

# Challenges and Prospects of Social Media Usage for Political Mobilization in Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** This paper sought to assess the challenges and prospects of social media for political mobilization in Ethiopia. In the study, a survey research method was used. Samples were selected based on a multistage sampling technique. So that stratified and simple random sampling techniques were applied. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The tools employed to collect primary data were interview and questionnaire. Primary data was gathered from 156 samples. Secondary data from books, reports, and Social Media Networks was used. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (like percentage and frequency) while the qualitative data collected through interview were used to triangulate the results of quantitative data. Findings from the study have shown that the main sources of political information are social media. It also revealed that Facebook is the most popular social media format followed by YouTube and Twitter. Regarding its role, social media has great importance for political mobilization. Social media users may discover political activities in social media and in this way intensify their political knowledge, increase their political efficacy, and improve their political participation. As the challenges of social media in Ethiopia, there are now quite some fake or sarcastic “news” sites that often post stories that sound authentic. Some fake news sites simply exist to post click bait stories or to troll readers who don’t do their own research. Some other challenges of social media identified by this study are limited connection speed, cost, and its inaccessibility to rural areas.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Political Mobilization, Ethiopia

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## 1. Introduction

The role of media continues to be useful in mobilizing and drawing citizens to focus on issues that are perceived as important and in priming public opinion among many Africans to get engaged in the political process of governance and democratization [1]. The massive boom in the online and wireless digital media augmented traditional media, namely radio, newspapers, television, and magazines [2].

Ethiopia is experiencing frequently occurring political and social chaos which results in social, economic and political progress of the country. Since the country establishes democratic government since 1991, the current government formulates the constitution which allows the right to express their feelings, opinions, their political stands using various

communication mechanisms. Democracy is widely acknowledged as the best form of government in most parts of the world today. Elections, which represent the most modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government is one of the cardinal features of democracy [3]. This is so because, in a democracy, the authority of the government derives from the consent of the governed. This is perhaps why democracy is commonly referred to as “the government of the people by the people and for the people”. Usually, a democratic election would characteristically be competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive and free and fair [4].

Ethiopia’s democracy may be considered as emerging

when compared to the older democracies of the western world. Although our democracy is 27 years older, fundamental questions like corruption, good governance, basic needs claimed by the people are not yet answered by the government. All these problems led to political mobilization in different parts of the country. For this recently occurred social and political mobilization social Media are used as instruments.

Before the advent of the new media, the older or conventional media – radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc, ruled the world and had directly or indirectly blocked popular participation in the electoral process. This is because there has always been a scarcity of space and airtime given by the conventional media to the citizens to have their say in politics, governance and in the electoral process. Conventional media critics such as [5] cited in Abubakar (2011) thus believe that voters were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about politics. They argue that there is the absence of serious debate in the conventional media that could make people learn the substance of issues and policies proposals as well as related arguments and that this disallows citizens from participating actively in political discourse.

Citizens in Ethiopia do have very limited access to journals, newspapers, radio, and television express their view democratically. Peoples are jailed in expressing their political view using public and private Media. Meanwhile, social media are interactive, web-based media. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. The ubiquitous access of these online devices no doubt has democratizing effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more fully engaged in the political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages.

People can now consume media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content. A person can now communicate to anywhere from any place at any time. Again, using social media is less expensive than the outrageous political advertisements on the older media. The new media is flexible, accessible and affordable. They promote the democratization of media, alter the meaning of geographic distance, and allow for an increase in the volume and speed of communication. They are portable due to the mobile nature; they are interactive and open to all.

The previous two years in Ethiopia has experimented the use of this technology for political and social mobilization. Regardless of the prospects in the use of Social Media's political movements, many challenges and lapses were observed in the use of Social Media. Therefore this study concentrates on investigating the prospects and challenges of social Medias use for political mobilization in Ethiopia.

## 2. Statements of the Problem

The use of social media as a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned. In the last two years, activists use social Media in mobilizing the people to protest against the government, for the rise of inter-ethnic conflicts. Even if social media brought many positive outcomes and prospects, challenges in the uses of social media are observed.

The researchers believe that if a study of this nature is left, the problems observed in the previous year's political chaos in Ethiopia result violence, bloodbaths, unwanted destruction of property and creation of unnecessary tensions and panics in the country. Therefore this research aims at investigating the prospects and challenges of social Media's usage for political mobilization in Ethiopia and possible solutions in alleviating the problem.

## 3. Objectives

### 3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to assess the challenges and prospects of social media for political mobilization in Ethiopia.

### 3.2. Specific Objective

Specifically, the study aimed to:

- i. Determine the role that social media has in the political mobilization process.
- ii. Discover the problems in the use of social media for political mobilization in Ethiopia?
- iii. To identify the popular social media platform used for political awareness in Ethiopia.

## 4. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions.

- i. What role did social media play in the political mobilization?
- ii. What are the problems in the use of social media for political participation in Ethiopia?
- iii. What are the popular social media platforms used for political awareness?

## 5. Materials and Methods

### 5.1. Research Design

Survey method helps to collect data from each sample. According to Kraemer Survey research quantitatively is very important to describe certain aspects of a given population. These aspects typically include the examination of the relationship between variables. Second, survey data needed for research, therefore, are relatively gathered from people.

Finally, the research results of the survey can be returned to the general Population from which a selected portion of the population uses. Survey method is selected as it is well planned. It can be generalized and can be statistically analyzed. To meet the requirement of the study Two-way stratification sampling was adopted for data collection from the target population. The scope of the study comes under the selected universities of southern nations, nationalities region of Ethiopia.

### 5.2. Sampling Technique

Sampling works on the premise that a given population is too large for any researcher to realistically observe all the elements therein [6]. Hence, the selection of samples became necessary. In doing so, we chose the stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Our choice of the two techniques was to reflect all college's students in the university. And at the same time, give elements of each population equal chance of being selected.

### 5.3. Sample Size

To determine the sample size out of the target (total) population of 659, 631 [7] statically formula was used at 92% level of confidence interval and 0.08 degree of variable and 8% level of precision.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad (1)$$

Where n=sample size

N=target population

e=error margin (precision)

Hence the final sample size selected from the total population is:

$$n = 659,631 / 1 + 659,631 (0.1)^2 \quad (2)$$

$$n = 156 \quad (3)$$

### 5.4. Sources and Method of Data Collection

Based on the research problem and objectives, both primary and secondary data sources are used. Multiple data collection strategies is more advantageous than single data collection strategy in research work. There are strengths and weaknesses to any single data collection strategy and using more than one data collection approach give the opportunity to the researcher to combine the strengths and correct some of the deficiencies of any one source of data. More specifically, the methods used to collect the necessary primary data were questionnaire and interview.

### 5.5. Method of Data Analysis

Different methods of data analysis are used depending on the nature of data. Accordingly, the quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive statistics (like percentage and frequency). Moreover, qualitative data collected through interview were used to triangulate the results of quantitative

data. The researcher used SPSS 20 to carry out the statistical analysis.

## 6. Review of Related Literatures

With a handful of exceptions, there is a global trend toward the continued and increased usage of social media. Social media's influence is constantly expanding as more people join online communities every day. Social media platforms are maturing into serious communication channels that facilitate problem-solving in creative and unexpected ways for commercial purposes, educational institutions, government and not-for-profit organizations, and for crisis responders and crisis response efforts [8].

The social media has been used for political mobilization worldwide, for instance in Egypt-Iran, Iraqi, Tunisia, Kenya just to mention but a few countries. However, the Egyptian revolution, it would seem had a large scale mobilization based on social media. In Egypt the government banned reporters from Tahrir Square as it tried to prevent news from spreading [9]. The social media technologies enabled protesters to become citizen journalists [10]. This demonstrates the role of social media in political mobilization.

Communication based on internet communication provide an additional resource for social movement implemented people who do not have resources. This offers a means for mass communication since they have financial challenges. What it shows is that Social Media Networks provide an accessible form of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism as the use of digital media tools to report on events on the ground. [11] These include uploading text and videos directly to the Internet or feeding the information and videos to media outlets. Minute by minute updates happen via the social media and foreigners abroad are kept informed on developments in the country affected. Social media place the tools of documentation and truth-telling into the hands of ordinary citizens. Social Media Networks create linked activists who can contest the narrative crafting and information controlling capabilities of authoritarian regimes [12]. The implication for the role of social media is that it allows for those who are directly involved in exposing themselves to an international audience [13].

For instance, the 2008 U.S. presidential election was the benchmark as the first election to fully grasp the power and reach of the Social Networking Sites to impact voters. The U.S. President, Barack Obama's campaign used Facebook in an exceptional ways to reach out the young voters. It worked, allowing him to win the votes nearly 70 percent of voters that were under 25 years old [14]. Social media is also facilitating a new way by which people are able to search and share information and increasing their awareness [15]. It plays a vital role in converting street movements into large cities of Romania in 2012 [16]. In the same passion during anti-corruption movement 2012, social activist, Anna Hazare used social media to connect people in New Delhi.

## 7. Results and Discussions

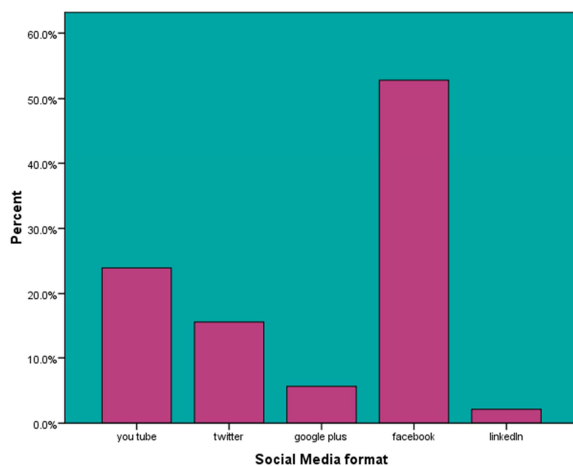
### 7.1. Percentages of Social Media Users

*Table 1. Respondents' usage of social media.*

Social media usage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	142	91.02
NO	14	8.97

Among the respondents, 142 (91.02%) are social media users and 14 (8.97%) didn't use any kind of social media. So this study is based on social media users.

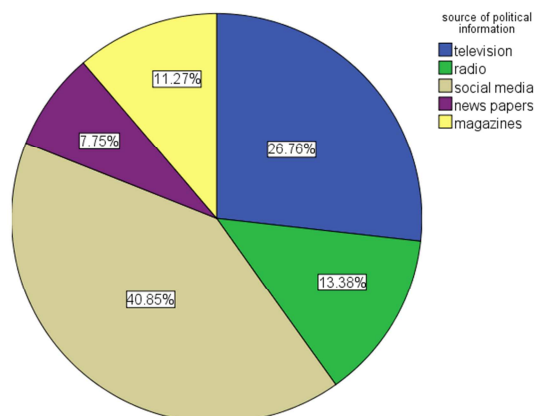
### 7.2. Popular Social Media Format to Consume Political Information



*Figure 1. Popular social media formats to consume political information.*

Figure 1 shows the summary of popular social media formats used by the study area where the majority of the respondents indicated Facebook the most popular social media and accounted for 75 (52.82%). The second popular social media is YouTube which is 34 (23.94%). Twitter which accounts 22 (15.49) ranked third. Responses indicated that Google plus which is only 8 (5.63%) and LinkedIn 3 (2.11%) are less popular social media formats in the study area.

### 7.3. Sources of Political Information



*Figure 2. Respondents' response on sources of political information in Ethiopia.*

Figure 2 shows respondents summary of response about the main source of political information in the study area. According to the data collected from respondents, the main sources of political information in the study area is social media which accounts for 58 (40.85%). Figure 2 also indicates television and radio are the other main sources of information which accounts for 38 (26.76%) and 19 (13.38%) respectively. Newspaper accounts for 16 (11.27%) and magazines which are 11 (7.75%) are the other sources of political news.

### 7.4. The Role of Social Media for Political Mobilization

*Table 2. Respondents view about the role of social media for political mobilization.*

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	131	92.25
No	11	7.74
Total	142	100

For the purpose of this study, respondents were asked to express their view about the role of social media for political mobilization. As shown in the above table the majorities, 131 (92.25%) responded that they believe that social media has a great role for political mobilization. It is the undeniable fact that the use of social media for political activities influences peoples' political efficacy, political knowledge, and political participation. Social media users may discover political activities in social media and in this way intensify their political knowledge, increase their political efficacy, and improve their political participation.

The primary finding of this study is strongly supported by different empirical evidences as discussed below. First, social media is an essential tool for communication. The main role of social media identified by the study is its capacity to swiftly exchange and disseminate information to millions of people inside and outside the affected country.

Second, society can interact at all levels; discuss socioeconomic and political issues affecting them in their daily lives. Third, Social Media Networks also provide an accessible form of citizen journalism. These include uploading text and videos directly to the Internet or feeding the information and videos to media outlets. Minute by minute updates happen via the social media and foreigners abroad are kept informed on developments in the country affected. Therefore, with social media, citizens become journalists themselves. They express their feelings, anger and even chat the way forward. Information is forwarded to news agencies, and the international community is kept informed on developments. Fourth, social media place the tools of documentation and truth-telling into the hands of ordinary citizens. He also adds that Social Media Networks create linked activists who can contest the narrative crafting and information controlling capabilities of authoritarian regimes.

### 7.5. Prospects of Social Media

Table 3. Potentials of social media.

prospects	Alternatives										Total	
	SDA		DA		UN		A		SA			
	NO.	%	No.	%	NO.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Accessibility	9	6.33	17	11.97	12	8.45	65	45.77	40	28.16	142	100
Empower citizens	0	0	12	8.45	16	11.26	62	43.66	52	36.61	142	100
Speedy communication	24	16.9	18	12.67	0	0	58	40.84	42	29.57	142	100
Create open society	0	0	17	11.97	24	16.9	73	51.40	28	19.71	142	100

Table 3 indicates the summary of the data collected from respondents about the prospects of social media. The major prospect identified from respondents about social media is its role to empower citizens followed by its accessibility.

It is true that social media is relatively new, and we're just starting to see its impact on different aspects of society. It is obvious that many political changes come about due to social media. There are now attempts for internet voting in different countries, which could lead to more people participating in elections. This could make social media even more influential, as people could literally vote moments after reading the latest comments or links they found on different social media formats.

It is also expected that social media advancements will also change politics. Polling techniques on social media will become more common and, hopefully, more accurate. More virtual political rallies and town halls will take place. As social media becomes ever more popular, its impact on politics will only increase over time. It will be interesting to observe how this plays out.

### 7.6. Challenges of Social Media in Political Mobilization

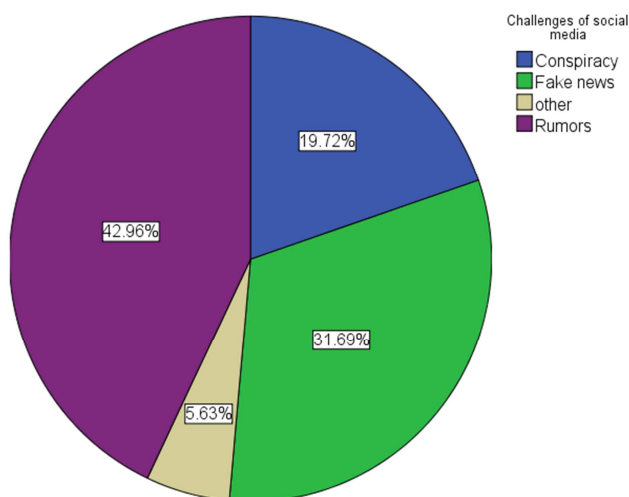


Figure 3. Respondent's response to Challenges of social media.

The survey data revealed that the main challenges of social media for political mobilization in Ethiopia are rumors (42.96%), the spread of fake news (31.69%) and conspiracies (19.72%).

Currently, Political mobilizations are influenced by every story, whether true or not, that gets spread around social

media. Nowadays it's getting more and more difficult to identify real or actual news from fake news around social media which makes this distinction especially confusing. The constant stream of memes, links, and rumors about political leaders and candidates is a mixture of truth, lies, satire and speculation. It is also the undeniable fact that in Ethiopia there are now quite some fake or sarcastic "news" sites that often post stories that sound authentic. Some fake news sites simply exist to post click bait stories or to troll readers who don't do their own research. Some other challenges of social media identified by this study are limited connection speed, cost, and its inaccessibility to rural areas.

## 8. Conclusion

Findings from the study have shown that the main sources of political information is social media. It also revealed that Facebook is the most popular social media format followed by YouTube and Twitter.

Regarding with its role, social media has a great importance for political mobilization. Social media users may discover political activities in social media and in this way intensify their political knowledge, increase their political efficacy, and improve their political participation.

As the challenges of social media in Ethiopia there are now quite some fake or sarcastic "news" sites that often post stories that sound authentic. Some fake news sites simply exist to post click bait stories or to troll readers who don't do their own research. Some other challenges of social media identified by this study are limited connection speed, cost, and its inaccessibility to rural areas.

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