

Preferences, Choice and Constrains of Social Media Platforms in Ethiopia**Dr. Sukanta Sarkar**

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Abstract

The paper discussed preferences, choice and constrains of social media platforms in Ethiopia. It has found that social media has changed the way of communication of Africans. People now create, share, and update their ideas among the groups. Social media has positive and negative effects on society. Social media connects people living in separate areas, allows customers to create and communicate individually, makes communication fast and efficient, facilitates online learning and related studies. Social media promotes democratic freedom and mass political participation. In an increasingly digital age, young people in Ethiopia are more using social media such as Instagram, Facebook and You Tube. But the rise in online gaming has raised concerns about its impact on overall health. Young people can collaborate with professionals in their fields of interest, receive training and find career opportunities. Majority of social media users are between 25-35 years. Number of male social media user are more than the female. Platforms such as LinkedIn allow them to showcase their skills and build an online presence, opening the door to future success. Limited internet availability and shut down of internet accessibility are the main challenges before the social media users. Hackling of social media account of user is another challenge. Therefore, government should implement transparent policies for mitigating such challenges and smooth operations of social media in the nation.

Keywords: Facebook, LinkedIn, Messenger, social network and Social media.

Introduction

Media refers variety of technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among users. Social media is a technology that allows ideas and information, including text and images, to be shared through virtual networks and communities. It has been praised for helping people build communities, but has also been accused of promoting misinformation and hate speech. Advertising is a useful tool for expanding business in multiple fronts (Sileshie, 2014). Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat. Are the leading social media platform globally. Social media are generally divided into six categories: social networking, social bookmarking, social news, media sharing, Weibo, and online forums. Companies use it to find and engage with customers, increase sales through advertising and promotions, identify customer

trends, provide customer service or support, and sometimes hide user data. Advertising helps stimulate competition where it can make itself visible and improve its image and reputation to gain international exposure (Kassegn & Sahil 2024)

Social media plays a role in our lives affecting all aspects of communication, internet, media, entertainment, and business. Social media is more than just managing relationships and staying connected. They also need it to make new connections, learn new skills and grow their networks. In today's fast-paced world, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have become important communication tools. Social media allows brands to promote their products or services, share important information and interact with consumers instantly (Zorofi et. al., 2011). The evolution of social media from a simple

messaging system to a social network reflects its increasing importance in today's culture. The proliferation of smartphones has increased the popularity and functionality of social media. While apps like Instagram and Snapchat have demonstrated the potential of mobile and video chat, Twitter has introduced a new model of events that are now broadcasted to the masses (Lisanu, 2020).

Ethiopia is situated in the Horn of Africa region of East Africa. Addis Ababa is capital and also the largest city that located near the East African Rift Valley. Most of Ethiopia is located in the eastern part of the African continent, the Horn of Africa. The main climate type is tropical monsoon, with great variations due to topography. Ethiopia's population is diverse and includes more than 80 different ethnic groups, the four largest being the Oromo, Amhara, Somali, and Tigrayan. With Africa's second largest population of 115 million, Ethiopia is on a major path towards democratic transition (Vekiri & Chronaki, 2008).

Objectives

The objectives of this paper is to study the preferences, choice and constrains of social media platforms in Ethiopia.

Methods and Materials

The design of this study was defined and used as qualitative. Secondary data was used in this research. Secondary data is collected by international publications, research articles, published articles, online papers etc. A range of qualitative analysis methods, including descriptive, analytical content and textual analysis, were used to uncover the full spectrum of approaches to social media and its status and constrains in specific.

Results and Discussion

The number of social media users in Africa is increasing and is nearly 384 million in 2022. As of February 2022, approximately 56 percent of the population in North Africa uses social media, compared to 45 percent in Southern Africa. Very less percentage of people in countries of Central Africa region are using social media. It is only eight percent. There are more followers of WhatsApp in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. Egyptian and Moroccan are more prefer Facebook. Facebook is Africa's leading social media platform. Since January 2021, Facebook's traffic generation has increased by 50 percent. As of May 2022, YouTube and Twitter follow closely behind with approximately 9.4 percent and 3.8 percent market share respectively. As internet usage increases in Africa, so does the penetration of social networks. However, despite its rapid development, the continent has less internet connectivity than other parts of the world.

According to Statista, the number of social media users in Africa is growing. Facebook is the undisputed king of social media in Africa, with 170 million users. The platform is ubiquitous and spans culture and language, making it a bridge that connects people from different backgrounds. The survey found that Facebook leads in user engagement, with 82 percent of respondents using the platform. TikTok follows closely behind with 60 percent active users, an indication of its growing presence. Instagram caught the attention of 54 percent of respondents, emphasising its position as the preferred platform for sharing visual content. Twitter has 49 percent active users, while LinkedIn is building on its collaboration power with 28 percent engagement.

Table 1: Social Media Status in Africa, Aug 2023 - Aug 2024

Year	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	Twitter	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Reddit	Tumblr	VKontakt	Others
2023-08	81.14	6.57	4.94	4.67	2.24	0.23	0.10	0.09	0.01	0.00
2023-09	78.57	6.12	6.21	6.07	2.56	0.19	0.10	0.07	0.09	0.00

2023-10	75.26	6.44	7.05	7.43	3.30	0.32	0.10	0.09	0.01	0.00
2023-11	72.35	8.35	7.92	7.20	3.55	0.40	0.15	0.07	0.01	0.00
2023-12	74.22	8.36	6.21	7.44	3.10	0.41	0.16	0.08	0.01	0.00
2024-01	70.84	11.37	6.45	7.52	3.08	0.50	0.15	0.08	0.01	0.00
2024-02	81.37	6.02	5.44	4.74	1.79	0.49	0.10	0.05	0.01	0.00
2024-03	67.81	10.15	10.68	6.94	3.27	0.72	0.22	0.16	0.02	0.02
2024-04	68.92	8.79	11.79	5.68	3.61	0.76	0.27	0.14	0.02	0.02
2024-05	73.53	7.68	9.70	4.86	3.14	0.66	0.29	0.11	0.01	0.01
2024-06	82.33	5.65	6.31	3.16	1.91	0.39	0.18	0.05	0.01	0.00
2024-07	74.23	9.46	7.90	4.54	2.88	0.59	0.32	0.05	0.02	0.01
2024-08	68.99	11.13	9.52	5.53	3.39	0.87	0.49	0.04	0.03	0.01

Source: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/africa>, Note: information in percentage (%)

Table 1 discussed status of social media platforms in Africa. It has found that Facebook is the most popular social media in Africa, followed by YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. Social media platforms have become a necessity for tourists. As of January 2024, the population of Ethiopia is 128.1 million. Ethiopian users increased by 616,000 in January, 2024. Ethiopia presents an interesting dilemma when it comes to new communications. It shows that dissidents and outsiders who use social media and the internet have a significant impact on politics. It plays an important role in building strong communities and ensuring that groups operate effectively. Generally speaking, independent media improves people's social and economic life's by providing good information, enabling people to make informed decisions in their daily life's.

New government in Ethiopia which runs the country since 2018 has been changed many

existing laws relating information (e.g. Anti-Corruption Law and Freedom of Information Law) which directly effects the accessibility of data and material. Internet connectivity has been re-established in many interior regions. Number of websites, blogs, and foreign radio and TV broadcasts are increased. Digital media user in the country is increasing continuously although the nation has lower rates of internet penetration. Ethio-telecom is the only internet provider in the country. Government is planning to allow new internet provider in the country for increasing affordability and accessibility of internet. Spread of misinformation, fake news, and hate speech through social media is a challenge before the government. Such incidences increase during revolt, violence, riot and economic crisis. Therefore, government authority often shut down such social media platforms during such situations. Authority also monitoring or control the contents in such platforms.

Table 2: Total number of active social media users in Ethiopia, 2014-2024

Year	Number of Users	Year	Number of Users
2014	1.56	2020	6.20
2015	2.20	2021	6.70
2016	3.80	2022	6.35
2017	3.30	2023	6.40
2018	3.80	2024	7.04
2019	6.10		

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1307184/number-of-social-media-users-ethiopia/>, Note: Number of users in millions

Table 2 represented total number of active social media users in Ethiopia. It has found that number of active social media users are increasing continuously. It was 1.56 million in 2014, 6.1 million in 2019 and finally 7.04 million in 2024. Communication between people was not easy before the availability of social media platforms. Direct communication among people or postal service was the main way for communication among people. But situation was changed when internet service is available among people. Through the social media platforms people now commutates with people of multiple regions. It has saves time

and money of the people. It also gives entertainment and relaxation to users. Social media is used by individuals and groups to create, share, and/or exchange user content. It is considered unique to Ethiopia's political transition because it helps promote reform measures, mobilise people against the government, expose illegal activities, and quickly inform the public. It causes or at least exacerbates much of the conflict and violence in Ethiopia. Misinformation based on society, rumours, sentiments, and misinformation threatens unity of the nation

Table 3: Social Media Status Ethiopia, Aug 2023 - Aug 2024.

Year	Facebo ok	YouTu be	Pintere st	Twitt er	Instagra m	Linkd In	Redd it	Tumb lr	VKontak te	new s.	Othe rs
2023-08	55.61	14.47	8.70	11.73	7.67	1.01	0.42	0.27	0.10	0.00	0.02
2023-09	56.47	13.55	8.67	11.13	8.47	1.08	0.48	0.11	0.02	0.00	0.02
2023-10	51.60	12.56	12.3	12.11	9.26	1.46	0.57	0.10	0.02	0.01	0.02
2023-11	50.91	13.80	13.93	9.52	8.72	1.76	1.05	0.18	0.03	0.01	0.08
2023-12	53.58	13.51	14.38	8.56	6.44	2.50	0.86	0.16	0.01	0.00	0.00
2024-01	55.50	13.85	11.99	7.61	6.95	3.07	0.69	0.23	0.03	0.01	0.07
2024-02	91.16	2.81	1.91	1.79	1.73	0.38	0.15	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.00
2024-03	86.74	4.82	3.06	2.22	2.26	0.61	0.19	0.08	0.01	0.00	0.01
2024-04	53.06	18.13	11.82	7.14	6.67	1.75	1.05	0.28	0.08	0.01	0.01
2024-05	53.1	19.34	10.57	7.17	6.62	2.02	0.81	0.25	0.04	0.08	0.00
2024-06	49.11	19.54	10.94	7.80	8.26	2.70	1.40	0.19	0.03	0.03	0.00

2024-07	62.05	13.90	7.84	7.65	5.55	2.00	0.87	0.06	0.06	0.02	0.01
2024-08	52.85	22.69	7.54	5.57	6.92	2.68	1.45	0.05	0.20	0.05	0.00

Source: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/ethiopia>, Note: information in percentage (%)

Table 3 portrayed status of social media in Ethiopia. It has found that Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter and Instagram are popular social media platforms in Ethiopia. But human rights groups, including Amnesty International, said the ban social media violated freedom of expression and Ethiopia's constitution, laws and international treaties. The restrictions create problems for people who use social media to spread news or promote their businesses. While they can use virtual private networks to bypass the restrictions, some say it limits their ability to reach audiences in Ethiopia. Some Ethiopian NGOs and civil

society organizations, including the Institute for the Promotion of Law and Justice, have raised concerns about impact of the restrictions on democratic expression. The 2020 armed conflict in Ethiopia is the latest example of the interaction of media that fuel ethnic conflict. Social media is being used as a weapon and plays a major role in conflicts. Images of rape and mass shootings are being used to create unity and violence against each other. Many times social media have been accused of fuelling racism in the country and there is still a lot of hate online.

Table 4: Distribution of Instagram users in Ethiopia, 2022

Year	Number of User (%)	Year	Number of User (%)
13-17 Years	7.7	45-54 Years	2.5
18-24 Years	32.0	55-64 Years	0.8
25-34 Years	42.8	65 Years and Above	1.4
35-44 Years	12.9		

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1313541/distribution-of-instagram-users-in-ethiopia-by-age/>, Note: Number of Users are in percentage (%).

Table 4 discussed the distribution of instagram users in Ethiopia. It has found that majority of Instagram users age lies between 18-34 years. So, Instagram is more popular among the young people. As of August 2024, there are 1,105,800 Instagram users in Ethiopia. Majority of users are male. Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social networking

service owned by Meta Platforms. It allows users to upload media, which can be edited using filters, organised by tags, and associated with locations through geotagging. Posts can be published publicly or with prior approval. As of December 2016, posts can be saved to a private area of the app.

Table 5: Distribution of Facebook users by Age in Ethiopia, May 2022

Year	Number of User (%)		Year	Number of User (%)	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
13-17 Years	1.4	1.2	45-54 Years	2.9	1.0
18-24 Years	13.1	8.4	55-64 Years	1.0	0.3
25-34 Years	29.8	15.5	65 Years and Above	1.9	1.4
35-44 Years	15.5	6.6			

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1313524/distribution-of-facebook-users-in-ethiopia-by-age/>, Note: Number of Users are in percentage (%).

Table 5 discussed the distribution of Facebook users by age in Ethiopia. It has found that Facebook is popular among the user of age group 18-44 years. Majority of users are male. Facebook is Africa's leading social media

platform for job sharing. Facebook is a social media and networking service owned by American technology group Meta. It was founded in 2004. According to metadata, Facebook users in Ethiopia is increasing

continuously. In February 2023, due to a crisis with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian government blocked social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, TikTok,

and YouTube for five months. This restriction was lifted in July 2023, allowing the public to access the platform again.

Table 6: Distribution of Messenger users by Age in Ethiopia, May 2022

Year	Number of User (%)		Year	Number of User (%)	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
13-17 Years	1.2	0.9	45-54 Years	2.9	1.0
18-24 Years	12.4	7.8	55-64 Years	1.0	0.3
25-34 Years	30.6	15.3	65 Years and Above	1.9	1.5
35-44 Years	16.6	6.7			

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1313545/distribution-of-messenger-users-in-ethiopia-by-age-and-gender/>, Note: Number of Users are in percentage (%).

Table 6 depicted distribution of messenger users by age in Ethiopia. It has found that messenger is more popular among the age group of 25-34 years. The majority of them are men. Messenger is a US-based instant messaging service developed by Meta Platforms. It is used to send messages and exchange images, videos, stickers, audio, and documents, as well as interact with other users' messages and interact with bots. The service also supports voice and video calling. The standalone app supports multiple accounts, end-to-end encrypted chat.

Popularity of Telegram is increasing in Ethiopia. Telegram is using among the students for sharing study materials and other information's. Telegram is a must-have app for businesses in Ethiopia and the platform is on the rise. Internet connectivity in Ethiopia is

very low, with only 20 percent internet coverage in Ethiopia and only 15 percent of its population of over 120 million. Despite having over 55 million people with mobile connectivity, only 6.5 million will use social media in 2022. There is also only one state-owned telephone service provider, Ethiopian Telecom, and the government has a monopoly on internet services. Ethiopia restricts access to the internet and frequently shuts down social media. Ethiopia's digital financial services are still in their infancy, and e-commerce development still has a long way to go. In general, many Ethiopians believe that Telegram makes it easy to store and share large files like videos, photos, documents, attachments, and audiobooks, even when internet connectivity is poor.

Conclusion

Social media is popular among the young generation in 21st century. The fact that the majority of the population uses social media provides businesses with a great way to reach their target audience. Social media has enabled Africans to actively participate in the governance of civil society. The growth of social media in Ethiopia is partly due to the increase in internet usage, as many Ethiopians have an online presence. Using social media as a brand helps to provide credibility and context to users. More and more Ethiopians are expressing their opinions through WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. But those who have

access to social media, especially urban youth, are turning to social media to criticize the government. As mobile internet coverage expands and smartphone prices fall, people are embracing social media.

Facebook, Instagram, You Tube and telegram are the popular social media in Ethiopia. The incidences of fake news in social media is the challenge before the government. While social media shutdowns often occur during protests, elections and other political debates, most governments have permitted the use of social media considering the security issues. The government also uses social media to exert pressure groups operating offline as well as

against the government. Low coverage of internet facilities, low speed, government monitoring, and cost of internet services are

the basic constraints before the user of social media in Ethiopia.

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