Chapter 18
Failure of Governance, State Legitimacy, and Hate Speech in Ethiopia:
Use of Social Media Post 2018

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ABSTRACT

Despite social media has supplied a great role in bringing the current political landscape of Ethiopia, a couple of months after PM Dr. Abiy took hold of power, hate speech on social media has become common. This has made the government police social media by drafting laws on hate speech since April 2019. This study has the objective of exploring the interplay between spoil political system, government legitimacy and hate speech on social media. This study adopted qualitative research approach. Data has been gathered data from social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. Different pages and informal discussions were important tools of data collection. From the findings, the author concludes with the argument that laws are not effective to end hate speech, but can be done by bringing legitimate government, good governance, equality, and justice to the country.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every change in technology entails a number of changes in the ways it can be used. With the advent of social media, which belongs to a collective category of Web 2.0, the so far irrefutable position of the traditional media has been compromised (Maksymowicz, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Networking is the key feature of social media, which makes it a powerful tool for sharing and disseminating information online. Schieb and Preuss (2016) also stated that internet enables boundless, rather inexpensive, and ubiquitous communication, providing individuals with immediate information, enabling to share opinions, and bringing people together.

Social media has not only become a fertile soil for the spread of hateful ideas but also motivates real-life action. Social media as indicated in Maksymowicz (2014) is a natural consequence of the natural desire of people to instantly communicate and share information and knowledge which is not possible in the traditional media.

As stated in Joseph (2012), people share information on social networking sites, of which Facebook and Twitter are among the most popular. These sites are very versatile, enabling the sharing of text, pictures, videos, audio files, and applications. Facebook enables users to create a profile page and share information with an unlimited number of virtual "friends." These, "friends" are usually known to the user in real life, but this connection is not essential. However, along with the good it did, there is also the notice of various problematic issues such as an increase in websites, communities, postings, comments, pictures and videos devoted to hateful speech and other antisocial activities (Benesch, 2014; Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012; Citron & Norton, 2011).

Hate speech on social media is damaging not just to the wellbeing of users, but also to an open, egalitarian society (Spencer-Smith, 2018). As stated in Spencer-Smith (2018), UK law does not hold social media companies liable for abusive messages sent by users for the reason that internet companies are service providers offering communications platforms and are not publishers with an editorial responsibility. However, Spencer-Smith (2018) further stated that in cases of repeated or extreme abuse, social media providers typically suspend or close user accounts. However, it is important to note that removal decisions are based on company policy and not on the national law any country.

The massive influence of social media, as well as the changing, dynamic nature of its impact on both public and private life, means the governments of any country would benefit from its approach to social media providers and updating governance.

1.1. The Problem Statement

Social media have contributed a lot to mobilize the public, demise the Tigrary People Liberation Front (TPLF) domination, and bringing 'the new political landscape' in Ethiopia. While the new political change was accepted by the majority, it was less well-received by TPLF officials, supporters and activists, and some Oromo elites. The TPLF leaders who were in power began to criticize the political change because they lost power. Since the change that came was particularly welcomed and supported by the Amhara people, some Oromo scholars and activists criticized the change, criticizing the move as a planned change to repeat the unitary government that the country had. This is particularly due to political distrust between the Amhara and Oromo officials, which is purposively created by TPLF. TPLF has fabricated the history since early 1900s that makes the Amhara people as 'oppressor' and all other ethics as 'oppressed' till the downfall of Dergue regime in 1991.

The change that was popular with the public and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed gradually lost public support and began to create suspicion. State banks were looted; citizens were evacuated, killed; churches burned and national parks burned. But to stop this act or to give justice, the government chose to be calm and quiet. During this time, a campaign of criticism against the new political change and Prime Minister Abiy was echoed by social media. The social media that campaigned "*May our king reign a thousand years*" began to criticize the political change and the Prime Minister at large. Such criticism has created another political move; some Oromo activists and politicians turned the issue into ethnic politics; claiming that the administration and the Prime minister is criticized simply because the prime minister belongs to the Oromo Ethnic group. This irrational claim has offended nationalist individuals

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