

# **Mekelle University**



**College of Social Sciences and Languages  
Department of Journalism and Communication**

**The Influence of Facebook Activists in the Context of the Tigray Political  
Crisis**

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**June, 2025  
Mekelle, Ethiopia**

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**Department of Journalism and Communication**

## **The Influence of Facebook Activists in the Context of the Tigray Political Crisis**

**A Thesis submitted to the College of Social Science and Languages  
Department of Journalism and Communication, Post Graduate Program, in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Media and Communication**

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**Thesis Approval Sheet**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled:

**“The Influence of Facebook Activists in the Context of the Tigray Political Crisis”**

Submitted by Solomon Asmelash to the Department of Journalism and Communication, College of Social Sciences and Languages, Mekele University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Communication studies, has been examined and approved by the thesis committee.

We hereby certify that this thesis meets the standards and requirements of Mekele University for the award of the aforementioned degree.

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**Declaration**

I, Solomon Asmelash Nigus hereby declare that this thesis entitled:

**“The Influence of Facebook Activists in the Context of the Tigray Political Crisis”** is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts in Media and Communication at Mekele University**, and it complies with the regulations of the university in terms of plagiarism and academic honesty.

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the role of social media, particularly Facebook, as a platform for political activism in the context of the Tigray political crisis. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative content analysis of Facebook posts with qualitative in-depth interviews to examine how activists use the platform to mobilize support, influence public perception, and shape political narratives. The quantitative data highlight patterns of engagement, frequency of posts, and audience interaction, while the qualitative findings provide deeper insights into the intentions, strategies, and experiences of Facebook activists. The study reveals that Facebook has been a critical tool for both pro-Getachew and pro-Debrezion led TPLF factions' activists in disseminating political messages, reinforcing or contesting dominant narratives, and fostering political mobilization. However, it also uncovers potential negative consequences, including the spread of dis/misinformation and increased political polarization. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of digital activism in conflict-affected regions and offer implications for the ethical use of social media in political discourse.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

COHA-Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

TPLF-Tigray People's Liberation Front

TDA-Tigray Defense Force

NGO-Non Governmental Organization

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have dramatically reshaped the organization and execution of political activism and social movements. These platforms enable users to create content, connect across geographical and political boundaries, and mobilize more rapidly than ever before (Castells, 2012). As a result, in politically charged environments, social media has become both a tool for grassroots activism and a means for state-led information campaigns (Tufekci, 2017).

The role of social media in political activism has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of global movements such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and various electoral campaigns. Studies by scholars like Howard and Hussain (2013) and Tufekci (2017) have underscored the transformative power of social media platforms in mobilizing political movements and facilitating the spread of information.

However, the bulk of these studies have concentrated on more global platforms like Twitter (Tufekci, 2017). Existing research predominantly focuses on the use of multiple social media platforms (e.g., twitter, Instagram, YouTube) in collective political activism, often treating these platforms as homogenous tools of engagement (Theocharis et al., 2015; Gerbaudo, 2018). However, Facebook, with its unique algorithms, community-building tools, and user demographics, has not been thoroughly examined as a standalone platform, especially in contexts like Ethiopia's ongoing conflict. Scholars such as Aday et al. (2010) have noted the importance of media access in conflict zones but have primarily focused on mainstream media and internet access, with minimal focus on how specific social media platforms, such as Facebook, are utilized by activists in these regions.

During the Arab Spring, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were critical in mobilizing activists, organizing protests, and spreading information. Howard and Hussain (2013) argue that social media served as an "accelerant" for collective action, facilitating the rapid dissemination of information and bringing together diverse groups of people united

against authoritarian rule. In Egypt, for example, the Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Said,” dedicated to a young Egyptian man who died in police custody, became a focal point for mobilizing anti-regime sentiment and organizing mass protests (Ghonim, 2012). This case illustrates how a single social media page can help foster collective identity and solidarity among individuals with shared grievances, providing activists with a virtual space for organization and dialogue.

The networked nature of social media has enabled activists to bypass traditional state-controlled media and directly reach both local and international audiences, facilitating real-time mobilization, awareness, and advocacy (Shirky, 2011). However, this apparent freedom is still constrained by alternative forms of control, as platforms like Facebook and Twitter are governed by corporate algorithms and content moderation policies that significantly influence visibility and engagement (Gillespie, 2018). Additionally, governments may exploit these platforms for surveillance, censorship, or narrative manipulation, particularly in politically sensitive contexts (Tufekci, 2017). Digital inequalities and algorithmic biases also contribute to the selective amplification or suppression of voices, revealing that while social media decentralizes communication, it remains embedded in complex and contested power dynamics.

The Arab Spring underscored the power of social media platforms like Facebook to raise awareness about state abuses and human rights violations. Activists used Facebook to document and share real-time images, videos, and personal testimonies of police brutality, unlawful detentions, and other forms of repression. Tufekci (2017) notes that by providing visual evidence of government abuses, activists could counter official narratives and expose the realities of state oppression to the world. This public documentation made it difficult for governments to deny abuses and helped attract international media coverage, which in turn increased global support for the protesters.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, social media has played an increasingly pivotal role in political activism, providing platforms for marginalized voices and movements, particularly in regions with restricted access to traditional media. Platforms like Facebook have become critical in mobilizing political movements, facilitating the spread of information, and connecting local movements with global audiences (Tufekci, 2017).

However, alongside these benefits, the same platforms also serve as channels for misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, which can distort public understanding, fuel polarization, and undermine the credibility of legitimate activism (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). While Facebook enables activists to bypass traditional state-controlled media and engage audiences directly, its algorithmic systems often amplify sensational or misleading content, making it difficult to distinguish accurate information from harmful narratives. This dual nature highlights both the empowering and destabilizing roles social media platforms play in contemporary political activism.

While much of the existing literature has focused on the role of social media in high-profile global movements such as the Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain, 2013) and Black Lives Matter (Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020), there is limited research on how Facebook used as a tool for political activism in localized and ongoing conflicts.

The Tigray political movement, rooted in the region's struggle for autonomy and influenced by the broader Ethiopian political crisis, has seen a surge in the use of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, to disseminate information, mobilize support, and counter state-controlled narratives (Mengiste, 2020). However, there is little empirical evidence on how Facebook, with its specific functionalities, has shaped the political activism in this context. Activists in the Tigray movement have leveraged Facebook's tools, such as groups, pages, and live streaming, to build networks, share updates, and rally international support. These efforts are particularly important in a region where traditional media is either state-controlled or heavily censored (Gagliardone, 2019).

Despite Facebook's significant role in modern activism, there is a lack of focused research on how individual Facebook activists contribute to political movements in post-war like Tigray.

Most studies on social media activism examine collective mobilizations, leaving the influence of individual digital activists understudied (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Yet, individual activists on Facebook, who often emerge as influential voices, play a crucial role in shaping political discourse, organizing protests, and engaging with the international diasporas, which is critical to amplifying the Tigray conflict. These individuals utilize the platform not only to inform and mobilize local populations but also to engage the international community, a factor that is underexplored in the literature on digital activism in conflict regions (Gagliardone, 2016).

Moreover, while scholars like Gagliardone (2019) have addressed the role of digital media in Ethiopia's political landscape, their research tends to focus broadly on the use of the internet or digital tools without specifically analyzing Facebook as a unique platform for activism. Given Facebook's algorithms, its ability to foster group formation, and its role in content dissemination, it warrants deeper investigation to understand its distinct influence on the Tigray political movement.

The problem is that despite the growing prominence of Facebook activists in the Tigray political movement, there remains a lack of scholarly understanding of how these activists utilize the platform to shape political discourse, mobilize community, and challenge politicians' narratives. This gap in the literature limits the broader understanding of social media's role in post-war-driven political activism, particularly in regions where traditional media is either inaccessible or heavily controlled by the ruling party.

Thus, this study seeks to examine how social media particularly, Facebook is used to shape political discourse, mobilize community, and challenge politicians' narratives in Tigray.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to explore and analyze the role of social media particularly Facebook as a platform for political activism, and to assess the influence of Facebook activists in shaping the Tigray political crisis.

### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

- ✓ To examine the ways in which Facebook is used by activists to mobilize support and disseminate misinformation disinformation and malinformation about the Tigray political crisis.
- ✓ To analyze the impact of Facebook activism on the people of Tigray's perceptions and responses to the crisis.
- ✓ To investigate the role of Facebook in countering or reinforcing the narratives of Tigrayan politicians after the COHA.
- ✓ To examine the potential consequences of Facebook use during the Tigray political crisis.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Facebook activists utilize the platform to mobilize support and disseminate misinformation disinformation and malinformation about the Tigray political crisis?
2. What impact does Facebook activism have on the Tigrayan people's perceptions and responses to the political crisis?
3. In what ways does Facebook activism challenge or reinforce Tigrayan politicians' narratives following the COHA?
4. What are the potential consequences of Facebook use during the Tigray political crisis?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it offers a timely and critical analysis of the role Facebook activists play in shaping political discourse, public perception, and mobilization within the context of the Tigray political crisis. In an era where digital platforms are increasingly central to political communication, understanding their influence is essential for multiple stakeholders.

Policymakers and government actors can benefit from this research by gaining deeper insights into how social media activism influences public opinion, challenges official narratives, and mobilizes political participation. Such understanding can guide the development of more inclusive and responsive political strategies, as well as inform digital governance policies.

Civil society organizations and human rights groups may utilize the findings to strengthen digital advocacy efforts and design more effective civic engagement campaigns. The study highlights both the opportunities and risks of digital activism, thereby helping these organizations promote responsible online participation and counter harmful content such as misinformation and hate speech.

Facebook activists themselves are primary beneficiaries, as the study provides reflection on their practices, impact, and the ethical dimensions of their activism. It encourages self-regulation, critical engagement, and a more balanced approach that prioritizes both advocacy and truth.

The academic community also benefits, as this research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital political activism, especially in conflict-affected and authoritarian contexts. It offers a localized and empirical perspective from the Tigray region, filling a gap in studies that often focus on Western experiences of social media activism.

Finally, the general public, particularly the people of Tigray, stand to gain from a clearer understanding of how Facebook activism has influenced their political consciousness, community polarization, and collective responses to the crisis. By raising awareness of the power and pitfalls of social media, the study promotes more informed and critical media consumption among citizens.

It offers insights into how Facebook shaped political narratives, mobilized communities, and influenced public discourse where traditional media was limited. By analyzing the methods and impact of Facebook activists, the research bridges a gap in understanding African digital activism, highlights both the empowering and polarizing effects of online platforms, and provides practical guidance for leveraging social media in grassroots mobilization, political participation, and peace building efforts in fragile contexts.

By exploring these dimensions, the research was not only advancing theoretical discussions on digital activism but also offered practical insights into the evolving role of social media in modern political movements.

## **1.6. Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on examining the role of Facebook as a platform for political activism within the context of the Tigray political movement. It specifically explores how Facebook is utilized to shape public opinion, mobilize supporters, and frame narratives related to the political struggle in the region. The temporal scope spans from October 23, 2015 E.C. to the resignation of President Getachew Reda, a period marked by significant political developments within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the region.

Geographically, the study concentrates on the Tigray region, with extended analysis of the national and international dimensions, particularly the involvement of the Tigrayan Diaspora. Key Facebook activists, as well as politically active citizens, were examined.

The research employed content analysis of Facebook posts to identify patterns in engagement, narrative framing, and mobilization strategies. Additionally, it addressed challenges such as misinformation and disinformation, online harassment, and the limitations of digital activism in achieving tangible political outcomes.

## **1.7. Limitations of the Study**

While this study provided valuable insights into the role of Facebook activism in the context of the Tigray political crisis, it was subject to several limitations.

Firstly, the study was limited by access to reliable and up-to-date data due to the sensitivity of the political situation and the restrictions on freedom of expression in conflict-affected areas. Some participants were hesitant to speak freely, which may have influenced the depth and openness of interview responses.

Secondly, the research focused exclusively on Facebook, excluding other influential social media platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the broader landscape of digital political activism related to the Tigray crisis.

Thirdly, the study was primarily qualitative and relied on purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While the selected participants were relevant and informative, the insights gathered may not capture the full diversity of views within the Tigrayan community

or among the Diaspora. Additionally, the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of online political discourse posed challenges in capturing a fixed picture of activist behavior and audience reactions over time. Social media content can be deleted, edited, or restricted, which affected the completeness of content analysis.

### **1.8. Organization of the Study**

This thesis was structured into five chapters. Chapter one introduced the study, presenting the background, research questions, objectives, significance, and key definitions. Chapter Two reviewed related literature and theoretical frameworks relevant to social media activism and the Tigray political crisis. Chapter Three outlined the research methodology, including the design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presented and analyzed the findings in relation to the research questions and literature. Finally, Chapter Five summarized the findings, drew conclusions, and offered recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2. Review of Related Literature**

#### **2.1. Social Media and Political Activism**

##### **Political Activism**

Political activism refers to the intentional efforts of individuals or groups to influence political decisions, policies, or social change through various forms of engagement, including protests, advocacy, campaigning, and digital mobilization (Jordan & Maloney, 2007). It encompasses both formal and informal actions aimed at challenging power structures, promoting justice, or supporting specific political causes. In the digital age, political activism has expanded to online platforms, allowing activists to mobilize support, disseminate information, and coordinate actions more efficiently and across broader audiences (Tufekci, 2017).

The rise of social media platforms has revolutionized the nature of political activism in both democratic and authoritarian states. Social media serves as an alternative platform for political engagement, enabling rapid dissemination of information, misinformation and disinformation mobilization of support, and the creation of digital communities around shared causes (Howard & Hussain, 2013). This development has been particularly impactful in regions where traditional media is tightly controlled by the state, such as Ethiopia, where the Tigray political movement has garnered significant attention both locally and globally.

Facebook, the world's largest social media platform, has been a prominent player in enabling activism. According to Castells (2012), the decentralized nature of social media networks enables activists to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as governments and mainstream media outlets, providing space for the expression of alternative narratives. This capacity for circumventing censorship and state control has been crucial in the context of the Tigray political movement, where Facebook has emerged as a key platform for activists to disseminate information and organize.

#### **2.2. Facebook as a Platform for Political Activism**

Facebook's accessibility, ease of use, and global reach has made it a powerful tool for political mobilization. The platform allows users to create groups, share multimedia content, and engage

in discussions, making it an ideal space for activists seeking to raise awareness and galvanize support (Gerbaudo, 2012). A key feature of Facebook's influence lies in its ability to facilitate rapid communication between activists, which has been demonstrated during various political uprisings around the world, including the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter movement (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Freelon et al., 2018).

In the Ethiopian context, particularly during the Tigray political crisis, Facebook has been used to mobilize both local and diasporas communities. Given Ethiopia's history of media censorship, Facebook has provided a critical platform for citizens to access information not available through traditional state-controlled media channels (Gagliardone, 2019). Tigrayan activists have leveraged Facebook's vast audience to spread awareness about human rights violations and the ongoing humanitarian crisis, often challenging the Ethiopian government's official narratives.

### **2.3. Facebook as a Double-Edged Sword**

Facebook has emerged as a powerful tool for social connection, information sharing, and mobilization. It offers significant potential for positive impacts, including enhancing social cohesion and empowering marginalized voices, but also raises concerns due to its potential to amplify misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, polarization and division (Vaidyanathan, 2018).

#### **Positive Impacts**

On one hand, Facebook serves as a platform for civic engagement and social activism, allowing people to connect across geographic and social boundaries. It has been instrumental in organizing social movements by providing activists with a space to share information, mobilize support, and foster a sense of community (Ellison et al., 2011). For example, Facebook has played a critical role in movements such as the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter, where activists leveraged the platform to share real-time information, document injustices, and organize protests, bypassing traditional media channels (Howard & Hussain, 2013). As such, Facebook can amplify voices that may otherwise go unheard, helping to democratize the public sphere by enabling diverse perspectives (Castells, 2012).

Moreover, Facebook enables users to maintain relationships and build social capital, which contributes to individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. Studies have found that frequent Facebook use can lead to greater social support, particularly in times of crisis, as individuals can easily reach out to friends and family (Ellison et al., 2011). Additionally, Facebook's algorithms, which recommend content based on users' interests, can help users connect with like-minded individuals and find communities of support (Hampton et al., 2011).

### **Negative Impacts**

On the other hand, Facebook's features and algorithms can also have detrimental effects, turning it into a double-edged sword. One primary concern is the platform's tendency to create polarization, as people are less likely to encounter or engage with opposing viewpoints (Sunstein, 2018). Such echo chambers can foster radicalization and extremism by validating and reinforcing extremist ideas, which is especially concerning in political contexts.

Another significant issue is the spread of misinformation, disinformation and fake news on Facebook. This has led to the rapid spread of misinformation on topics such as health, elections, and social issues, with serious societal consequences (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook faced criticism for enabling the spread of misinformation about the virus and vaccines, which influenced public behavior and exacerbated the health crisis (Cinelli et al., 2020).

## **2.4. Digital Repression and Activist Counter-Strategies**

Digital repression refers to the use of digital technologies by governments, corporations, and other actors to monitor, control, or suppresses dissenting voices and activism (Feldstein, 2019). This form of repression leverages various digital tools and techniques, including surveillance, censorship, disinformation campaigns, and network disruption, to stifle opposition and hinder activists' efforts. In response, activists worldwide have developed a range of counter-strategies to continue their advocacy. Digital repression encompasses a variety of tactics designed to monitor, manipulate, or limit access to information and communication. Key forms include:

**Surveillance:** Governments use advanced surveillance technologies to track the activities and communication of activists. Tools such as facial recognition, geolocation tracking, and spyware

allow authorities to gather information on individuals and groups, often leading to harassment or arrest (Deibert, 2020).

**Censorship and Content Blocking:** Governments may censor online content or block access to social media and messaging platforms during protests or politically sensitive periods. These restrictions prevent activists from reaching broader audiences and coordinating their efforts (Tufekci, 2017).

**Disinformation Campaigns:** Disinformation, or “fake news,” is used to undermine activist credibility by spreading false information that confuses or misleads the public about a movement’s intentions or goals. These campaigns may be coordinated by state actors or their affiliates to shape public perception and discredit activism (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

**Internet Shutdowns:** In extreme cases, governments resort to internet shutdowns, cutting off citizens’ access to the internet or specific communication platforms during protests. These blackouts isolate activists, hinder organizing efforts, and limit real-time information sharing (Access Now, 2020).

### **Activist Counter-Strategies**

In response to digital repression, activists have developed several strategies to evade surveillance, maintain communication, and continue their advocacy. These counter-strategies combine technological innovation, digital literacy, and creative tactics that adapt to the repressive measures they face.

**Encryption and Secure Communication Tools:** To evade state surveillance, activists increasingly use encrypted communication tools like Signal, Telegram, and WhatsApp. These platforms offer end-to-end encryption, ensuring that only the sender and recipient can read the messages (Marczak et al., 2014). By using these tools, activists can securely coordinate actions and exchange information without fear of interception.

**Digital Literacy and Security Training:** Many activist groups and NGOs provide digital security training to activists, educating them about risks such as phishing, malware, and compromised networks (Harfoush, 2009).

**Anonymity and Pseudonymity:** To avoid detection, activists often use pseudonyms or anonymous profiles when sharing information online. Which help activists circumvent censorship, communicate securely, and protect their identities (MacKinnon et al., 2016).

**Decentralized and Peer-to-Peer Communication:** To mitigate the risks of internet shutdowns, activists sometimes employ decentralized or peer-to-peer communication systems, such as mesh networks, making it possible for activists to continue communicating even during shutdowns (Bittman, 2020).

**Use of Alternative Media and Citizen Journalism:** In environments where mainstream media is controlled by the state, activists turn to alternative media platforms to document and share information about their causes. They use video-sharing platforms, podcasts, and blogs to raise awareness and mobilize support. Citizen journalism, where activist's record and share live footage of protests or abuses, is a powerful tool that bypasses traditional media channels (Gerbaudo, 2018).

**Social Steganography and Code Language:** To avoid censorship, activists sometimes employ social steganography, a technique in which hidden meanings are embedded in seemingly innocuous messages (boyd, 2014). Activists may also use symbolic language or code words that resonate within their communities but appear harmless to outsiders.

**Countering Disinformation Through Fact-Checking and Awareness Campaigns:** Activists counter disinformation campaigns by sharing factual content and promoting media literacy. They collaborate with independent fact-checking organizations and leverage social media to debunk false claims and clarify their goals. Raising awareness of disinformation tactics empowers supporters to critically evaluate information and resist manipulative narratives (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

## **2.5. The Challenges and Limitations of Facebook Activism**

One of the primary limitations of Facebook activism is its tendency to create echo chambers and filter bubbles, which limit exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforce existing beliefs. Facebook's algorithm prioritizes content that aligns with a user's interests and past engagement (Pariser, 2011).

### **Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation**

Facebook, while instrumental in enabling political expression and activism, faces significant challenges and limitations related to misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. One major challenge is its algorithm-driven content distribution, which prioritizes engagement over accuracy, often amplifying misleading or false information because such content tends to provoke stronger emotional reactions and wider sharing (Vaidhyanathan, 2018).

Misinformation false content shared without intent to harm can spread rapidly among users, while disinformation deliberately false content has been used by both state and non-state actors to manipulate public opinion and political outcomes (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Malinformation which involves the deliberate use of genuine information to cause harm (such as doxing or out-of-context leaks), is also facilitated by Facebook's vast reach and lack of sufficient contextual safeguards

These limitations not only undermine the credibility of online activism but also contribute to public distrust and societal polarization.

### **Privacy and Surveillance Risks**

Activists on Facebook face substantial privacy and surveillance risks. Governments and other actors often monitor social media for dissent, using Facebook as a tool to track activists' activities, associations, and locations (Deibert, 2020). Facebook's data collection practices further exacerbate these risks, as the platform gathers detailed information on users that can be accessed by third parties or exploited by malicious actors (Isaak & Hanna, 2018).

### **Algorithmic Bias and Content Moderation**

Facebook's algorithmic and content moderation practices present another challenge. Algorithms that prioritize engaging content may suppress important activist messages if they are not deemed "engaging" enough or fail to generate rapid user interaction. Additionally, Facebook's content moderation policies often result in the removal of posts, accounts, or entire groups if they are flagged as violating community guidelines, which can disproportionately affect activists discussing sensitive or controversial topics (Gillespie, 2018).

### **Polarization and Trolling; Digital Divide and Accessibility**

While Facebook is widely accessible, digital divides persist, affecting who can participate in online activism. Access to Facebook depends on internet access, digital literacy, and familiarity with social media. Physical access to technology which is the availability and ability of individuals or communities to obtain and use the necessary digital tools such as smartphones, computers, and internet connections to participate in the digital sphere.

Communities with limited digital infrastructure, especially in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may be excluded from online activism, limiting the movement's inclusivity and reach (Hargittai, 2008). Additionally, language barriers and accessibility features may further restrict participation for certain groups, which can undermine the inclusivity and representativeness of activism on Facebook.

### **Risk of Government Regulation and Shutdowns**

In some countries, Facebook activism faces the risk of government regulation, censorship, or complete shutdown. Governments may restrict access to Facebook during periods of unrest to limit activists' ability to organize and disseminate information (Access Now, 2020). Additionally, increasing pressure from policymakers to regulate social media content can lead to restrictive policies that disproportionately impact activists, limiting their ability to communicate freely (MacKinnon et al., 2016).

## **2.6. Theoretical framework**

Several scholars have employed diverse theoretical frameworks to examine the intersection of social media and political activism, each offering unique insights into the dynamics of digital mobilization and influence. Castells' (2012) Network Society Theory has been widely used to understand how activists operate in decentralized digital environments. For instance, Tufekci (2017) utilized this framework to explore how social movements in Turkey and Egypt leveraged platforms like Twitter and Facebook to organize protests and bypass traditional state-controlled media. This aligns with the context of Tigray, where activists have used Facebook to challenge dominant political narratives and rally support both locally and within the Diaspora.

### **2.6.1. Public Sphere Theory**

The public sphere theory is pivotal for analyzing how social media platforms, such as Facebook, operate as spaces for discourse, political engagement, and activism. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) conceptualizes the public sphere as a space where individuals freely and critically discuss societal concerns, with the potential to influence political action. He envisioned this sphere as inclusive, where individuals would engage in rational-critical discourse on common concerns without interference from state or economic power.

Habermas emphasized that the public sphere must be inclusive, allowing for open participation from all members willing to engage in reasoned debate. This concept is essential for understanding social media platforms as digital public spheres where individuals from diverse backgrounds converge to share opinions, discuss societal issues, and advocate for change. Platforms like Facebook provide spaces for public discourse, but their structural factors, such as corporate interests and algorithmic filtering, shape the quality of discussion, often complicating alignment with Habermas' normative ideals.

Nancy Fraser's article on the Public Sphere a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy (1990), critiques and expands upon Habermas' model, arguing that it overlooks the social and cultural pluralism inherent in modern democracies.

Fraser contends that a plurality of public spheres including counter-publics is essential for democratic engagement in diverse societies. In Fraser's view, marginalized groups excluded from mainstream discourse often establish their own public spheres, or "counter-publics." These counter-publics allow groups to discuss issues relevant to their needs, develop collective identities, and advocate for social and political change. Feminist, LGBTQ+, and racial justice movements, for example, often operate as counter-publics, using platforms like Facebook to organize, share narratives, and promote social change (Fraser, 1990).

### **2.6.2 Digital Activism and Online Movements**

In recent years, digital platforms have fundamentally transformed the nature of political activism, creating new possibilities for mobilization and participation in social movements.

Scholars such as Bruce A. Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl (2005), as well as Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011), have examined the dynamics of digital activism and how online platforms alter the ways individuals engage in collective action.

These insights are essential for understanding the role of Facebook and similar platforms in contemporary political movements, particularly within the context of the Tigray crisis. In their article *Re conceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment*, Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005) explore how digital technology reshapes collective action and political participation. Traditionally, collective action has required significant organizational resources and coordination, often facilitated by formal organizations such as unions or political parties. However, in the digital age, the authors argue, social media platforms allow individuals to engage in activism without the need for extensive resources or institutional support (Bimber et al., 2005).

Bimber et al. (2005) introduce the concept of "organizational hybridity," in which digital activism is facilitated by a blend of formal and informal networks, allowing people to participate in political movements in ways that are more flexible, spontaneous, and decentralized than traditional forms of activism. In this model, social media platforms like Facebook enable individuals to join movements and contribute to campaigns without requiring significant commitment or hierarchical organization. For example, during the Tigray crisis, activists have used Facebook to quickly disseminate information, coordinate protests, and engage supporters across the globe, illustrating how online platforms reduce the need for traditional organizational structures.

Additionally, Bimber et al. emphasize that digital activism often operates through "personalized communication networks" rather than centralized leadership. In these networks, individuals can connect with each other based on shared interests, goals, or identities, rather than being directed by formal leaders. This decentralized model of activism aligns with the structure of online movements on Facebook, where activists and supporters can directly share content, respond to emerging events, and shape the discourse within their communities. Bimber et al.'s insights highlight the flexibility of digital activism, showing how Facebook allows for rapid, networked

responses to political crises and facilitates collective action even in the absence of formal organizations.

Earl and Kimport's concept of "theory of costless coordination" explains how online platforms like Facebook can empower individuals to engage in activism with minimal barriers. For example, the Tigray political crisis has leveraged Facebook to organize demonstrations, coordinate petitions, and mobilize global support, demonstrating how the platform facilitates low-cost, high-reach activism that would be challenging to achieve through traditional means. Earl and Kimport argue that this form of "coordination without centralization" enables social movements to thrive even in environments where traditional media or organizational support is unavailable, which is particularly relevant in authoritarian contexts or areas affected by conflict (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Furthermore, Earl and Kimport highlight the role of "scale shift" in digital activism, where online platforms allow local issues to gain global attention. By disseminating information and framing narratives that resonate with diverse audiences, activists can mobilize international support for causes that may not receive mainstream media coverage.

In the case of the Tigray crisis, Facebook activists have used this scale-shift mechanism to bring international attention to the region's struggles, connecting with a global network of supporters and advocates who might otherwise remain unaware of the conflict. Earl and Kimport's framework thus provides valuable insights into how digital platforms amplify the reach of marginalized voices, enabling local issues to become part of global conversations.

However, Earl and Kimport also discuss the potential limitations of users engage superficially without committing to deeper involvement. This form of low-effort activism may undermine the effectiveness of digital movements by reducing participation to symbolic gestures rather than substantive contributions (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Additionally, the authors note that while online platforms facilitate rapid mobilization, they can also lead to the "overload" of movements with information, making it challenging for participants to process, organize, and act effectively on the vast amount of content shared. These limitations remind us that digital activism, while

powerful, also faces constraints that must be considered when analyzing the efficacy of online movements.

### **Applying Digital Activism Theory to Facebook Activism in the Tigray Crisis**

The frameworks provided by Bimber et al. (2005) and Earl and Kimport (2011) offer essential insights for understanding how Facebook operates as a platform for activism within the Tigray political movement. Bimber et al.'s concept of organizational hybridist explains how Tigray activists have formed decentralized networks on Facebook, where participants share information and coordinate actions independently of traditional structures. This flexibility has allowed the movement to remain resilient and adaptable, even in the face of government censorship and limited access to traditional media. The idea of personalized communication networks further explains how supporters connect based on shared identities or experiences, strengthening the movement's solidarity and reach.

Earl and Kimport's theory of costless coordination also provides a framework for understanding how Tigray activists use Facebook to mobilize resources, organize events, and scale local issues to a global audience. Through low-cost coordination, the Tigray movement has been able to bypass logistical and financial obstacles that often constrain traditional activism, enabling a global network of supporters to advocate for the cause.

The concept of scale shift is particularly relevant for analyzing how activists have used Facebook to gain international visibility, turning a localized issue into a global human rights concern by connecting with audiences worldwide.

While these theoretical insights highlight the strengths of Facebook activism, they also point to certain challenges. The phenomenon of slacktivism, as discussed by both Bimber et al. and Earl and Kimport, raises concerns about the sustainability of online engagement.

The works of Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005) and Earl and Kimport (2011) offer critical frameworks for understanding the dynamics of digital activism on platforms like Facebook. Bimber et al.'s concept of organizational hybridity and Earl and Kimport's theory of costless coordination illustrate how social media has transformed collective action, enabling flexible, low-cost activism that empowers individuals and marginalized groups to engage in political

movements. These perspectives are highly relevant for analyzing the Tigray movement, where Facebook serves as both a mobilizing platform and a space for constructing a global network of support.

However, these theories also highlight the limitations of digital activism, including the challenges of sustaining commitment and navigating information overload. Despite these obstacles, digital platforms continue to play a transformative role in contemporary activism, offering new opportunities and challenges for movements seeking visibility, solidarity, and change. By applying the insights of Bimber et al. and Earl and Kimport, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and potentials of social media as a tool for political engagement and collective action.

### **2.6.3 Social Media and Activism**

Social media has revolutionized how political activism is organized, communicated, and mobilized, serving as a powerful tool for enabling social change. Scholars such as Clay Shirky (2011) and Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) have examined the transformative role of social media in political movements, offering essential insights into how platforms like Facebook facilitate public discourse, activism, and the mobilization of political movements. These perspectives are crucial for understanding how Facebook and similar platforms function as catalysts for activism in contexts like the Tigray political crisis.

*The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change*, Shirky (2011) explores the capacity of social media to act as a vehicle for political change. He argues that social media enables collective action by reducing the barriers to participation and communication, thus creating opportunities for individuals to organize and express dissent outside of traditional, state-controlled media channels. For Shirky, social media amplifies the voices of ordinary citizens, allowing them to become active participants in the public sphere and empowering them to challenge existing power structures (Shirky, 2011).

Shirky also emphasizes that social media's power lies in its ability to facilitate horizontal communication, where individuals can communicate directly without intermediaries. This

structure allows movements to spread organically, as individuals can share information widely and quickly, creating networks of support that transcend geographical boundaries.

Shirky's framework is essential for analyzing Facebook's role in the Tigray political movement, where activists use the platform to reach international audiences, share real-time updates, and mobilize support across borders. The use of social media in such movements highlights the potential for platforms like Facebook to bypass traditional media restrictions, empowering marginalized groups to tell their stories and galvanize global support.

However, Shirky also acknowledges the limitations and challenges of social media activism. He warns that while social media provides tools for mobilization, it does not guarantee sustained political change. The speed and accessibility of online activism can sometimes lead to what he terms "slacktivism," where participants engage superficially without meaningful commitment or long-term impact (Shirky, 2011).

Additionally, authoritarian regimes often adapt to the digital age by implementing surveillance and censorship mechanisms, which can compromise social media's potential as a tool for political change. Despite these limitations, Shirky's work underscores the fundamental shift social media represents in the relationship between citizens and political power. Paolo Gerbaudo's book *Tweets and the Streets*:

*Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (2012) builds on the idea that social media platforms play a central role in structuring and organizing political movements. Gerbaudo focuses on how social media serves as an intermediary in mobilizing people, facilitating organizational processes that once required physical meetings. He describes how platforms like Facebook provide "choreography of assembly," where leaders and influencers guide the movement's direction, encourage participation, and create a sense of collective identity (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Gerbaudo's work is especially relevant for analyzing how Facebook activism operates within the Tigray political crisis, as activists use the platform to create cohesive narratives, rally supporters, and coordinate online and offline actions. According to Gerbaudo, social media offers more than just a space for discussion; it serves as a platform for identity formation and solidarity building, allowing users to feel part of a larger movement (Gerbaudo, 2012). This

sense of virtual community is essential in political movements, as it strengthens the commitment of participants and fosters resilience against opposition, even when physical protests are restricted.

# CHAPTER THREE

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study will adopt a mixed-methods research design, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), mixed-methods designs are beneficial when studying complex social phenomena.

A mixed-methods approach is well-suited for analyzing social media activism, as it facilitates a dual perspective: quantitative analysis helps quantify engagement patterns, while qualitative analysis offers insight into content, themes, and narratives used by activists.

### 3.2. Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

#### 3.2.1. Quantitative Research Method

Quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis to explain phenomena. It emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and reliability. Researchers using this method often apply structured tools like surveys, experiments, and questionnaires to collect data from large samples. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is "a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables, which can be measured typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures." It aims to test hypotheses, establish patterns, and make generalizations. Quantitative research is often associated with positivist or post-positivist paradigms, which assume that reality is stable and can be observed and described from an objective viewpoint.

#### 3.2.2 Qualitative Research Method

In contrast, qualitative research seeks to understand people's experiences, perspectives, and social contexts through non-numerical data such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and textual analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world... It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." It is interpretive and grounded in the idea that meaning is constructed

by individuals within specific social and cultural contexts. Qualitative research is typically aligned with constructivist or interpretive paradigms, focusing on in-depth understanding rather than applicability.

### **Comparison and Integration**

While quantitative methods offer breadth and applicability, qualitative methods provide depth and detail. Scholars like Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) advocate for mixed methods, which combine both approaches to capitalize on the strengths of each and provide a more comprehensive understanding of research problems.

## **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

### **3.3.1 Content Analysis Method**

Content analysis is a research method used to systematically analyze text, images, or media to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within the content (Krippendorff, 2018). This approach is especially useful for analyzing social media data, as it allows researchers to examine large volumes of posts to understand how political issues are framed, discussed, and shared among activists and their audiences (Neuendorf, 2017).

For this study, content analysis will focus on Facebook posts related to the Tigray political movement, with a specific emphasis on posts shared by activists. A thematic coding system will be developed to identify and categorize recurring themes, emotional tones, calls to action, and levels of engagement (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This will enable a deeper understanding of how Facebook is used as a platform for political activism and how activists' messaging influences public discourse. Furthermore, both qualitative and quantitative elements will be integrated into the content analysis, combining statistical insights (e.g., frequency of specific themes) with interpretative analysis to capture the contextual meaning behind posts (Mayring, 2014).

### **3.3.2. Interview**

The research will explore In-Depth and Semi-Structured interviews. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method that allows participants to share their experiences, motivations, and opinions in detail (Boyce & Neale, 2006). These interviews are particularly effective in exploring complex social phenomena, such as the influence of social media activism, because

they enable participants to articulate the nuances of their experiences that may be overlooked in quantitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

For this study, in-depth interviews are ideal for understanding how Tigray activists perceive and engage in Facebook-based activism, as well as how they believe their posts impact followers and the broader political landscape. Using in-depth interviews will allow the researcher to investigate several important aspects, including: personal Motivations and Backgrounds: Influential activists can share their reasons for participating in Tigray activism, which might include personal, political, or ethical motivations.

The research will also use semi-Structured Interviews for Flexibility and Comparability which offer a balance between flexibility and consistency, making them particularly effective for capturing both individual experiences and comparable data across multiple participants (Bryman, 2016). Unlike structured interviews, which limit responses to predefined questions, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask open-ended questions and follow up on participants' responses, fostering a conversational flow that can reveal unexpected themes (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In the context of this study, semi-structured interviews will enable the researcher to address Core Research Questions Consistently: The use of an interview guide ensures that key topics, such as the role of Facebook in mobilizing activism and the influence of specific narratives, are addressed by each participant. This structure makes it possible to compare responses across interviews while still allowing for personalization based on each activist's unique experiences (Gill et al., 2008).

It also allow for Probing of Specific Themes. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on participants' answers, thus exploring specific themes, strategies, and perceptions in greater depth (Barriball & While, 1994). For example, if a participant mentions a particular strategy they use to increase engagement on Facebook, the interviewer can probe further to understand why and how that strategy is effective.

### **3.4. Population and Sampling**

#### **3.4.1. Target Population**

The target population for this study is composed of two main groups: Influential Tigray activists on Facebook: this group includes individuals within the Tigray Diaspora and local activists. Influential activists can be identified by their follower count, frequency of posts, engagement metrics (e.g., likes, shares, comments), and their perceived authority within the community (activists who support interim Tigray administration and TPLF supporters).

According to Kozinets (2015), online influencers in activist communities often act as opinion leaders, shaping narratives and mobilizing social and political support. In this case, Tigray activists who have established a significant online presence and demonstrate strong engagement levels will be central to this study's analysis.

Diaspora and local Tigray Facebook Users Engaging with Tigray-Related Content: This group consists of Tigray local and Diaspora members, who actively follow, engage with, or share content related to the Tigray movement on Facebook. Engagement can include actions such as commenting on posts, sharing activism-related content, participating in online discussions, and joining groups focused on Tigray issues.

The Diaspora plays a significant role in political activism, as research has shown that expatriate communities often become more vocal on social media regarding home-country issues (Lyons, 2007). This population will help provide insights into how audiences respond to and are potentially influenced by activist content.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling Method**

The sampling methods for each group differ based on the unique characteristics and accessibility of the populations:

##### **Purposive Sampling**

A purposive sampling technique is selected for identifying influential Tigray activists because it enables the researcher to intentionally select participants who are particularly relevant to the study (Patton, 2015). This non-probability sampling approach is effective for gathering data from a specific subset of individuals those who have a significant social media presence in the

Tigray activism space. And Influential activists will be identified based on several criteria, including follower Count: A threshold (e.g., a minimum of 42,000 followers) will be set to ensure that selected activists have substantial reach.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods to ensure comprehensive understanding and triangulation of findings.

#### **3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were collected from purposively selected Facebook posts by key activists, categorized by content type, engagement level (likes, shares, comments), and posting frequency. Analysis involved deductive coding using predefined categories such as “mobilization,” “resistance,” and “solidarity,” based on prior digital activism literature, alongside inductive coding to identify context-specific themes related to the Tigray crisis.

#### **3.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step approach: familiarization, open coding, axial coding, theme refinement, naming, and interpretation.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent:** All participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Consent will be obtained before surveys and interviews.

**Confidentiality:** Participant anonymity will be maintained by not disclosing names or identifying information in any reports or publications.

## **Chapter Four**

### **3. Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered through in-depth interviews and content analysis of Face book posts and pages relevant to the Tigray political crisis. The aim is to examine how Face book has been used as a platform for political activism and to assess the influence of Face book activists in shaping public opinion and political discourse in the current context of Tigray.

The data analysis is structured according to the research objectives, beginning with an exploration of how activists utilize Face book to mobilize support and disseminate information. It then moves to assess the perceived impact of Face book activism among Tigrayan citizens, investigates the role of Face book in reinforcing or countering political narratives following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), and finally, explores the broader consequences of social media engagement during the ongoing political crisis.

Qualitative data from interviews are analyzed thematically, highlighting key patterns, perspectives, and insights from participants. Survey data are presented in descriptive statistical form to show general trends and perceptions among a broader population. Meanwhile, the content analysis of Face book posts provides a contextual understanding of the discourse and strategies used by prominent Face book activists. This chapter thus bridges empirical evidence with the study's theoretical and conceptual foundations.

#### **4.2. Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the study participants is essential to contextualize the analysis of Face book activism in the Tigray political crisis. This section presents the demographic distribution of respondents who participated in the survey and interviews, including variables such as age, gender, education level, occupation, and frequency of Face book use.

## Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

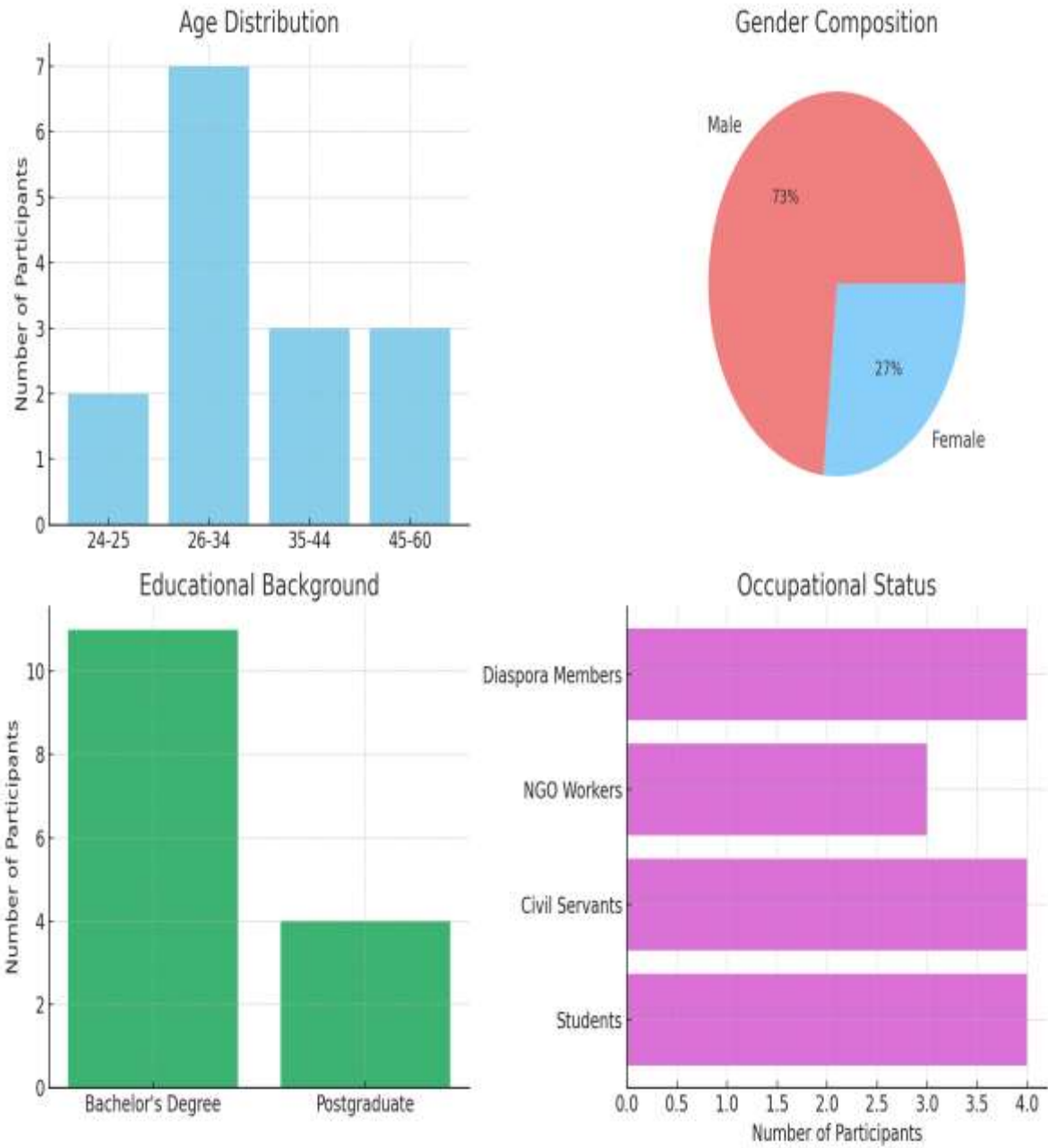


Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of interview participants

### Interpretation of Participant Demographics

The demographic profile of the 15 interview participants provides essential context for understanding Facebook activism in the post-COHA Tigray political crisis. The inclusion of both younger (24–25) and older (45–60) participants enriched the study with generational diversity. Male respondents comprised 73%, reflecting broader gender disparities in political spaces, though female perspectives offered valuable insights into gendered dimensions of digital activism. Most participants held at least a bachelor's degree, with 25% having postgraduate qualifications, suggesting that higher education correlates with increased political engagement online.

Occupational diversity including students, civil servants, NGO workers, and diaspora members provided varied yet complementary views. While students and diaspora participants emphasized digital advocacy, civil servants and NGO workers offered grounded insights on policy and community engagement. Together, these demographic factors shaped how participants interacted with and contributed to Facebook-based political discourse during the ongoing crisis.

### **4.3. Facebook Usage Patterns**

Out of the 15 participants interviewed, 12 (80%) reported using Facebook on a daily basis, primarily for news consumption, political updates, and engagement in discussions related to the Tigray crisis. This high rate of daily use underscores Facebook's continued importance as a key platform for political communication among Tigrayans.

### **4.4. Thematic Analysis of Interview and Facebook Content Data**

This section presents the core findings of the study based on thematic analysis of in-depth interviews and content analysis of Facebook posts and pages related to the Tigray political movement. The analysis is structured according to the specific objectives of the research.

#### **4.4.1. Theme 1: Facebook as a Tool for Mobilization and Information Dissemination**

Many interview participants emphasized Facebook's role in spreading information rapidly and mobilizing support for the Tigray current political crisis. Activists used Facebook to share live

updates, organize online campaigns, and call for demonstrations, especially after the division of TPLF.

#### **4.4.2. Preference for Text-Based Posts and News Updates among Tigrayan Facebook Activists and Their Audience**

Participants noted that written content is not only accessible but also more economical, especially in areas with limited internet access or expensive data costs. Participant R05, interview conducted on March 25, 2025 stated that, “We want to have information daily about the ongoing Tigray political crisis, so we prefer written posts rather than videos. To use video is costly.” This comment illustrates a widespread concern about the affordability of accessing video materials online. The cost of streaming or downloading video content is considerably higher compared to reading text, making it impractical for many people who rely on mobile data or have limited digital resources.

Another Participant R12, interview conducted on April 4, 2025 emphasized that, “When you read a post, it's quick, straight to the point, and you can immediately share it with others. Videos take time and data, and sometimes the message isn't even clear.” These insights highlight a clear preference for written content among Facebook users in the Tigray context, driven by both economic and communicative considerations. This aligns with findings by Tréré and Mattoni (2016), who argue that written digital communication continues to be a primary form of engagement in low-resource contexts because it allows for efficient, low-cost dissemination and reception of information.

#### **4.5. Patterns of Engagement on Face book**

This section explores the patterns of user engagement with political content related to the Tigray crisis on Face book. It gives insight into how users interact with political narratives, respond to activist messaging, and contribute to the broader discourse around the current Tigray political crisis.

The analysis draws from content analysis of selected Face book pages and posts. It aims to identify, how users express support or dissent, and the extent to which engagement translates into offline action or political awareness. The section also examines differences in engagement

of audiences to the influential activists as well as how Face book’s algorithms may influence visibility and interaction with political content. By identifying these patterns, the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of Face book as a platform for mobilization, persuasion, and community-building among Tigrayans and the Diasporas during a time of intense political upheaval.

### A. Narrative Construction and Discourse Framing

<b>N</b>	<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Pro-Getachew Reda Activists</b>	<b>Pro-Debretsion Activists</b>
<b>0</b>			
<b>1</b>	Legitimacy of Leadership	Frame Getachew as legitimate and reformist supported by youth and intellectuals	Claim Getachew-led IRA usurped power; only Debretsion represents true TPLF leadership.
<b>2</b>	Peace Agreement (COHA)	Support COHA; accuse Debretsion’s faction of undermining it.	Accuse Getachew of violating COHA and failing to implement peace.
<b>3</b>	Party Unity and Legality	Criticize TPLF's re-registration; view Debretsion faction as self-serving.	Declare Getachew and allies expelled; claim Debretsion’s TPLF is the legal party.
<b>4</b>	Governance and Development	Accuse Debretsion’s camp of corruption, inefficiency, and decades of underdevelopment.	Accuse IRA of incompetence, failing to deliver services or ensure sovereignty.
<b>5</b>	Military and TDF Role	Criticize TDF's political ties with Debretsion; call for depoliticization	Claim Getachew’s IRA undermines TDF and insults its leaders.
<b>6</b>	External Alliances	Accuse Debretsion faction of aligning with Eritrea.	Claim Getachew’s IRA is allied with Prosperity Party and foreign actors.
<b>7</b>	Resistance Campaign & Legacy	Criticize lack of accountability in Resistance and Debretsion’s failure to self-assess.	Accuse IRA of weakening Resistanceunity and legacy.
<b>8</b>	Public Institutions and Councils	Claim councils are TPLF tools working against the IRA.	Accuse IRA of dismantling local governance structures.
<b>9</b>	Political Ideology	Frame Getachew-led faction as pragmatic and reformist.	Frame Debretsion-led faction as rooted in resistance and historical loyalty.
<b>10</b>	Gender and Discourse Ethics	No specific gender-based narrative noted.	Accuse IRA of disrespecting Tigrayan women and TDF members through derogatory rhetoric.

Table 1: Narrative Construction and Discourse Framing: A Thematic Comparison

## **Interpretation of the Thematic Comparison**

The internal split within the TPLF leadership has extended beyond political circles and into the digital space, where Facebook has become a battleground for competing narratives. Activists aligned with Dr. Debretsion and Getachew Reda use the platform not just to express political loyalties but to shape public opinion, rally support, and frame the future of Tigray's political direction. This study explores how each faction utilizes Facebook across thematic areas such as mobilization, narrative framing, public engagement, and the unintended consequences of such activism.

## **Mobilization and Awareness**

Supporters of Dr. Debretsion primarily use Facebook to promote party unity and institutional stability. Their messages often stress adherence to organizational hierarchy and negotiation-based approaches. In contrast, Getachew Reda's supporters emphasize reformist ideas, frontline leadership, and tactical response to crises. They often highlight Getachew's visibility during key military and political moments. Both factions rely heavily on Facebook to organize digital campaigns and direct their followers toward real-world political actions or public sentiment shifts.

## **Narrative Framing**

Narratives crafted by Debretsion-aligned activists are typically rooted in the legacy of the TPLF, reinforcing themes of resistance, peace negotiation, and continuity. Their tone is cautious and strategic, focusing on safeguarding the region through political process. On the other hand, Getachew's supporters frame him as a pragmatic reformer who embodies action over rhetoric. His faction's messaging often revolves around bravery, frontline leadership, and the need for political reorientation within TPLF. The divergence in narrative tone and content underscores ideological shift about Tigray's path forward.

## **Engagement Metrics**

Quantitative data shows that Getachew-aligned activists tend to generate higher engagement rates across Facebook, particularly in terms of posts, comments, and shares. This may be due to their more dynamic, provocative content that resonates with youth and diaspora audiences. Although Debretsion's supporters post less frequently, their content still garners substantial

likes, suggesting a quieter but loyal base. The disparity in digital engagement points to a generational and geographical divide in how Tigrayans interact with political discourse online.

### **Public Sentiment and Influence**

Sentiment analysis indicates that Getachew Reda's group receives a higher proportion of positive reactions, especially among younger Facebook users and Diaspora communities seeking urgent change. Debretsion's base garners more neutral responses, possibly reflecting their more formal and less emotionally charged messaging. Negative sentiment is comparable across both groups but often linked to perceived internal division rather than specific policy positions. These trends illustrate how social media engagement is both a mirror and a driver of factional allegiance.

### **Unintended Consequences**

The increasing polarization on Facebook has led to several unintended effects. The public airing of internal disagreements has made the TPLF appear divided, which could weaken its negotiating position and overall credibility. Misinformation spreads more rapidly in such polarized environments.. Additionally, external actors and opposition groups have exploited these visible divides for their own propaganda, complicating the Tigray political crisis further.

This comparative analysis confirms that Facebook activism plays a critical role in shaping the political landscape in Tigray. Each faction's supporters use the platform not only to advocate but also to compete for legitimacy and influence. While this digital engagement can be empowering, it also brings risks of fragmentation and misinformation. The ongoing digital conflict is, therefore, both a reflection and an amplifier of deeper ideological and leadership challenges within the TPLF.

## **B. Engagement Metrics and Sentiment Distribution across Thematic Areas**

Content Analysis of Influential Tigray Activists' Posts: From COHA to the Resignation of Getachew Reda (Nov 2023 – Mar 2025)

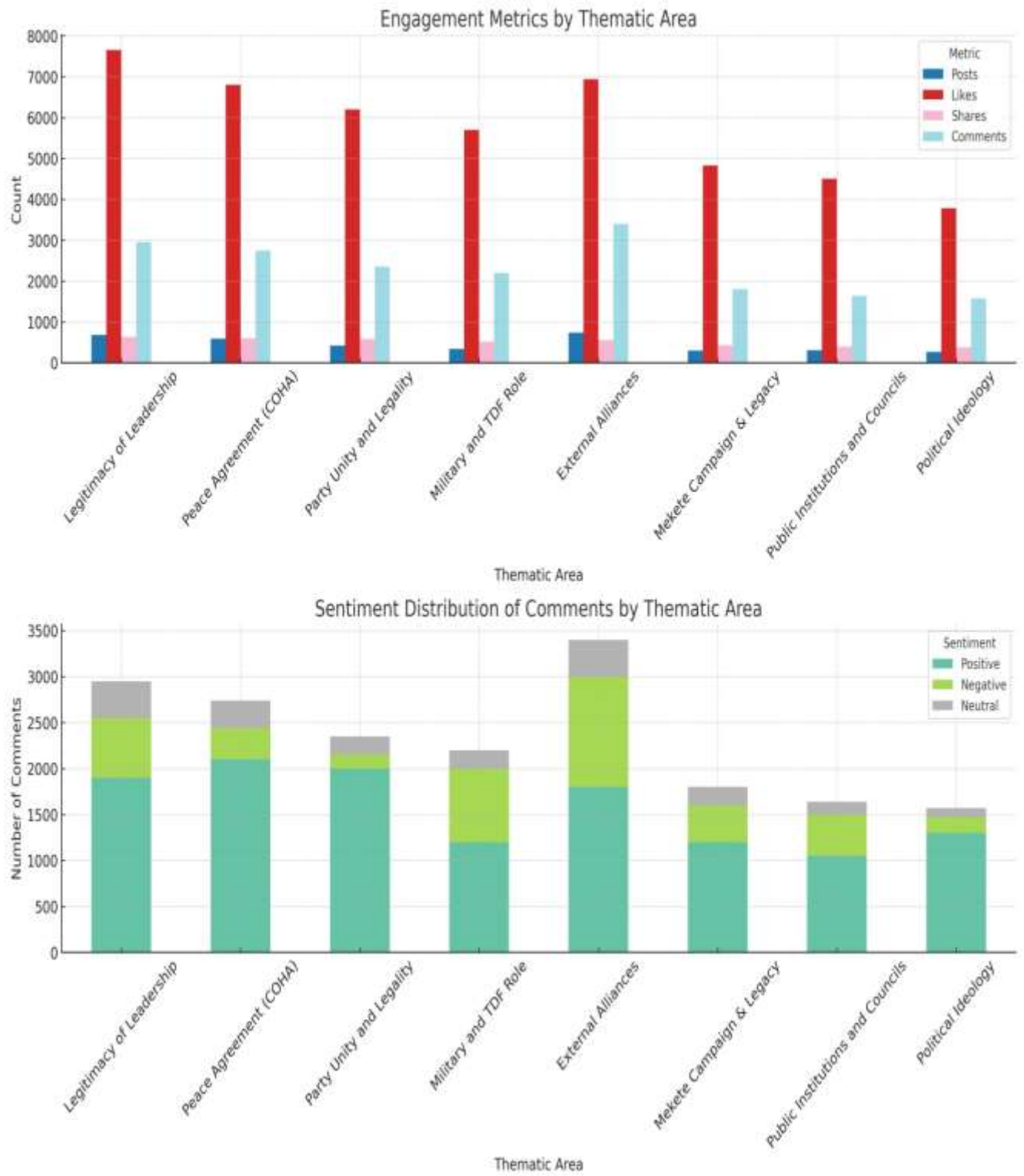


Figure2: Thematic Distribution of Posts

This content analysis examines the digital discourse of 10 influential Tigrai activists with follower counts ranging from 45,000 to 320,000. The study focuses on three pivotal political moments: the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in November 2023, the August 2024 TPLF General Assembly which highlighted factional divisions, and the March 2025 resignation of IRA President Getachew Reda followed by the resurgence of Dr. Debretsion's leadership, supported by TDF commanders. Data was collected from posts, likes, shares, and, most crucially, from thousands of public comments. These were categorized under eight key thematic areas and assessed based on sentiment polarity (positive, negative, and neutral). This analysis is interpreted through the lens of established political science and conflict studies frameworks.

**Legitimacy of Leadership**to begin with, the issue of leadership legitimacy attracted significant public engagement, with 2,950 comments analyzed. Notably, 64.41% of these were positive, 22.03% negative, and 13.56% neutral. This indicates broad, albeit complex, public support particularly in favor of Dr. Debretsion's return to power.

Nevertheless, the relatively high negative sentiment reflects a notable skepticism, especially among younger generations who view the current leadership as lacking legal and moral authority following Getachew Reda's resignation. Lodge (1994) notes that post-conflict political legitimacy depends not just on legality, but also on symbolic and moral authority earned through service and struggle. In the current context, many Tigraians are questioning whether TPLF leadership retains such legitimacy, particularly amid visible internal fractures.

The question of legitimacy has become one of the most divisive political themes in post-COHA Tigrai. A comment from L01 (August 29, 2024) clearly expresses doubt about the legality of the Dr. Debretsion-led TPLF faction:

At this time, the illegal Dr. Debretsion-led TPLF couldn't have a legal ground to control 51% power in IRA because the illegal General Assembly had excluded many areas like South, South East, partially east and central zones of Tigrai. Also, it excluded one faction of TPLF which is led by Getachew Reda and it has

not recognition and acceptance by the National Election Board of Ethiopia. So, the party is already trying to control power by force.

The comment from L01 (August 29, 2024) reflects public skepticism toward the legitimacy of the Dr. Debretsion-led faction of the TPLF, arguing that its claim to 51% control of the Interim Regional Administration (IRA) lacks legal and democratic grounding. L01 points out that the General Assembly, which facilitated the power consolidation, excluded large geographic regions (South, Southeast, parts of East and Central Tigray) and rival factions such as the one led by Getachew Reda.

This exclusion undermines representational legitimacy, suggesting a monopolization of power rather than democratic consolidation. This aligns with Weber's (1978) typology of legitimacy, particularly legal-rational legitimacy, which is derived from adherence to formal rules and procedures. When those rules are circumvented or manipulated, legitimacy is eroded.

Moreover, Lodge (1994) emphasizes that post-conflict legitimacy depends not only on legal authority but also on moral legitimacy public belief in the righteousness and inclusiveness of leadership. The lack of recognition by the National Election Board of Ethiopia, as mentioned by L01, further weakens the claim to legality and can foster political instability.

In contrast, a comment from L02 (August 29, 2024) defends the legitimacy of the same leadership that, "TPLF has legal ground to change cabinets which are represented by TPLF because TPLF signed COHA and established IRA with the federal government." L02 (August 29, 2024) offers a counter-narrative, asserting that the TPLF does possess legal authority since it signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) and co-established the IRA with the federal government. From this perspective, internal changes to leadership or cabinet composition are framed as procedural and lawful.

This reflects institutional continuity as described by Sartori (1976) that once a party becomes an architect of governance (via agreements or elections), it gains functional authority to make executive decisions unless formally contested through institutions like the electoral board or judiciary. This divergence in public perception illustrates the polarization within Tigray's

political discourse, with one side emphasizing procedural legality and inclusion, and the other emphasizing authority through formal agreements and continuity.

The debate also highlights the fragility of transitional institutions in post-conflict regions where the lines between legal mandate and power imposition often blur.

**Peace Agreement (COHA):** Next, discourse surrounding the COHA reveals strong endorsement from the online community. Out of 2,740 comments, 76.64% expressed positive sentiment, while only 12.41% were negative. This overwhelming support signals a clear public desire for stability after years of violence.

According to Galtung's (1969) concept of "negative peace," the absence of direct conflict often becomes a priority, even when deeper structural tensions remain unresolved. This perspective helps explain the strong public approval for the COHA, despite some critics expressing doubts about its long-term viability or accusing it of favoring particular political interests.

**Party Unity and Legality:** Similarly, the theme of party unity and legality received the highest level of public approval among all categories, with 85.11% of comments being positive and only 6.38% negative. This suggests that the public places a high premium on internal cohesion within the TPLF, especially during a period marked by factional rivalry.

Sartori (1976) contends that the strength and legitimacy of political parties, especially in post-revolutionary settings, are grounded in both ideological clarity and organizational coherence. Indeed, the data suggests that the Tigray public perceives internal division within the TPLF not only as a political threat but also as a catalyst for wider social fragmentation and potential instability in the region.

**TDF Role:** In contrast, public opinion on the role of the TDF in post-conflict governance is far more divided. Of 2,200 comments, 54.55% were positive, 36.36% negative, and 9.09% neutral. While many continue to honor the TDF's role in defending Tigray during the war, others express concern about the military's growing involvement in political affairs particularly its backing of Dr. Debretsion's faction.

As Tilly (1990) warns, military influence may lend short-term stability but often undermines democratic governance in the long run. Thus, the data reflects a tension between appreciation for military heroism and fear of militarized politics. The Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), once celebrated as defenders of Tigray, now find themselves the subject of public scrutiny.

L03 (March 12, 2025) made a critical remark regarding their post-conflict intervention: "TDF commanders have committed a historical mistake to overthrow the Getachew Reda-led IRA administration through a coup. This also makes the crisis of Tigray more complicated and may lead to civil conflict among Tigrians." Comment L03 (March 12, 2025) raises serious concerns regarding the involvement of TDF commanders in what is described as a coup against the Getachew Reda-led IRA.

The use of the term "historical mistake" suggests a breach of civilian-military boundaries and a potential erosion of democratic norms. This situation can be analyzed through Charles Tilly's (1990) lens, who argued that while militaries can be crucial in state formation and defense, their intrusion into civil governance can delegitimize authority and destabilize institutions.

Tilly warns that when power is seized militarily, it undermines the development of democratic governance by privileging force over electoral or participatory legitimacy. Furthermore, L03's comment anticipates the risk of intra-regional civil conflict, emphasizing how military interventions in political leadership can sow division and long-term instability. This underscores the importance of maintaining clear boundaries between military loyalty to the people and political neutrality, a core tenet in democratic transitions.

**External Alliances:** The topic of external alliances also elicited mixed responses. Out of 3,400 comments, 52.94% were positive and 35.29% negative. While some view alliances be it with international organizations or neighboring states as necessary for survival and leverage, others fear foreign manipulation and a loss of autonomy. This aligns with Frank's (1967) dependency theory, which argues that post-colonial regions often become trapped in unequal relationships with stronger entities. Notably, recent rumors about TPLF's factional alignment with the Eritrean government have fueled public fears about the possibility of renewed armed conflict with the Ethiopian federal government.

A strong statement from L04 (April 19, 2025) raises alarm over the rumored alliance with Eritrea: "Tsimdo, which is the alliance between TPLF and the Eritrean government, is against the COHA and it is an attempt to go to war against the federal government. We need peace we are tired of war." Comment L04 (April 19, 2025) critically addresses the reported alliance "Tsimdo" between the TPLF faction and the Eritrean government, interpreting it as a violation of the COHA and a provocative act toward the federal government.

The phrase, "We need peace, we are tired of war," encapsulates the broader public fatigue with prolonged conflict and reflects a popular desire for durable peace rather than strategic military positioning. From a theoretical standpoint, Johan Galtung's (1969) concept of negative peace is relevant here. Galtung distinguishes between negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the presence of social justice and reconciliation).

L04's concern is that alliances like alliance (Tsimdo) threaten the fragile negative peace established by COHA by potentially reigniting hostilities. Additionally, the comment implicitly critiques the manipulation of external alliances for political gain, which Franks (1967) critiques in his dependency theory: alliances in post-colonial or post-conflict regions often reflect structural dependencies rather than sovereign agency. This perspective raises critical questions about agency and autonomy in TPLF's decision-making whether such alliances are meant to strengthen regional governance or are tactical moves that risk broader instability.

**Resistance Campaign & Legacy:** The legacy of the Mekete Campaign continues to resonate with a large portion of the public. From 1,800 comments, 66.67% were positive, yet 22.22% reflected critical reassessment. Kertzer (1988) argues that while political rituals like resistance campaign can unify during crises, they may become obsolete or even polarizing once the immediate threat has passed. Increasingly, younger Tigrains are calling for accountability and a reevaluation of resistance campaign's role in shaping the political narrative.

They argue that its continued use might serve as a distraction from more urgent socio-economic and governance challenges.

**Public Institutions and Councils:** Turning to public institutions and councils, sentiment was moderately favorable, with 64.02% of comments being positive, but 27.44% negative. This

reflects growing concern over their performance and independence. As Weber (1978) explains, bureaucratic legitimacy depends on transparency, rule-based conduct, and perceived neutrality.

In Tigray, however, increasing politicization especially the belief that local councils are becoming tools of TPLF loyalists has led many to question whether these bodies still serve the broader public or merely act as instruments of a particular political faction.

**Political Ideology:** Finally, the discourse surrounding political ideology revealed both strong loyalty and deep criticism. Although 82.80% of comments were positive, these often came from older generations or traditionalists. Meanwhile, the critical voices, particularly among the youth, argue that TPLF's ideological framework is outdated anchored in 1960s revolutionary theory that no longer resonates with 21st-century realities. Althusser (1971) highlights how ideology, institutionalized, can become a form of control unless it evolves to reflect contemporary needs. In the case of TPLF, many are now advocating for ideological renewal and the empowerment of a new generation of leaders with more relevant visions for governance and development.

In summary, this content analysis reveals simultaneously exposing fault lines related to leadership legitimacy, military influence, ideological stagnation, and external alliances. These findings align with academic perspectives on post-conflict transitions, which stress the importance of institutional credibility, public accountability, and ideological renewal in building a sustainable peace.

### C. Engagement Metrics and Sentiment Trends

NO	Activist page name	No likes	No shares	No comments	Comments		
					Positive comments	Negative comments	Neutral comments
1	Mezeker Abadi Zemo	1582	138	169	132(78%)	24(14%)	13(8%)
2	Desye Ashenafi	1265	143	534	315(59%)	203(38%)	16(3%)
3	Ztseat Save AdnaAnanya	509	51	118	61(52%)	54(46%)	3(2%)
4	Aula Solomon	2146	101	178	121(68%)	53(30%)	4(2%)
5	Daniel Birhane	1339	36	84	60(71%)	21(25%)	3(4%)
6	Senait Mebrahtu	708	81	206	119(58%)	80(39%)	7(3%)
7	Seb Ziseane Seb	326	117	244	134(55%)	100(41%)	10(4%)
8	Basha Desta	865	68	310	158(51%)	136(44%)	16(5%)
9	Stalin Gebreslasie	1986	164	622	-	-	-
10	Fetawi Lewti	262	23	68	54(80%)	8(12%)	6(8%)

Table 2: Engagement and Sentiment on Face book Posts by Tigrayan Activists

The table presents data from 10 prominent Tigrayan Facebook activists divided into two political camps: pro-Getachew Reda (first 5) and pro-Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael (last 5), analyzing their engagement (likes, shares, comments) and the sentiment of comments (positive, negative, neutral).

**1. Engagement Metrics:** The engagement metrics specifically likes, shares, and comments provide valuable insights into how Facebook users interact with content related to the post-COHA Tigray political crisis. Among the sampled activists, Aula Solomon (2,146 likes) and Stalin Gebreslasie (1,986 likes) received the highest number of likes, indicating that their content resonated strongly with followers, possibly due to their consistent messaging or alignment with widely held views. High like counts often reflect approval or support, suggesting that these activists hold influence in shaping public sentiment online.

In terms of shares, Stalin Gebreslasie (164 shares) and Desye Ashenafi (143 shares) led, which implies that their posts were considered impactful or provocative enough to be redistributed. Scholars such as Papacharissi (2015) argue that sharing behavior often signals emotional engagement or perceived importance, which supports the notion that these posts likely contained emotionally charged or polarizing narratives. Interestingly, pro-Getachew pages such as Mezeker, Aula, and Daniel consistently garnered more likes per post, suggesting that their content either appealed to broader audiences or aligned more closely with dominant online

discourse, particularly among younger, reform-oriented users. Comments, however, present a more nuanced picture. The most commented posts came from Stalin Gebreslasie (622 comments) and Desye Ashenafi (534 comments), indicating that their content stimulated significant discussion, debate, or even disagreement.

. This pattern supports Tufekci's (2017) argument that engagement is not merely a measure of popularity but also of contestation and visibility, where high comment counts can signify both support and criticism. Overall, the metrics reflect how Facebook serves not only as a tool for dissemination but also as a space for contesting political narratives in Tigray's evolving crisis context.

- 2. Sentiment Distribution**the sentiment analysis of follower comments provides insight into how the public emotionally engages with the narratives advanced by Facebook activists during the post-COHA Tigray political crisis. Among pro-Getachew activists, the overall trend indicates a strong positive sentiment, suggesting that their content is largely viewed as credible, reform-oriented, and aligned with the aspirations of a substantial portion of their audience. This reflects a level of trust and approval toward messages that emphasize change or critique of the status quo, particularly from figures perceived as forward-looking or diplomatically active.

However, an exception to this pattern is Desye Ashenafi, whose posts attracted a notably high rate of negative sentiment (38%). This likely stems from his frequent and direct criticisms of the Debretsion faction, as well as the provocative tone of his rhetoric, which may alienate some followers even as it energizes others. In contrast, sentiment around pro-Debretsion activists tends to skew more negatively. This trend suggests a broader public disagreement or emotional resistance to their messaging.

The higher levels of negative sentiment in this group may reflect skepticism toward the perceived status quo or dissatisfaction with the leadership associated with the TPLF's historical governance. Importantly, this camp often mobilizes through critique and emotionally charged language an approach that does generate attention and interaction but also invites backlash. This aligns with Papacharissi's (2015) observation that emotional expression in digital spaces often drives engagement, even when it polarizes. Therefore, while both activist groups attract

significant attention, the nature of emotional responses varies indicating differing levels of resonance, legitimacy, and public receptiveness to their political messaging on Facebook.

### **3. Political and Social Implications**

#### **A. Polarization**

The sharp contrast in sentiment between activists shows that the Tigrayan online community is deeply divided along factional lines. Activists such as Basha Desta and Senait Mebrahtu demonstrate that engagement does not always equal support many followers are interacting critically.

This polarization undermines collective action, fosters internal mistrust, and shifts online engagement from solidarity to confrontation. Moreover, high interaction levels do not necessarily indicate support, as many users engage critically or antagonistically, complicating efforts to measure genuine public consensus or mobilize unified political movements.

#### **B. Echo Chambers**

Pages with high positive sentiment (Mezeker Abadi Zemo, Fetawi Lewti) may reflect ideological echo chambers, where opposing views are filtered out and followers reinforce the activist's position. In contrast, Desye Ashenafi and Basha Desta seem to attract cross-factional interaction, possibly due to provocative or controversial posts.

#### **C. Influence Strategy**

Pro-Getachew activists appear to frame their posts around reform, generational change, and accountability, which appeals to segments seeking political renewal. In contrast; Pro-Debretsiion activists frame their discourse around betrayal, resistance, and historical continuity, appealing to those who value loyalty to the original TPLF vision.

To conclude, this table illustrates a complex landscape of digital political activism, where engagement does not always reflect consensus, and emotional sentiment reveals the depth of political division within the Tigrayan public. Facebook has become not only a battleground of ideas but also a mirror reflecting polarization, echo chambers, and factional contestation over legitimacy, sovereignty, and future leadership.

## **4.6. The Role of Face book in the Tigray Political Crisis:**

The analysis of interview data reveals that Facebook has played a paradoxical role in the political crisis in Tigray, particularly in relation to the internal fragmentation of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

### **4.6.1. A Platform for Democratic Expression and Pluralism**

Participants in the study emphasized that Facebook created a virtual space where citizens could express their political views freely, critique leadership, and share alternative perspectives. This shift was significant in light of the TPLF's historically centralized and hierarchical political dominance. As a networked public sphere, Facebook enabled individuals both within Tigray and in the Diaspora to engage in political discourse beyond the boundaries of party loyalty or state control (Papacharissi, 2010). Similarly, respondent R24 (April 4, 2025) stated that:

Facebook gave us a chance to speak out without fear. We could criticize leaders, discuss ideas, and hear from others who felt the same pain or disappointment. Before, we had no space to ask questions. Now, through Facebook, we can debate leadership failures and propose better solutions.

This response illustrates, in a previously restricted communicative environment, digital platforms like Facebook have provided alternative public spheres where marginalized voices could be heard and political discussions could flourish. Scholars such as Castells (2012) have argued that social media platforms act as “networks of outrage and hope,” enabling users to connect, challenge dominant power structures, and organize around shared grievances. The ability to openly question leadership and articulate dissatisfaction once suppressed in traditional public spaces has been reactivated through digital engagement.

The respondent's remarks also suggest a deeper function of Facebook: fostering political accountability. As he noted, “ordinary Tigrayans are asking: ‘Who is responsible?’ ‘Why did we go to war?’ ‘What did we gain or lose?’” These critical questions signal a collective demand for transparency and accountability an essential component of democratic governance. This aligns with Dahlberg's (2007) theory of the digital public sphere, where online platforms provide citizens with the means to deliberate on political matters, hold leaders accountable, and

contribute to democratic discourse. In this context, Facebook is not just a tool for information sharing but also a forum for civic engagement and political scrutiny.

Furthermore, the emergence of such conversations on Facebook supports Habermas's (1989) notion of deliberative democracy, wherein open dialogue and reasoned debate are foundational to holding authority accountable. Although Facebook is far from an idealized public sphere, its role in enabling Tigrayan citizens to publicly question political decisions and evaluate leadership choices marks a significant development in the region's political communication landscape.

In summary, the responses highlight that Facebook is serving as a catalyst for political awakening and collective introspection. It empowers users to shift from silence and submission to dialogue and demand for accountability a change that aligns with broader theoretical understandings of social media's democratizing potential.

#### **4.6.2. Fragmentation and the Spread of Misinformation**

Participants in the study emphasized that despite the positive aspects, Facebook was also identified as a significant contributor to internal division, particularly as the TPLF became split between factions perceived to align with either Debretsion Gebremichael or Getachew Reda.

Public disagreements between supporters of these figures were magnified on Facebook, leading to the polarization of public opinion and mistrust within the Tigrayan community. A recurring concern among interviewees was the intensifying polarization within the Tigrayan community, where individuals are increasingly labeled as either pro-Debretsion or pro-Getachew.

As Respondent R07 (interviewed on March 25, 2025) explained, "People now identify each other as pro-Debretsion or pro-Getachew. It's no longer about unity or Tigray. It's about choosing sides." This quote reflects a broader transformation from a shared political identity to factional division, indicating that online discourse is shaping offline social relationships.

Several interviewees also pointed to the negative role played by certain Facebook activists. Respondent R12 (March 25, 2025) noted, "Some activists are not helping. They attack leaders,

spread half-truths, and make everything more emotional. It's like adding fuel to the fire." This perspective suggests that online activism is not always constructive and may worsen tensions through emotionally charged or misleading content.

The real-world implications of this division were powerfully captured by Respondent R19 (April 4, 2025), who warned, "We may end up fighting each other. One group might go with Ethiopia, another with Eritrea. That's how divided we are becoming." This statement highlights the potential consequences of online polarization, which, if unchecked, could lead to more political fragmentation and societal breakdown.

These concerns align with the findings of Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018), who demonstrated that false and emotionally provocative information spreads faster than accurate content on social media platforms. Facebook's algorithm, which prioritizes engagement, may be contributing to this trend by amplifying sensational posts.

Respondents frequently encountered fake screenshots, manipulated narratives, and misleading rumors in their feeds. As Respondent R23 (April 4, 2025) shared, "Sometimes I believe what I read. Then I find out it's not true. But the damage is already done people are angry, scared, and divided."

Overall, the data suggests that Facebook is not just a tool for political communication but a significant factor in deepening social divides. The combination of algorithmic bias and provocative activist content contributes to a fragmented information ecosystem, undermining efforts at unity and reconciliation in the post-war Tigray context.

#### **4.6.3. Dual Nature of Facebook's Influence**

Participants in the study stated that Facebook's role in the Tigray political crisis is best understood as dualistic. On one hand, it has contributed to the democratization of political discourse, enabling citizens to challenge entrenched power structures and articulate new visions for Tigray's future. On the other hand, it has also exacerbated internal fragmentation, spread misinformation, and created ideological fault lines within the TPLF and the broader society.

As respondent R08 (April 4, 2025) stated that, "Face book is our mirror. It shows who we are divided, emotional, grieving but also strong, determined, and politically awake." This dual

function reflects broader scholarly critiques of social media platforms, which emphasize that while they can empower grassroots movements, they also pose serious risks to unity, credibility, and collective political action (Tufekci, 2017; Castells, 2012).

#### **4.7. Civic Engagement and the Emotional/Psychological Influence of Face book Activism**

The fragmentation within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) following the signing of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) marked a significant turning point in the digital political landscape of the Tigray conflict. What had been a relatively unified voice of resistance on Face book transformed into a more polarized and emotionally volatile space. This section explores how Face book activism both facilitated civic engagement and exerted emotional and psychological effects on users particularly after the emergence of internal divisions within the TPLF leadership.

##### **4.7.1. Civic Engagement Intensified by Political Division**

A significant finding from the interviews is that the internal political division within the Tigrayan community particularly after the growing fragmentation of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has resulted in deep emotional and psychological strain. The increasing polarization between competing narratives on Face book, especially from activists aligned with different factions, has disrupted a sense of unity among Tigrayans and intensified anxiety, mistrust, and emotional fatigue.

Many respondents expressed distress over the conflicting narratives circulating on social media. Respondent R25 (March 25, 2025) explained that, “We used to be united by a common cause. Now, even among ourselves, we fight on Face book. It’s emotionally exhausting.” This sentiment reflects how internal political divisions, when amplified through social media activism, do not simply represent a difference in opinion but actively fragment communal solidarity and heighten emotional tensions.

Another participant R20 (April 7, 2025) explained that, “Each activist says the other is lying or working for the enemy. We don’t know who to trust anymore. This confusion is damaging us mentally.” This erosion of trust among activists and the public creates an environment of

suspicion and emotional instability, especially when those engaged are already under the psychological pressure of an unresolved conflict. As Papacharissi (2015) argues, digital platforms shape affective publics communities mobilized around shared emotions but when those emotions become fragmented, they can lead to divisive affective dynamics that damage collective identity.

Several interviewees stated that the rift within the TPLF leadership and the emergence of pro- and anti-TPLF activist blocs on Face book intensified feelings of betrayal, confusion, and grief. One Diaspora respondent R22 (April 7, 2025) shared that, “I used to support all Tigrayan activists, but now their posts attack each other. I feel like we are losing ourselves from the inside.” This aligns with Alexander’s (2004) concept of cultural trauma, where a community's internal rupture, if publicly narrated and emotionally amplified, becomes a shared psychological injury.

The political split has also led to online hostility, where individuals fear speaking out or expressing moderate views. Respondent R27 (March26, 2025) asserted that, “When you post something neutral or call for unity, both sides attack you. It’s mentally draining. You feel alone.” This reflects the impact of digital polarization, where activists and followers are locked in a binary conflict that leaves little room for reconciliation or critical dialogue. According to Sunstein (2001), such group polarization leads individuals to adopt more extreme views and reduces tolerance for internal disagreement, particularly in online echo chambers.

Moreover, the emotional toll is magnified by the sense of lost unity, which many Tigrayans had once relied on for collective strength during the early stages of the war. In addition respondentR09 (April 7, 2025) highlighted “We had hope because we were together. Now that hope is fading.” The psychological consequences include not only stress and sadness but also disillusionment, especially among youth and Diaspora members who had been active in digital campaigns for Tigray. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that the division of TPLF leadership and the rise of polarized Face book activism have profoundly impacted the emotional and psychological well-being of Tigrayans. Social media, once a platform for unity and collective resistance, has become a site of internal conflict, emotional distress, and growing alienation. The consequences are not only digital but deeply personal fracturing relationships,

undermining trust, and threatening the psychological resilience of an already traumatized community.

#### **4.7.2. Emotional and Psychological Impacts**

Facebook, as a dominant social media platform, plays a significant role in shaping users' emotional and psychological states. It influences how individuals perceive themselves, interact with others, and respond to ongoing socio-political events. These impacts can be both positive and negative, depending on the context of use and the nature of content consumed.

One of the most widely discussed psychological effects of Facebook is its influence on mental well-being. According to Kross et al. (2013), frequent use of Facebook can lead to a decline in users' moment-to-moment happiness and overall life satisfaction. Their study found that the more people used Facebook, the more their subjective well-being declined, suggesting a potential link between social media consumption and emotional distress. Moreover, Chou and Edge (2012) argue that Facebook users tend to believe others are happier and more successful than themselves, due to censored and idealized posts. This comparison effect can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and low self-esteem. Such emotional responses are particularly intensified during times of crisis or political conflict, when emotionally charged content dominates the platform.

In the context of political activism, such as the Tigray political crisis, Facebook serves as a space for emotional expression, solidarity, and resistance. However, it also exposes users to traumatic content, such as images of violence, suffering, and displacement, which can contribute to emotional exhaustion and secondary trauma. Bayer et al. (2018) describe this phenomenon as "emotional contagion," where users absorb the intense emotional states of others through repeated exposure to distressing posts. Furthermore, emotionally manipulative content, such as misinformation or highly polarized narratives, can provoke anxiety, fear, and anger among users. As Moreno et al. (2013) note, online interactions during politically charged times can amplify users' psychological stress and contribute to polarization, rather than constructive dialogue.

Despite the negative impacts, Facebook also offers emotional support and community building. It can be a platform for users to share experiences, gain empathy, and find psychological relief

through collective engagement. As Hampton et al. (2011) suggest, online communities can enhance social connectedness and emotional resilience, especially in societies undergoing conflict or disruption. In summary, the emotional and psychological impacts of Facebook are multifaceted. While it can empower and connect individuals, it can also increase emotional stress and psychological vulnerability, especially when users are exposed to intense political conflict or social comparison. These effects are crucial in understanding the broader implications of Facebook activism in the Tigray political crisis.

A civil servant respondent R24 (April 14, 2025), that:

The internal political division within the Tigrayan community particularly after the growing fragmentation of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has resulted in deep emotional and psychological strain. The increasing polarization between competing narratives on Face book, especially from activists aligned with different factions, has disrupted a sense of unity among Tigrayans and intensified anxiety, mistrust, and emotional fatigue.

This sentiment reflects how internal political divisions, when amplified through social media activism, do not simply represent a difference in opinion but actively fragment communal solidarity and heighten emotional tensions. Another participant R15 (April 14, 2025) added that, “Each activist says the other is lying or working for the enemy. We don’t know who to trust anymore.

This confusion is damaging us mentally.” This erosion of trust among activists and the public creates an environment of suspicion and emotional instability, especially when those engaged are already under the psychological pressure of an unresolved conflict. As Papacharissi (2015) argues, digital platforms shape affective publics communities mobilized around shared emotions but when those emotions become fragmented, they can lead to divisive affective dynamics that damage collective identity. Several interviewees stated that the rift within the TPLF leadership and the emergence of pro- and anti-TPLF activist blocs on Face book intensified feelings of betrayal, confusion, and grief.

One Diaspora respondent R21 (March26, 2025) stated that, “I used to support all Tigrayan activists, but now their posts attack each other. I feel like we are losing ourselves from the

inside.” This aligns with Alexander’s (2004) concept of cultural trauma, where a community's internal rupture, if publicly narrated and emotionally amplified, becomes a shared psychological injury. The political split has also led to online hostility, where individuals fear speaking out or expressing moderate views.

Similarly respondent R06 (April 26, 2025) emphasized that, “When you post something neutral or call for unity, both sides attack you. It’s mentally draining. You feel alone.”

This reflects the impact of digital polarization, where activists and followers are locked in a binary conflict that leaves little room for reconciliation or critical dialogue. According to Sunstein (2001), such group polarization leads individuals to adopt more extreme views and reduces tolerance for internal disagreement, particularly in online echo chambers.

### **4.7.3. Polarization and Algorithmic Reinforcement**

A critical finding of this research is the role that Facebook’s algorithmic design plays in reinforcing political polarization among Tigrayan users. Several interviewees observed that their Face book feeds are dominated by posts that match their political views or emotional state.

One participant R10 stated that, “The more I like or comment on posts supporting my side, the more I see the same kind of posts. I rarely see the other side unless someone shares it to criticize.” This perception directly corresponds with scholarly insights into algorithmic filtering. As Pariser (2011) explains, Face book’s algorithm prioritizes content based on prior engagement, creating “filter bubbles” that limit exposure to opposing views and foster ideological isolation.

Respondent R07 (March 25, 2025), noted that, “The posts I see are always emotional full of anger or grief. It’s like Face book wants me to stay angry.” This reflects how emotionally intense content is often rewarded by Face book’s algorithms due to higher engagement rates.

According to Tufekci (2017), social media platforms are engineered to amplify content that triggers strong emotional responses such as outrage, fear, or moral condemnation because such content drives longer user attention and interaction. The result is a cycle of emotional

polarization, where users not only become more entrenched in their views but also emotionally reactive toward those who disagree.

This was evident a respondent R22(April 7, 2025) stated that, “Now, I don’t even talk to some of my relatives. They believe the other activists. Face book made us enemies.” This speaks to Sunstein’s (2001) theory of group polarization, which holds that like-minded groups, when insulated from counter-arguments, tend to become more extreme in their beliefs. Respondent 12 (March 25, 2025), observed:

If you post something balanced or critical of both sides, nobody cares. But if you attack someone or show anger, it gets hundreds of likes. That pressure shapes how people write, and also how they feel.

This aligns with Bernal's (2006) assertion that digital activism in Diaspora and conflict communities are often intensified by the absence of accountability and the amplification of emotion. These echo chambers not only polarize the political space but also place psychological strain on users who navigate competing truths and constant conflict.

Interviewees also noted that Face book's algorithm seems to reward divisive content more than calls for unity. Respondent 08 (April 4, 2025) expressed frustration, saying, “When someone posts something peaceful or asks for dialogue, it gets ignored. But when someone attacks the other side, it goes viral.” This supports Bail et al. (2018), who found that algorithmic curation systems often prioritize posts that provoke strong reactions thus escalating polarization even among users who might originally hold moderate views.

#### **4.8. Tigray Face book Activists and the Political Narrative: Discourse Framing and Influence**

The findings of this study reveal that Tigrayan activists on Face book have played a critical role in shaping political discourse through deliberate framing and narrative construction, particularly in the aftermath of the division within the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). As internal political fractures emerged, activists increasingly framed events and actors in contrasting terms, creating divergent discourses that influenced public understanding, loyalty, and engagement across the Tigrayan community.

Several interviewees noted a shift in online narratives from unified resistance during the early stages of the war to fragmented and contested interpretations of the political situation. Respondent R25 (March 25, 2025) said that, “Before, most activists were speaking in one voice against the external threat. But now, they argue about who is betraying Tigray from within.” This reflects a transition from a collective, externalized conflict narrative to an internal discourse of blame and political rivalry.

The activists' use of framing is a key mechanism in this shift. As Entman (1993) defines, framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient to promote a particular interpretation. In this case, activists aligned with different political camps began to frame the TPLF leadership either as liberators betrayed by internal enemies or as outdated elites obstructing democratic reform.

Respondent R22 (April 7, 2025) explained that, “Depending on who you follow, you get a completely different picture of who is right and who is corrupt.” This finding aligns with Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) theory that media framing provides interpretive packages that help people make sense of political developments. Facebook activists in Tigray function as influential political communicators, offering narrative frames that simplify complex political events into emotionally resonant binaries: heroes vs. traitors, patriots vs. collaborators, resistance vs. surrender.

The discourse has also become increasingly performative and emotionally charged. Several respondents described how activists appeal to historical trauma, sacrifice, and nationalist pride to legitimize their perspectives. Interviewee R24 (April 4, 2025), stated that, “Each group uses our pain what we went through during the war to justify their side. It’s like they weaponize our suffering.” This finding resonates with Wodak's (2015) Discourse-Historical Approach, which explains how political narratives draw on collective memory and national identity to persuade audiences and mobilize support. Importantly, these competing activist narratives have real-world implications.

Respondents described how discourse on Face book influences public trust in political leaders, support for new movements, and even decisions to participate in protests or reject calls for negotiation. Respondent 23(April 4, 2025) said that:

I changed my view completely because of the way some activists explained what really happened behind closed doors. They exposed things the media would never tell us.

This speaks to the growing agenda-setting and persuasion power of activists acting outside traditional media channels (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). However, the findings also point to the polarizing effect of these competing discourses. The rise of faction-based framing has made cross-political dialogue increasingly difficult. Respondent 25 (March 25, 2025) noted that, “You’re either with us or against us there’s no middle ground anymore. Activists make sure of that.” This confirms Papacharissi’s (2015) argument that digital platforms create “affective publics” driven by emotional allegiance rather than deliberative debate.

In conclusion, Tigrayan activists have become powerful political narrators, using Face book to frame events, interpret political developments, and influence public opinion in a deeply divided context. Their discourse reflects and reinforces the fragmentation of Tigrayan political identity following the TPLF split. Through selective framing, emotional appeal, and strategic use of history, activists are not only informing but also polarizing their audiences reshaping political consciousness in the digital era.

#### **4.9. Potential Consequences of Facebook Use in the Tigray Political Crisis**

In the aftermath of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in 2022, Facebook has remained a powerful force shaping the political consciousness of Tigrayans. While it offers unprecedented opportunities for civic engagement, the platform’s impact in the post-conflict landscape is deeply ambivalent. This section consolidates the findings into three critical themes: (1) Political Polarization and Fragmentation, (2) Civic Empowerment and Democratic Expression, and (3) Generational Shift and Demands for Reform.

### **4.9.1. Political Polarization and Fragmentation**

The most pressing concern emerging from the data is Facebook’s role in intensifying political polarization and internal fragmentation within Tigray. Interviewees consistently voiced fears that factionalism between pro-Getachew and pro-Debretsion groups, magnified through Facebook discourse, could lead to intra-community conflict. Participant R20 (April 7, 2025) warned, “We Tigrayans may divide into two sides and fight each other.” This reflects what Sunstein (2001) calls “group polarization,” where online echo chambers push individuals toward more extreme positions. Facebook’s algorithmic prioritization of sensational content exacerbates this division. Participants noted that “activists are adding fuel to the fire,” a sentiment that mirrors Cinelli et al. (2021), who argue that engagement-driven platforms amplify polarized narratives.

The digital battleground has thus shifted from unifying resistance to factional conflict, reducing space for moderate voices and increasing mistrust among politically active youth. Moreover, public trust in traditional leadership has eroded. Interviewee R10 (April 26, 2025) stated that, “No one speaks for us all anymore.” This aligns with Castells’ (2012) notion of “networked disillusionment,” where transparency through social media undermines institutional legitimacy. Without trusted leadership, political influence increasingly falls to unaccountable digital actors, whose narratives can destabilize collective identity and peace building efforts.

### **4.9.2. Civic Empowerment and Democratic Expression**

Despite these risks, Facebook has also democratized political voice in Tigray. Marginalized groups rural citizens, women, the displaced now participate in political discourse once dominated by elites. One female respondent from a displaced area emphasized, “Before, no one listened to us. Now we post, comment, and people hear us.” This resonates with Castells (2012), who highlights the empowering nature of the networked public sphere.

Facebook has also helped dismantle the culture of political fear. Criticism of TPLF leadership, once unthinkable, is now common. As participant R06 (April 26, 2025) shared, “Now, we criticize openly, but in the past, we used to whisper.” Drawing from Foucault’s (1980) concept of discourse as power, this shift marks a critical moment in Tigray’s political evolution: a break from monolithic narratives and the emergence of pluralistic dialogue. This digital

transformation has contributed to a broader democratic awakening. Citizens now use the platform to propose reforms, demand accountability, and advocate for inclusive governance.

### **4.9.3. Generational Shift and Youth-Led Reform**

The final and perhaps most transformative theme is the emergence of a youth-led political movement. Young Tigrayans, especially those in the Diaspora, are using Facebook to challenge entrenched power structures and demand visionary leadership. As participant R06 (April 26, 2025) declared, “The older generation led us here. Now it’s our turn to rebuild.” This sentiment reflects Inglehart and Welzel’s (2005) theory of self-expression values, where younger generations prioritize autonomy, accountability, and innovation.

These youth-driven conversations are not merely reactive; they represent a new phase of political imagination. Facebook is not only a site of critique but also a space for vision-building where leadership renewal, gender inclusion, and participatory democracy are openly debated. While risks of polarization and radicalization remain, the digital space has also enabled the articulation of hopeful alternatives to Tigray’s post-war future.

## Chapter Five

### 5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### 5.1. Summary of Major Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Facebook has played a complex and highly influential role in the political discourse and civic engagement of Tigrayans following the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA). The data, drawn from interviews and content analysis, show that Facebook functions simultaneously as a tool for political empowerment and a platform for fragmentation.

Firstly, the study finds that Facebook has emerged as a vital platform for civic engagement, especially among youth, women, and Diaspora communities. It has allowed previously marginalized voices to participate in the political sphere, challenge authority, and shape public discourse. The concept of "voice for the voiceless" was repeatedly cited by participants, reflecting a digital democratization of political dialogue. Activists have used the platform to share updates, mobilize opinion, and criticize decisions made by the TPLF leadership particularly in relation to the peace agreement and party leadership.

Secondly, the findings highlight the emotional and psychological impact of Facebook activism. For many users, the platform serves as a space of emotional release and identity negotiation. While some expressed feelings of empowerment and connection, others voiced fear, confusion, and exhaustion, particularly in response to hostile online debates and divisive content. The rise of internal divisions often characterized as "pro-Getachew" vs. "pro-Debretsion" camps has further intensified this emotional strain.

Thirdly, the study reveals both positive and negative consequences of Facebook activism in post-COHA Tigray. On the positive side, Facebook has fostered a sense of political awakening and reduced fear of speaking out against the ruling party. It has encouraged demands for reform, transparency, and generational change, especially among youth. On the negative side, however, the platform has amplified polarization, eroded trust in traditional institutions, and increased

fears of intra-regional conflict. Some participants warned of the possibility that online hostility could spill into real-world violence if left unchecked.

Lastly, the research finds that Face book is reshaping political legitimacy and leadership dynamics in Tigray. The party's internal fragmentation has been magnified online, resulting in a crisis of representation and a declining sense of collective identity. Activists are not only reacting to events but actively influencing political narratives, making Face book a central arena for both contestation and mobilization.

In summary, Face book activism in post-COHA Tigray is a double-edged phenomenon: it provides a space for democratic expression and mobilization, while also posing serious risks to social cohesion and peace. The platform's growing influence calls for urgent attention to digital media literacy, dialogue facilitation, and ethical activism to harness its positive potential and mitigate its harms.

## **5.2. Conclusions**

The role of Face book in the Tigray political crisis has been transformative, reflecting both the immense power and the significant limitations of social media as a tool for political activism. This study explored the multifaceted influence of Face book activists on shaping the political discourse surrounding the Tigray conflict, particularly following the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement for Humanitarian Access (COHA). The findings underscore the importance of Face book as a platform for mobilization, information dissemination, and the construction of political narratives, while also highlighting the negative consequences of misinformation, polarization, and fractured political discourse.

Facebook empowered Tigrayans both within the region and in the Diaspora to share firsthand accounts of the conflict, document human rights abuses, and organize global advocacy efforts that captured the world's attention. These online actions were crucial in bypassing the Ethiopian government's media restrictions, thereby providing a channel for alternative narratives to emerge. Activists used Facebook to challenge the official government portrayal of the crisis, framing it as a humanitarian disaster and calling for international intervention. The immediacy

and reach of Face book allowed for real-time reporting, which helped mobilize support and raise awareness of the situation on a global scale.

However, while Face book allowed for the amplification of critical voices and the distribution of vital information, it also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation. The platform's open nature allowed unverified content to circulate freely, which often distorted public perception of the conflict and deepened political polarization. False or exaggerated claims, especially when shared by high-profile users or groups, contributed to confusion and hindered the international community understands of the crisis. Moreover, Face book's algorithmic structure, which promotes sensational and emotionally charged content, further exacerbated this issue by amplifying posts that were highly divisive or inflammatory.

In the context of the Tigray crisis, Face book also became a site for the internal political fragmentation of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the broader Tigrayan community. After the COHA was signed, Face book played a pivotal role in shaping the debate over its effectiveness, with activists using the platform to either endorse or criticize the agreement. These competing narratives often reflected broader political divides within Tigray, undermining efforts to achieve unity and stability. Face book, rather than fostering reconciliation, became a tool for amplifying dissent, deepening political divisions, and exacerbating tensions between various factions.

The study concluded that while Face book played a critical role in raising global awareness and facilitating activism during the Tigray crisis, it also contributed to the fragmentation of political discourse and the spread of misinformation. The platform's unregulated nature and its role in political polarization underscore the need for a more responsible, ethical, and regulated approach to social media activism in conflict zones.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to harness the positive potential of Face book activism while mitigating its risks in the context of the Tigray political crisis post-COHA:

#### **Promote Digital Media Literacy and Critical Thinking**

To combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation, rising polarization, and emotionally manipulative content online, civil society organizations, educators, and local media institutions should take the lead in launching targeted media literacy campaigns, particularly aimed at youth and politically active communities. Additionally, it is essential to encourage users to reflect on the psychological and social impact of their online activism, fostering a more mindful and responsible digital environment.

#### **Encourage Constructive Digital Engagement**

Activists and content creators should be encouraged to use Face book responsibly by:

1. Promoting dialogue over division and fact-based critiques over personal attacks.
2. Prioritizing peace building narratives and inclusive language.
3. Creating online spaces that allow for diverse political opinions without fear or hostility.

#### **Institutionalize Digital Ethics among Activists**

Facebook activists should adopt community guidelines or ethical charters to regulate the tone, accuracy, and objectives of their activism, while also recognizing their influential role in shaping public discourse and being held accountable for inciting division or hate.

#### **Foster Youth Inclusion and Political Dialogue**

To channel the energy of youth activism constructively:

- 1 Local leadership, including TPLF and other emerging political actors, should engage directly with youth voices online and offline.
- 2 Dialogue forums should be created both digital and in-person where young people can propose reforms, critique leadership, and envision Tigray's future.

### **Rebuild Trust through Transparency and Communication**

To rebuild trust, political leaders should communicate their decisions clearly and consistently through social media, while trusted intermediaries such as journalists, scholars, and civic leaders can help interpret complex political events to minimize speculation and reduce emotional reactions.

### **Collaborate with Facebook and Tech Platforms**

Advocacy groups should pressure Facebook to improve its moderation of hate speech, factional misinformation, and incitement to violence in Tigrinya and other local languages, while also encouraging the platform to partner with local NGOs for rapid response to harmful content.

### **Support Mental Health for Politically Active Users**

Counseling and mental health services should be made available for individuals overwhelmed by political content or cyber bullying.

## **5.4. Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings of this study reveal the significant yet complex role Facebook activism plays in the context of the Tigray conflict, including its influence on public discourse, political alignment, and community mobilization. However, the study also uncovers several gaps and limitations that warrant deeper investigation.

While Facebook emerged as a dominant platform, the role of other social media networks such as Twitter and Telegram in shaping political narratives remains underexplored. Moreover, demographic factors like gender, age, and diaspora status appear to influence patterns of digital engagement but were not fully examined in this research.

Additionally, although this study focused on online activism, the offline implications such as protest participation, aid coordination, and political campaigning present rich areas for future inquiry.

Finally, the state's response to Facebook activism, including surveillance, suppression, or internet shutdowns, raises critical questions about digital rights and democratic expression in Ethiopia that merit further scholarly attention.

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## Appendices:

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

#### Semi-Structured Interview Questions Used for Data Collection

1. How do you use Facebook to follow or engage with political discussions related to Tigray?
2. What narratives or themes do you often encounter from activists supporting Dr. Debretsion or Getachew Reda?
3. How do these narratives influence your political understanding or engagement?
4. Do you think Facebook activism contributes to peacebuilding or division in Tigray?
5. What is your perception of the legitimacy of the Interim Regional Administration led by Getachew Reda?
6. What are your thoughts on the role of the historical TPLF and its leadership under Dr. Debretsion?

#### Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Gender	Age Range	Occupation	Location
R19	Male	26–35	University Lecturer	Mekelle
R27	Female	18–25	Student	Abyi ADI
R15	Male	36–45	Civil Servant	Diaspora (UAE)
R24	Female	26–35	NGO Worker	AbyiAdi
R10	Male	46–60	Former TPLF Member	Mekele

### Appendix C: List of Coded Themes and Subthemes

No	Main Theme	Subthemes
1	Facebook Use for Mobilization	Campaigns, Hashtags, Community Building
2	Public Perception and Engagement	Opinion Shaping, Emotional Reactions, Solidarity Expression
3	Narrative Construction & Political Power	Countering/Supporting Politicians, Framing Conflicts
4	Unintended Consequences	Misinformation, Hate Speech, Polarization

### Appendix D: Sample Facebook Posts (Translated and Anonymized)

Pro-Getachew Example:

“Getachew Reda represents the change we’ve fought for. The Debretsion faction is stuck in the past. Reform is not betrayal its survival.”

Pro-Debretsion Example:

“The IRA is a puppet structure that has hijacked our sacrifices. Debretsion remains the only legitimate voice of the people of Tigray.”

### Appendix E: Thematic Coding Table

Code	Description	Sample Quote	Aligned Group
D04	Reformist Leadership	“Getachew listens to the youth”	Pro-Getachew
B03	Illegitimacy of IRA	“This administration was imposed on us”	Pro-Debretsion
M02	Corruption Accusations	“TPLF wasted our future with bad governance”	Pro-Getachew
S01	Betrayal of Resistance	“They joined our enemies to dismantle TPLF”	Pro-Debretsion