

Predictors of Hate Speech Propagation and on Facebook Among the Youth in Ethiopian Government Universities: Evidence from Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities

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Abstract

Though the issue of hate speech is not a new phenomenon in Ethiopia, its visibility has increased due to its propagation specifically through social media inducing political and social instability among the youth and beyond. There had been no theoretical /empirical studies examining the predictors that propagate Hate Speech on Facebook among University youth in Ethiopia. This study aimed to assess the propagation and predictors of hate speech on Facebook among the youth in Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities. The study employed cross-sectional survey design to pool quantitative data from university youth enrolled in Eastern Ethiopia. Data was collected through self-developed structured questionnaires from a random sample of 377 university youth who claimed to be Facebook users. We adopted the Uses and gratifications theory and the 'social media logic' to explain the findings. The findings suggested that majority of the sampled youth have used Facebook for over six years and spent more than four hours a day. Paradoxical it may seem, the youth had both positive and negative attitude towards hate speech when they were exposed to ethnically-induced hate, albeit majority of them spread hate on purpose. The outcome of the multiple linear regression model revealed that attitude was the strongest predictor of hate speech followed respectively by exposure, purpose, level of education and age. Concerned stakeholders need to collaborate in media literacy education to tackle hate speech propagation among university youth.

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1. Introduction

With the advent of digital technology, communication among people has changed significantly. Social media platforms have been among the significant technological advances in the communication field in the last a few decades. These platforms are primarily used to connect people and help them share ideas, experiences, and observations. Social media platforms make it viable to comment, share, and review corporate and/or individual messages.

According to Ellison (2007), social media are defined as online communication channels that help the community interact in the public sphere by creating their own public profile and sharing their connections with others. There are several types of social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok, tumbler, snap chat, YouTube, pinterest, viber, Telegram, Whatsup, and Instagram. Each social media networking platform has its own features and communication systems, and the users have the freedom to choose which outlet they would use to gratify their needs. According to data from Statista.com, in 2022, Facebook was the leading social media platform with over 2.9 billion users, followed by YouTube, which had over 2.5 billion users. The most popular social media platform to date, Facebook, was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard University student. This social media platform has now become a part of the social lives of users. The platform provides opportunities for users to create and share content in multimedia formats.

Jürgen Habermas is noted to argue that digital platforms are freeing its users from “editorial guardianship of legacy media” (Habermas, 2021 cited in Barth et al, 2023, p. 210). In this line, Facebook provides an inexpensive communication medium, especially in the Global South,

which allows anyone to reach many users quickly at a time. Anyone with an Internet connection can publish content and anyone interested in the content can obtain it, representing a transformative revolution within society. However, this same potential of Facebook is greeted with the important challenge that the platform lends itself to be a space for discourses that are harmful to humanity at times. This challenge manifests itself in several forms of hate speech. Many countries are rapidly recognizing hate speech as a serious problem to date because it is difficult to limit its dissemination.

Facebook became a champion over other similar platforms invented in the 1990s in terms of attracting users with its technological features giving the leverage for users to create accounts by using fake identities and pseudonyms. It is difficult to identify one's identity even if one posts a large amount of hate speech. Things become more difficult because some want to share and propagate hate anonymously. Thus, although unintended, Facebook serves as a platform for propagating hate speech (Auvinen, 2012). The online media in general and Facebook in particular has facilitated for the creation of digital publics. The digital publics that were presumed to advance cohesive communication and rational integration were perceived to substantially propagate "irrational raging of a digital mob" by "polarizing and radicalizing conflicts" (Barth, Wagner, Raab & Wiegärtner, 2023, p. 210). Those mostly amount to hate speech. Hate speech has become a global problem. For instance, a report by the US Anti-Defamation League disclosed that 41% of Americans experienced online harassment in 2021 (Barth et al, 2023, p. 211).

Hate speech, according to the the European Court of Human Rights (2004), is defined as "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant

origin.” Hate speech is aimed at injuring, dehumanizing, harassing, intimidating, debasing, degrading, and victimizing the targeted groups and fomenting insensitivity and brutality against them (Cohen-Almagor, 2013). Consulting various scholarly literature Barth et al (2023, p. 216) operationalized hate speech as, “a form of communication in which individuals or groups of individuals are defamed on the basis of a collective, ascribed, and stigmatizing group characteristic (e.g., ethnicity, sex, religious affiliation, sexual orientation)”. Benesch (2014) explained hate speech as a problematic and catalyzing tool that magnifies the violence and hostility of particular individuals or groups.

As the pace of hate speech is constantly accelerating, ethnic tensions are increasing in several countries social media platforms being abused for propagating hate. Hate speech in Africa takes political, economic, and sociocultural dimensions, and the political dimension has the lion’s share in escalating it. The Rwandan genocide (1994), Kenya’s post-election events in 2008, Burundi’s post-election instability in 2015, the South Sudan steady conflict, and South Africa’s recent xenophobic violence against migrants are among the many political dimensions of hate speech. Hate speech has been used as a weapon for most political violence and disobedience in Africa (Chekol et.al, 2023). According to Tesfai (2016), Ethiopia is one of the African countries currently facing problems due to the spread of hate speech on social media.

In Ethiopia, Facebook has been abused by extremists in many instances to propagate violent forms of expression targeted to specific individuals or groups. Hence, the emboldening of tribalism, nationalism, and extremism is challenging the sense of togetherness and contributing to destruction. According to Mutsvairo (2016), Facebook is becoming a channel for hate speech, intolerance, and increased disempowerment that targets particular ethnicities, religions, genders, and so forth. Gagliardon (2014) contended

that Facebook contributes to the circulation of hate speech that violates basic human rights due to anonymous and pseudonymous usage on the platform.

In the past a few years, we observed conflicts in different parts of Ethiopia by which government higher education institutions became the target place for some groups to incite ethnically induced conflicts. Some may have arisen from the spread of hate speech on social media. This study assessed the propagation and predictors of hate speech on Facebook among youth in Haromaya and Dire Dawa Universities, Eastern Ethiopia. This is crucial, as hate speech on social media has become a challenge in Ethiopia and beyond, implicating the need for proper strategies to tackle its proliferation. We adopted the uses and gratifications theory, and the social media logic to explain the findings of the study.

Currently, Facebook users are observed to use the platform to propagate ethnically induced hates among diverse communities in Ethiopia. This problem received high-level attention, from which Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed gave a briefing to parliament on the issue in 2018 (ETV, October 2018). During the briefing, the Prime Minister highlighted the problem of hate speech on Facebook and other social media platforms. He stated that many people were trying to incite conflict among society and/or ethnic groups using these platforms. He also emphasized that the use of Facebook or other social media in Ethiopia is mostly based on political and ethnic motifs rather than dealing with social affairs. The government of Ethiopia issued a bill named “Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation” (Proclamation No. 1185 /2020). This bill aimed at regulating and curbing hate speech.

Hagos (2017) suggested that the opportunity to spread hatred through Facebook in Ethiopia has provided a safe haven for individuals, groups, and those who propagate extremist views, aiming to incite

ethnic tensions being anonymous. Kasilu (2014) assessed the way youth in Kenya utilized social media to spread ethnic hate speech during the 2013 Kenyan general elections, in which Facebook and Twitter played a vital role. Youth in higher education institutions in Ethiopia, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, are relatively more exposed to hate speech on Facebook (Chekol et al., 2023).

The question remains whether exposure to online hate and violence led the youth to contribute to its propagation. Previous studies seemed to be in divergence on this. Some argued exposure to hate may not necessarily result in its propagation (Celuch, Magdalena, et al. 2022). While others argued exposure to violence online fostered its propagation (Hawdon, Bernatzky & Costello, 2019). Moreover, there is no sufficient evidence on the purpose of the youth in consuming or propagating hate speech and the determinants of hate propagation on social media. The purpose of this study was to investigate the purpose and predictor variables for the propagation of hate speech by youth in Ethiopian Universities. Specifically, this study aimed to

- To assess the purpose of youth in Government Universities in Eastern Ethiopia in utilizing Facebook.
- To assess the exposure of youth in Government Universities in Eastern Ethiopia to an ethnic-oriented hate on Facebook
- To identify the strongest predictor variable that propagates hate speech on Facebook among the youth at Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities.

2. Theoretical Framework

We adopted the uses and gratifications approach (Blumler and Katz 1974; Katz, 1979) and the conceptions of the ‘social media logic’ (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) that are deemed relevant to this specific study.

The Uses and gratification approach suggests that users play an active role in choosing media and consuming content. Users actively participate in the communication process and are goal-oriented in their

media use. The exponents of the theory argue that a media user seeks a media source that best fulfills their needs (Blumler and Katz, 1974). Uses and gratifications assume that media users have alternate choices for gratifying their needs. This is relevant to social media use in Ethiopia, where citizens of diverse backgrounds embrace a social media platform that satisfies their needs. Social media also comes with some anonymity factor whereby users can easily assume fake personalities and pseudonyms to make it easy for them to do what they need to do on social media, without revealing their true identity. Studies on uses and gratification theory also suggest that audience activity is within a range. According to Ruggiero (2009), “different individuals tend to display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process.” In this way, the uses and gratifications approach shifted the emphasis of communication research from answering the questions “what do media do to people?” (Katz, 1979) to “what active audience members do with the media” (Katz, 1979).

van Dijck and Poell (2013) in their oft-cited seminal work explained the social media logic. Social media for them include a group of platforms on the internet that facilitated a user-generated content and production. The nature and operations of the technology fostered for online connectivity and online social networks and ease of communication. They operationalized the social media logic as referring to “the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic”. In their explication of the ‘social media logic’ van Dijck and Poell, (2013) outlined four important elements: *programmability*, *popularity*, *connectivity*, and *datafication*. Programmability is conceived as, “the ability of a social media platform to trigger and steer users' creative or communicative contributions, while users, through their interaction with these coded environments, may in turn influence the flow of communication and

information activated by such a platform” (P. 5). This is due to the amenability of the technology and its algorithm for a ‘two-way traffic’ and user agency. Popularity refers to the social media’s capability in “pushing "likeable" people to become media personalities; depending on their ability to play the media and lure crowds, a variety of actors, from politicians to entertainers, accumulated mass attention, often achieving the status of celebrity” (p.6). The third element in the social media logic, *connectivity*, “refers to the socio-technical affordance of networked platforms to connect content to user activities and advertisers” (p.7). van Dijck and Poell (2013) cited Mayer-Schoenberger and Cukier (2013), to define *datafication* as “the ability of networked platforms to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before” (p.9).

3. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted at two government universities, Haramaya and Dire Dawa, which are situated in Eastern Ethiopia. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design (Saunders & Cornet 2004) and data were collected from the two universities simultaneously.

By the time we collected the data, in 2019/2020, there were forty-three government higher education institutions in Ethiopia. To collect relevant data and achieve the research purpose, data were collected from two institutions in the eastern part of Ethiopia. We first categorized Ethiopian higher education institutions into four major geographic clusters, as those situated in Eastern Ethiopia, Western Ethiopia, Northern Ethiopia and Southern Ethiopia. We then chose the Eastern cluster, from which Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities were randomly selected. The reason behind selecting these two higher education institutions was that they both are found in eastern part of Ethiopia and manageable for the researchers in terms of time and space. We purposively targeted university youth who claimed to use Facebook. There are two important reasons for this. First, Facebook is a dominantly used social media platform in Ethiopia. Evidence

showed that Facebook is the most popular social media with over 6.6 million users⁴ Second, youth in Ethiopia consume and propagate hate speech predominantly using Facebook (Hagos, 2017). We used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination formula.

$$n = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where

X^2 = table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the desired

confidence level (the table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the desired confidence level is 3.841)

N = the population size

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

The combined student population of the two universities during the study period was 23,517, of which Haromaya University had 11,517 students and Dire Dawa University had 12,000 students. The sample size was 377 students. Using the sample size obtained based on the above formula, a proportionate sample size was computed for each university. The proportional sample size was determined using the following formula:

$$no = \frac{n \cdot N1}{N}$$

Where

no= the proportion value

n= sample size

$N1$ = the number of the students in a given university

⁴<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312554/social-media-users-by-platform-in-ethiopia/>

N= total population

The proportionate sample sizes drawn for the Haromaya and Dire Dawa Universities were 185 and 192 students, respectively.

We used a self-administered questionnaire to gather data from youth who were Facebook users at the time of data collection. The survey was pre-tested for reliability of the scales we developed to measure the most important variables the study was set to measure. The pilot-test was conducted at Hawassa University, one of a government university, on 10 % (n=37 students) of the sample size of the actual survey. Based on feedback from the pilot study respondents, typographic errors were corrected for clarity. We conducted a reliability analysis of the scale's questions. Accordingly, 'hate speech' (the dependent variable) had five scale items. Likewise, the independent variables: 'purpose,' 'attitude,' and 'Exposure' also had 5 scale items each. The test revealed that all scales fulfilled the requirement, with a minimum score of 0.796 and a maximum of 0.866. The data were analyzed using both descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistical (multiple regression) methods. SPSS version 22 was used to analyze the data.

We used multiple regression analysis to understand the association between the variables, particularly to determine the strongest predictor of hate speech on Facebook among university youth in Ethiopia. The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \varepsilon$$

Where,

Y= Dependent variable (hate speech)

β_0 = constant which would be equal to the mean if all slope coefficients are 0

X1= purpose β_1 = unstandardized regression coefficient of purpose

X2= attitude β_2 = unstandardized regression coefficient of attitude

X3=exposure β_3 = unstandardized regression coefficient of exposure

X_4 = age β_4 = unstandardized regression coefficient of age

X_5 = level of educational year β_5 = unstandardized regression coefficient of level of educational year

ε = error term

4. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by Hawassa University, Department of Journalism and Communication, where the first author had to defend her master's thesis proposal in open public defence under the supervision of the second author. The questionnaire was distributed to the youth after verbal informed consent was obtained. The subjects were informed that all the information they provided was kept confidential. They were also informed that they were not required to write their names to maintain their anonymity. Participants were informed about their right to refuse participation or to terminate at any time. In addition, the study was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire that ensured participants' privacy and encouraged them to freely give their ideas.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of this study. For ease of presentation, we first deal with descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and move on to the regression analysis we conducted. The study participants were university youth aged between 18-23 years, with an educational level of first through fifth year university students.

Table 1 Respondents by number of years using Facebook

Number of years Using FB	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a year	30	9.5
1-2 years	63	19.3
3-4 years	39	12
5-6 years	65	19.9
Above 6 years	129	39.9

Source: Own survey

As presented in table-1, 39.9 % (N=129) used Facebook for more than six years. Thus, the majority of respondents had used Facebook for five years or more. Nearly one-in-five, 19.9 % (N=65) of the study participants used Facebook for 5-6 years. 19.3 % (N=63) and 12 % (N=39) had been using the social network for 1-2 and 3-4 years respectively. Approximately one in ten, 9.5% (N=30) of the study participants had been using Facebook for less than a year. This implies that most of the respondents had a good experience of using Facebook, as they seemed to start using Facebook since they were either in elementary or preparatory schools.

We asked study participants how long they used Facebook per day. The findings as presented in Table 2 suggest that majority of the study participants, 31.9 % (N=104) used Facebook for four hours a day, while 25.2 % (N=82) of the participants used Facebook for more than four hours a day. This implies majority, about 57 % of the youth were 'heavy' users of Facebook. The more an individual consumes media content, the more likely it is that the norms, beliefs, and attitudes portrayed on television (in our case, in the virtual world) are accurate representations of the real world (Gerbner, 1969; 1994; Morgan, 1982).

Table 2- Respondents by purpose of using Facebook, n=326

Items	SDA		DIS		NU		AG		SA		Mean	S. Dev.
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
to chat with my friends	48	15	59	18	4	1	110	34	105	32	3.5	1.4
to post a photo and video	32	10	54	18	32	10	118	3	85	26	3.5	1.3
for information or news	27	8	23	19	9	3	116	36	117	34	3.7	1.3
to spread opinion about issues	38	12	65	20	6	2	113	35	104	32	3.6	1.4
to share hate	36	11	66	20	15	5	126	39	83	26	3.6	1.4

5= SA, 4=AG, 3= NU,2=DIS 1=SDA

Source: Own survey

As portrayed in Table-2, majority of the respondents, 66% (n=215) agreed that they used Facebook to socialize (chat with their friends) ($Mean=3.5$, $SD=1.4$, $CFI=95\%$). Majority, 62% (n=203) of the respondents also used Facebook to post photos and videos ($Mean=3.5$, $SD=1.3$, $CFI=95\%$). Obtaining information/news was also one of the purposes of using Facebook for over two-in-three, 70% (n=233) of the respondents ($Mean=3.68$, $SD=1.3$, $CFI=95\%$). Slightly over two-in-three, 67% (n=217) of the Youth also used Facebook to spread their opinions regarding different issues ($Mean=3.6$, $SD=1.4$, $CFI=95\%$). Two-in-three of the respondents, 65% (n=199) also agreed that they used Facebook to share hate speech on social and/or political affairs ($Mean=3.6$, $SD=1.4$, $CFI=95\%$). The mean score of “I use Facebook to find out information or news” is the highest with the mean score of 3.7 ($SD=1.3$) followed by “I use Facebook to write/share hate speech regarding a particular issue” with the mean value 3.60 ($SD=1.4$).

Table 3 - Respondents by their understanding of hate speech, 326

Items	SD		D		NU		AG		SA		Mean	S. Dev
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Hate speech is speech or writing that attacks a person or groups on the basis of attributes such as ethnic, race, origin, sex, religion and nationality.	35	11	39	12	31	10	124	38	97	30	3.6	1.3
I am exposed to different kinds of hate speech on Facebook towards a social and political issue	48	15	38	9	16	5	95	29	137	42	3.8	1.5
An exposure with ethnic based post provokes me to write/share hate speech	38	12	52	16	18	6	122	37	96	29	3.6	1.4
I posted/shared different form of hate speech about ethnic issue and others because it's not crime	24	7	51	16	39	12	150	46	62	19	3.5	1.2

5= SA, 4=AG, 3= NU,2=DIS 1=SDA

Source: Own survey

Table-3 depicts that majority of the respondents, 68% (n=221), were aware of the conventional definition of hate speech (Mean=3.6, SD=1.3, CFI=95%). A significant majority of the respondents, 71% (n=232) agreed that they were exposed to different forms of hate speech on Facebook. Subsequently, two-in three, 65% (n=218) agreed that exposure to ethnic-oriented posts provoked them to write/share hate speech (Mean=3.6, SD=1.36, CFI=95%). A significant majority of the study participants, 65% (n=212) were of the view that people can post/share different forms of hate speech about political, social, and ethnic issues because it is the democratic right of a person and not a crime (Mean=3.8, SD=1.2, CFI=95%).

Table 4 - Respondents by their attitude towards hate speech, 326

Attitude towards hate speech	SD		D		N		A		SA		M	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	M	SD
As a right to freedom of expression, hate speech can be posted to attack a specific person or group(s)	25	8	63	19	21	6	128	39	89	27	3.6	1.3
I feel that nowadays hate speech is a problematic issue in Ethiopia	72	22	152	47	19	59	53	6	30	9	2.4	1.3
Posting/ sharing hate speech is considered as a crime	107	33	90	28	51	16	43	14	35	11	2.4	1.3
Writing/speaking hate speech is a part of freedom of speech	20	6	48	15	44	14	101	31	113	35	3.8	1.2
Posting, liking, commenting on hate speech targeting a specific person/group gives me satisfaction	44	14	43	13	35	11	108	33	96	29	3.5	1.4
When I encountered any hate speech directed against to me, I report/block it	49	15	50	15	22	7	59	18	146	45	3.6	1.5
When I encountered any hate speech directed against others I report/block	92	28	130	40	67	21	18	6	19	6	2.2	1.1

5= SA, 4=AG, 3= NU,2=DIS 1=SDA

Source: Own survey

As shown in Table 4, a significant majority of the respondents, 66% (n=237) agreed that hatespeech is content posted to attack a specific person or group ($Mean=3.6, SD=1.3, CFI=95\%$). Arguably, another significant majority of the respondents, 69% (n=224) disagreed that hate speech was a problem in Ethiopia ($Mean=2.4, SD=1.3, CFI=95\%$). In a similar vein, majority, 61% (n=197) of the

respondents disagreed that posting/ sharing hate speech was crime ($Mean=2.4$, $SD=1.3$, $CFI=95\%$). Over two-in-three, 66% ($n=214$) of the youth also agreed that writing/ speaking hate speech was tantamount to freedom of expression/ free speech ($Mean=3.8$, $SD=1.2$, $CFI,95\%$).Worrisome it may seem, a significant majority, 62% ($n=204$) of the respondents agreed that posting/liking/commenting on hate speech directed against aspecific person/group givesthem satisfaction ($Mean=3.5$, $SD=1.4$, $CFI=95\%$).Paradoxically, majority of the respondents, 63% ($n=205$) of them also agreed that they report/block any hate speech on Facebook against them ($Mean=3.6$, $SD=1.5$, $CFI=95\%$)while they felt that hate speech is a sort of freedom of expression when they do it.Over two-in-three, 68% ($n=222$) of the respondents also disagreed in reporting/blocking any hate *speech* directed against others ($Mean=2.2$, $SD=1.092$, $CFI=95\%$)although they bet to do it when it was targeted against themselves. In their move to ‘gratify their needs’ (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz, 1979), the youth seemed to oversee the fact that freedom had a concomitant obligation attached to it. Interestingly, the social media logic (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) seemed to foster for opportunities to posting, sharing, and blocking content very easily.

Table 5 respondents by Exposure to ethnic-oriented hate, $n=326$

Items	SD		D		NU		A		SA		M		SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
I encounter ethnic based post on Facebook towards my ethnic group/ other group	46	14	41	13	20	6	124	38	95	29	3.6	1.4	
When I watched/read hate speech about my ethnic group I became irritated	38	12	52	16	18	6	122	37	196	60	3.6	1.4	
When I got ethnic based post, I tried to induce conflict with	103	32	72	22	100	31	28	9	23	7	2.4	1.2	

that ethnic group (by sharing the post for example)												
My friends influence me to write/share hate speech about another ethnic group	46	14	43	13	13	4	127	39	97	30	3.6	1.4
While I read ethnic based post towards my ethnic group, I tried to react negatively	39	12	37	11	41	13	132	41	77	24	3.5	1.3
When I read ethnic based hate spread by influential activists/popular people against my ethnic group I respond negatively	48	15	30	9	16	5	95	29	137	42	3.8	1.5
When I read ethnic based post, I decide to stop using Facebook	79	9	104	15	46	7	41	19	56	50	2.7	1.4

5= SA, 4=AG, 3= NU,2=DIS 1=SDA

Source: Own survey

As shown in Table 5, majority of the respondents, 57% (n=219) encountered ethnically-motivated hate against their ethnic group/other ethnic groups ($Mean=3.6, SD=1.39, CFI=95\%$). A landslide majority, 97% (n=318) of the respondents claimed that they became irritated when they came across ethnic-oriented hate against their ethnic group ($Mean=3.6, SD=1.36, CFI=95\%$). Majority of the study participants, 54% (n=197) however, claimed that they did not try to induce ethnic conflict when exposed to ethnic-based post ($Mean=2.6, SD=1.29, CFI=95\%$). Peer pressure was one factor implicated in initiating hate speech by 69% (n=224) of the respondents ($Mean=3.6, SD=1.4, CFI=95\%$). About one-in-three of the study participants, 65% (n=209) claimed that they reacted negatively when they read ethnic-oriented posts against their group ($Mean=3.5, SD=1.3, CFI=95\%$). A significant Majority, 71% (n=232) of the youth also revealed that ethnically motivated posts spread by political/ethnic activists or popular people encouraged them to write and share hate

speech ($Mean=3.8$, $SD=1.5$, $CFI=95\%$). They, however, did not feel terminating using Facebook due to the volume of hate they face on Facebook ($Mean=2.7$, $SD=1.4$, $CFI=95\%$).

The majority of the study participants encountered hate speech targeting their ethnic identity and reported that they became irritated when exposed to such. They expressed their grievances by writing a hate speech; it is like ‘an eye-for-an eye.’ An important note here is that peer pressure and the influence of social activists, played a role in the youth’s decision to post or share an ethnically motivated hate.

These findings, however, need to be questioned, as the responses of the youth sometimes found to be inconsistent in the sense that they become irritated when their ethnic identity is targeted and hate speech is directed against them. They fought these by ‘blocking’ the person when they could, and responding to the same hate content otherwise. We believe we need to conduct a higher-level statistical analysis to interrogate these findings and to reveal the strongest predictor of hate speech among youth. We conducted a regression analysis to this end, taking hate speech as our dependent variable and five predictor variables: level of education (in years), age, exposure, purpose, and attitude.

Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R. Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.824a	0.679	0.674	0.46094

Predictors: (constant), level of education (in years), Age, Exposure, purpose, attitude.

Dependent Variable: hate Speech

After checking all the criteria that a regression model needs to fulfil, we developed a multiple regression model to determine the strongest predictor. The output has an R-squared value of 0.679. This implies that 67.9% of the variation could be explained by our model. Put in other words, the total variation in the dependent variables was explained or caused by 67.9% of the change in all the independent variables. Equally, 32.1% of the variations in hate speech could not be explained by this model.

Beta coefficients

We analyzed the beta coefficients to determine which predictor variables were significant predictors of the dependent variable when examined individually. The Unstandardized Beta coefficient shows the contribution of the individual variables, where the Beta Weight is the increment in the average amount of the dependent variable (hate speech) with an increase in the independent variable by one standard (all other independent variables held constant) (see Table-6). Standard beta values were calculated to examine the individual contributions of the independent variables in explaining the dependent variable. This was calculated by relating the dependent variable jointly with the independent variables (see Table-6).

Table 6- Beta coefficient analysis

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		standardized coefficient	T	Sig
	B	Std. Error	B		
Constant	0.538	0.1		4.284	0
Purpose	0.14	0	0.228	4.508	0
Attitude	0.505	0.1	0.525	8.624	0
Exposure	0.173	0.1	0.164	2.955	0.003
Age	-0.028	0	-0.027	-0.772	0.441
level of education in year	-0.024	0	-0.039	-1.112	0.267

The values for both unstandardized and standardized beta coefficients were determined. Standardized coefficients imply that the values for each of the predictor variables were converted into the same scale for comparison. To compare the impact of each variable, it is recommended to examine the standardized beta coefficient rather than the unstandardized beta coefficient.

In the methodology section, the model specification of the variables, it was said that as stated elsewhere, the unstandardized coefficients of Beta (β_1 up to β_5) are the coefficients of the estimated regression model we developed. In our case, the developed model of hate speech could be written by including an error term (ϵ), as shown below.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \epsilon$$

$Y = .538 + .140X_1 + .505X_2 + .173X_3 + (-.028) X_4 + (-.024) X_5 + .126$ (see Table-6)

The findings revealed that a change in the purpose of using Facebook results in an increment in the dependent variable, hate speech, by 14 percent (see Table-7). Attitude was found to be the strongest predictor of hate speech in our model, with a unit change in attitude towards hate speech resulting in an increase in hate speech by 50 percent. A unit change in exposure to ethic-oriented posts was found to affect hate speech by 17 percent. The other predictor variable was age: an increase in age resulted in a 28 percent decrease in hate speech. Likewise, an increase in the youths' level of education in years exhibited a 24 percent decrease in hate speech, keeping the other variables constant.

Thus, we can deduce that all of our predictor variables in the model (level of educational year, exposure, purpose, attitude, and age) have a significant influence on hate speech among youth in Ethiopian universities.

A closer look at the standardized coefficient column also explains the relative importance of the weight of each predictor/explanatory variable. This is achieved by expressing the β coefficients as the standard deviation with a mean of zero. The findings revealed that attitude was the strongest predictor of hate speech among youth, followed by exposure, purpose, level of education in years, and age.

This study aimed to investigate the propagation and predictors of hate speech among youth in government universities in Eastern Ethiopia. The findings were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The majority of the respondents used Facebook for five purposes, including information seeking, socializing with their Facebook friends, sharing a photo/video, and reflecting their opinions on a particular issue. The youth purposefully used Facebook to spread hate speeches on social and political affairs. Our findings are consistent with those of Wesseling (2012). Al-Dheleai & Tasir (2016) parted from our findings that higher education youth seem to have a positive purpose in their use of Facebook. Ellefsen (2015) conducted a qualitative study on youth in Higher Education, and the findings suggested that participants had a positive aim towards using Facebook.

In contrast, the present study revealed that the university youth who participated claimed that they purposively spread hate using Facebook. According to Hagos (2017), Facebook has become a safe haven for individuals, groups, and extremists in Ethiopia to post and spread toxic ideas that can lead to ethnic tension. Building on the extant body of work (e.g. Wesseling, 2012), this study regarded the 'purpose' of using Facebook as a significant predictor of what they intended to do with it. The findings proved our assumption as correct and our regression analysis testified that 'purpose' determined the propagation of hate speech.

From the social media logic perspective (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) though the social media presumably look neutral, their algorithms and

architecture, especially ‘datafication’ has the potential to filter issues to appeal to the ‘needs’ of users and to ‘lure’ them towards the message packed. The findings were also in line with those of Celuch et.al (2022) who claimed experiences with the Internet and social media for online hate acceptance. The feature of the platform in terms of its flexibility to post multimedia messages from anywhere and by any one, and the instant sharing provisions- programmability and connectivity in the words of the social ‘media logic’(van Dijck and Poell, 2013) facilitated for Facebook to lend itself to a speedy transfer of whatever content the audience was purposed to spread, including hate speech. In addition, According to Kinyamu (2012), social media went beyond just a platform for socialization and sharing funny videos. This went to the extent of influencing people’s opinions. For Kinyamu, social media can influence the world by impacting users’ opinions on sensitive issues, including political affairs and hate content. A recent study in Ethiopia suggested that Facebook accounts for the origination of 80% of fake news and misinformation (European Institute of Peace, 2021).

Another line of argument, in line with the uses and gratifications approach, is that the user determines what to do with the media, not otherwise. We, therefore, assumed the users’ need gratifications has to do with the ‘attitude’ and ‘educational level’ of the youth under study. Confirming our assumptions, the findings justified the ‘attitude’ of youth as a strong predictor of hate speech propagation. The youth under study went to the extent of claiming that spreading hate content gratified their needs and they did it on purpose, although they claimed that one source of motivation for such was the social activists they followed,-‘popularity’ in terms of the ‘social media logic’ conception (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). This testifies the role of ‘exposure’ as a propagating factor. The findings were correspondent with that of those Kansok-Dusche, et al (2022) in that they claimed hate speech is based on an intention to harm and it has the potential to cause harm on multiple different levels (e.g., individual, communal,

societal). ‘Exposure’ to hate content was one of the strong predictors for the youth under study to spread hate on Facebook. The findings were equivalent to those of Hawdon et.al (2019) whose findings stated individuals with larger social networks (i.e., exposed to more Facebook friends) are more likely to be exposed to online hate materials. The proliferation of hateful social media and ‘ethnic/social’ activists in Ethiopia fomented for the youth to consume and spread hate on purpose. This might be one of the conditions that led the government to promulgate and ratify a proclamation aimed at preventing hate speech and disinformation (Proclamation No. 1185/2020) (FDRE, 2020) that discussing its content is beyond the scope of this study. Hate speech is not endemic to Ethiopia; rather, it is a global issue. However, the extent of this problem may vary from context to context. This propagation of hate also concerned the UN in developing a strategy to tackle drivers (UN, 2019).

The majority of the participants used in this study held the opinion that hate speech was not a crime, although they had a positive attitude towards blocking hate speech on Facebook when directed against them and their ethnic group. There is misperception that some equated hate speech with freedom of expression (Howard, 2019). The youth under study seemed to view hate speech as freedom of expression, lest their actions at times were contradictory that when it was done against them or their ethnic identity, as they blocked the source or reacted in negative terms. A study conducted elsewhere elucidates that one in five citizens was not aware of the propagation of hate speech as a crime (Open Society Institute Sofia, 2014).

6. Conclusions

This study analyzed the propagation and predictors of hate speech on Facebook among youth at Ethiopian universities. This study examined the predictor variables for the propagation of hate speech on Facebook using both descriptive and inferential analyses. The extent of the problem found to be huge as majority of the youth in the university

did not consider the propagation of hate as a crime and that they were 'heavy' users of Facebook spending four or more hours on the platform and that majority of them used the platform for six years or more. Attitude, purpose, and exposure were strong predictors of hate speech propagation. Given that the youth were motivated by 'social activists' from their own ethnic groups to spread hate on social media, an investment in attitudinal change is crucial. Based on these findings, we conclude that any attempt to tackle hate speech among youth needs to start working on their attitudes. We argue that attitude is critical as it precedes the social media users' 'purpose' of use. Stakeholders in freedom of expression need to forge hands in saving this basic right not to be abused, equated with hate speech. There is a need for media literacy initiatives to combat the spread of hate by boosting awareness of its use. Concerned stakeholders need to collaborate in media literacy education to tackle hate speech propagation among university youth. We recommend further study on the issue, incorporating youth who are not in universities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors disclosed no conflict of interest

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