrying a hidden bomb. He was hanged upside down and beaten to death. The regional police reported that no bomb was found on this person.

Following this action the society condemn the killing of the innocent man through social media. According to my review of selected Facebook pages, the upside down hanged picture was shared over and commented on popular social media more than 7.2 million times. Jawar Mohammed on his official Twitter and Facebook pages that he has more than 112,000 and 1,671,625 followers respectively, Twitted and shared on August 12, 2018 to denounce the mob injustice as: "The mob attack that happened in Shashemene was cruel, disgusting and damaging to the image of this beautiful city that has been hot bed of resistance that brought this changes we enjoy today."

Other social media users have also commented on as: "It is still heartbreaking to see images or hear about what happened in Shashemene. However, there seem to be reflections being made by many that their action does not represent our (Oromo) society. I beg to differ".

Another social media user also commented as: "Very sad to see this happening in Ethiopia today. No matter the reason, this shameful and illegal act should be stopped."

One user observed by stating that "It is totally inhuman act…….barbaric……. Government must arrest the

youths/attackers".

Therefore, during the time of the political transition, together with the national security force, the society used social media played a vital role to expose, denounce/condemn such acts.

Creating awareness among the community

Literatures reveal that citizens prefer social media rather than the local, traditional or main stream media for political news and information (Karolak, 2018; Chimee, 2016). No need of visiting websites, buy newspaper, listen to radios and watch televisions programs to follow up new political developments. Social media provide news faster and less-costly than other mediums. Among the popular social media, Facebook is the most preferred social media for news on Ethiopian politics and other related issues (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019).

For instance, social media widely used to support different group of societies displaced due to ethnic or political violence. *GLOBAL ALLIANCE* led by activist Tamagn Beyene[2] solicited funds for the victims of ethnic-violence in the town of Burayu. Tamagn's fundraising plea was shared about 289,000 times over social media and around $483,973 was raised in three days.

Similarly, a social media movement led by Zemedkun Bekele[3] started to raise funds to rebuild the Orthodox Churches burned in Somalia region, Jigjiga. This fundraising call was shared over 349,000 times on social media and all the required expenses to rebuild the churches were raised within a week.

Hence, during current Ethiopia's political transition, social media, especially Facebook has played a vital role in terms of serving as means of a communication platform between the community, politicians, activists, government reformist and supporters.

Negative impacts of social media on Ethiopia's political transition

The information posted on social media, such as spreading/disseminating fake news/incorrect information/rumors from fake accounts, individual opinions/feelings, ethnic-based information, false allegations, hate speeches, misrepresentations, and inciting ethnic violence have negative impacts on the political transition of the country. In our email correspondences, Mukerrem Miftah has made the following remark.

Since no one controls the content of information shared in these platforms, it has a dangerous natural propensy

to unleash chaos and instability. This has already caused significant problems in many times and places in Ethiopia and challenged the current political transition in Ethiopia.

Fake news (Rumors)

Among the top most negative effects of social media in Ethiopian politics is spreading/disseminating fake news (rumors) from fake accounts. Political issues that get spread over the internet are distorted by each story, regardless of being genuine or not. It is getting increasingly harder to isolate genuine news from fake ones on the web. The consistent stream of images, connections, and gossips about political leaders are blend of truths and lies. There are currently a significant number of fake news websites and pages created by unknown individuals that frequently post rumors and fake news. There are more than 10 Facebook accounts created by his identity and profile picture. Furthermore, #ZemedkunBekele, #Seyoum Teshome, #MikyAmhara, #MulukenTesfaw, #Daniel Berhane and others are also activists who have an official Facebook account and significant number of followers. But, different irresponsible individuals created another account using the names or identities of the aforementioned activists, bloggers and politicians and spread fake, fabricated news supported by photo shopped images and photos that led different groups to conflict and unrest. I have even found more than 20 Facebook accounts created using the name and title of the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, such as #PM abiyahmed, #DrAbiy Ahmed PM, #Pm Abiy Ahmed, #Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali PM, Ethiopian PM Dr.Abiy Ahmed, etc., with a significant number of followers. As stated by the office of the Prime Minster, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has no Twitter account. But, as shown in Image 3, there are a number of twitter accounts created by his appellations.

Using all the fake accounts created by different unethical individuals fake news and photo shopped images are posted and spread on social media that led innocent Ethiopians to conflict and unrest. For example, as shown in Image 4, the original picture was from Central Africa posted some years back, but irresponsible individuals (bad actors edited the picture by including Oromo Liberation Fronts' OLF) flag and tried to show that the disturbance happened in Ethiopia and spread it over social media.

Group/ethnic interest

In Ethiopia, a radical ethno-nationalist politics is certainly producing an extremely irrational youth groups in different parts of the country. In an interview with Addis Standard, Mukerrem (2018), stated that activists can be divided into two groups: those who have institutional affiliations,

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[2]Human rights activist, political commentator, talk show host, Ethiopian Nationalist and comedian based in USA.
[3]*He is a spiritual preacher of Ethiopian Orthodox church, blogger, writer and activist based in Germany with more than 570,000 followers*

Image 3. Fake accounts by name and title of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Image 4. Photoshopped image posted on Facebook used to spread fake information.

refined goals, and a certain degree of stability (a sense of directionality), and those who do not necessarily have any institutional affiliations, and possess a blurred sense of goal (and direction). Mukerrem further explained, for the former group of activists, broadcast and print media serve as an important vent for reaching out and initiate change efforts. Here activists are personally and institutionally identifiable. This entails a certain degree of refined role and status, for any status confers responsibility. In other words, activism under this modality assumes responsible activism, making the act of activism nuanced and strategic (Mukerrem, 2018). However, despite some fluctuations among the first group of activists, the second group of activists and the kind of activism within which they function is apparently causing more chaos, unpredictability, crisis, and identity-based frictions in Ethiopia. It should be noted, however, that some of the individual activists have been genuinely engaged in harnessing peace and stability for the country.

Some are well educated with significant influences than others. Yet, devoid of any institutional affiliations, refined and specific goals and directions, individual activists inspired by their ethnicity, religion, or group mentality, have been the major source of discontent in Ethiopia. Finally, Mukerrem has remarked that, "Social media platforms, including Face book, Twitter and YouTube, have been the major means of their outreach. Being largely uncontrolled, social media has allowed for the expression of views, relevant or destructive, affecting the way "normal" citizens think, act, and behave" (Mukerrem, 2018).

Currently, there are different types/category of social media activists who have large number of followers in Ethiopia. Among the different categories, unity centered activist, ethno-nationalism activist and religion based activist can be mentioned. For instance, we may take the Oromo-centered activism, especially Jawar Mohammed, and the unity-centered activist Tamagn Beyene,

represent a different strand of political activism in Ethiopia. Despite all their shortcomings, one can relatively predict the overarching discourse underpinning their activism (Mukerrem, 2018). The Ethno-nationalism activists with a large number of followers posted and shared different information on social media using their local language about the interests of those specific ethnic groups. Because of the different attitudes and interests of the different category of social media activists and the kind of activism within which they function is apparently causing more chaos, unpredictability, crisis, and identity-based frictions in Ethiopia. For instance, in Oromia and Benishangul regions, ethnic-based attacks and displacement have become a recurrent problem. In Guji Zone of Oromia region, nearly a million ethnic Gedeos were displaced, and many seem to think that it is a sort of ethnic cleansing effort. In Amhara region, the conflicts between Amhara and Qimant communities in Gonder, Amhara region have resulted in dozens of deaths and displacement of well over 40,000 people (Borkena, 2019).

The sentiments for ethnic conflict are still (end of 2019) there. Activists with a conviction of unstated radical ethno-nationalism with huge followers on social media could cause a lot of damage to the country. As a result, ethnic-tension in the country is taking root so much so that now the government is considering it as a national security concern (Borkena, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary objective of this research is to investigate and evaluating both the positive and negative aspects of social media for Ethiopia's political transition. The findings of the study have shown that a positive development of social media emergence has been emerged as an indispensible tool that the society, specially the youth is talking about the political issues. Before the emergence of social media, the political interests were restricted only to those individuals who have an access to read newspapers, watch TV news or radio channels. But recently, social media helped activists to mobilize millions of people and spark widespread protests in the streets, which led to the outbreak of a revolution or transformation at different countries including Ethiopia. The outcome of this report also shows negative impacts of social media, for instance, false allegations, incorrect information, hate speeches, misrepresentations, inciting ethnic violence, and many others which specifically characterize specific group. Since no one controls the content of information shared in social media platforms, it has a dangerous natural propensity to unleash chaos and instability, and these uncontrolled social medias have caused significant problems many times and places in Ethiopia, especially since Abiy came to power. The worst feature of social

media is that since many of the activists and followers use fake usernames and appellations, it makes it harder for the relevant authorities to take any corrective measures. It is, therefore, the contribution of this study to the political parties, activists, youth, government (including policy maker) and society of Ethiopia at large regarding the proper and wise usage of social media networks. Youths, activists, journalists and others are expected to use the social media in a responsible manner. In general, social media users should not give attention for the unknown or fake accounts who may share rumors or fake news that leads to conflict and displacement. The government together with the Facebook CEO has to be cooperate, transparent and deliver genuine information for the society at the right time, and take corrective measures upon the fake accounts or individuals who shared fake news over the social media. Finally, even though it is open for subjective judgment, the recent declaration/policy by Ethiopian government to control or restrict hate speech is one way of going about it. However, the government can do many things beyond and above promulgating laws.

In the future, a research on framework is proposed for social media analytics aiming at collecting, storing, monitoring, analyzing, and summarizing politically relevant user-generated content from social media for political institutions in Ethiopia.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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