

SOCIAL MEDIA HEALTH REPORT

DECEMBER 15, 2020 - JANUARY 15, 2021



INTRODUCTION

This social media health report construes the monitoring conducted in the working days between the 15th of December 2020 through the 15th of January 2021. The Health Report is aimed at mainly assessing the key issues/grievances on social media, the overall dynamics of hate speech in the country, and what they mean for the socio-political development of Ethiopia.

The monitoring of this month includes the overall assessment of social media activities through the platform of Crowd tangle and Brandwatch. Key issues are determined based on the degree of interaction and the attention it received on social media.

FINDINGS

KEYS ISSUES OF THE MONTH

During this period, the following issues have been widely discussed:

Controversy between the Benshangul Gumuz[1] and Amhara[2] prosperity parties (December 15th)

The war of words on social media networks between the two (Benshangul-Gumuz and Amhara) regional prosperity parties[3] has been intensified. From our December report, it can be recalled that an **interview** was aired on Amhara mass media agency where the interviewee, the commissioner of the Amhara Regional Police Commission, Abere Adamu said they had asked the federal government to give them the responsibility of law enforcement in the Benshangul Gumuz region, if the safety of citizens could not be guaranteed in the area. Later, on December 15, in a **statement** posted on its social media page, the Benishangul-Gumuz prosperity party stated that;

“Declaring to fight in a constitutionally formed state without the recognition of the federal government by repeatedly using threats and intimidation is a declaration of open war between peoples”.

The Amhara prosperity Party, in response, accused the Benishangul Gumuz regional government of engaging in political infighting instead of stopping the genocide. It warned that if the federal government did not manage the crisis, the attack would continue. Amhara regional state officials say they (the Amharas) are being killed and the federal government and the Benshangul Gumuz regional government should fulfill their responsibilities to ensure

the safety of the people. “The rift between the two regions can only be bridged if a responsible decision is made” the head of the Amhara Prosperity Party, Abraham Alehegn, responded;

“it is impossible to think that there will be an independent leadership capacity and line-up in a political market that gives prominence to words than the loss of human life”.

The social media reaction: Following this, various responses from different sides were echoed on social media. There were responses saying “Neftegna’s”[4] are trying to restore the old system’, ‘attempts are being made to invade Benishangul Gumuz’, naming the Amhara’s in Benshangul- Gumuz ‘Sefari’[5], and ‘Mette’ and blaming the TPLF[6] and OLF Shane[7] for what was happening in the area.

Whereas on the side of Amhara activists mainly from those who are agenda setters, there was an open call for violence against the Benishangul Gumuz and naming them cannibals and ‘shanqilas’[8]. On the part of Tigray activists, it was something that they were careless about and in some way supported what was being done in Benishangul Gumuz.

Image 1 a **comment** under the post by the Amhara prosperity party. It was commented by a well-known but anonymous social media activist, with numbers of followers.



Image 1: A call for violence against Benishangul-Gumuz.

Comment translation of Image 1:

“That’s the right response. But once you have done so, do not respond again. But work hard, it’s enough to prepare another archer for the archer. For a gunman, send a gunman. If you asked how to play this, I would say fight back the attacker. Don’t ask me what the attacker looks like. You don’t have to wear a military uniform. Only the youth of Chagni, Akako and Gohanaj (Zigerm woreda) are enough.”

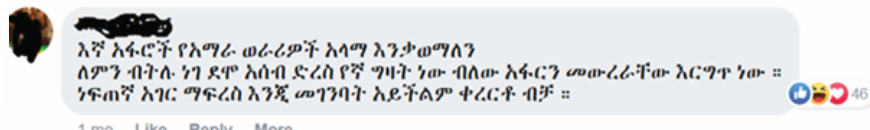


Image 2: A message in a comment section that the aim of the Amhara is to invade Benishangul-Gumuz

Comment translation of Image 2:

“We Afars oppose the aim of the Amhara invaders. Of course, tomorrow they will invade Afar, claiming that it is our territory. Neftegna only knows destroying a country. They only know boasting”.

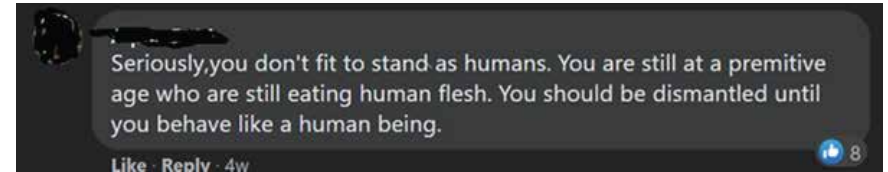


Image 3: A comment under the statement of the Benishangul Gumuz prosperity party’s statement which claims to have primitive societies who are cannibals that should be dismantled.

When coming to widely used terms while this agenda was discussed, the term ‘Shanqila’ showed a significant increase during the controversy between the two regional prosperity parties and following the **interview** with the commissioner of the Amhara Regional Police Commission, Abere Adamu.

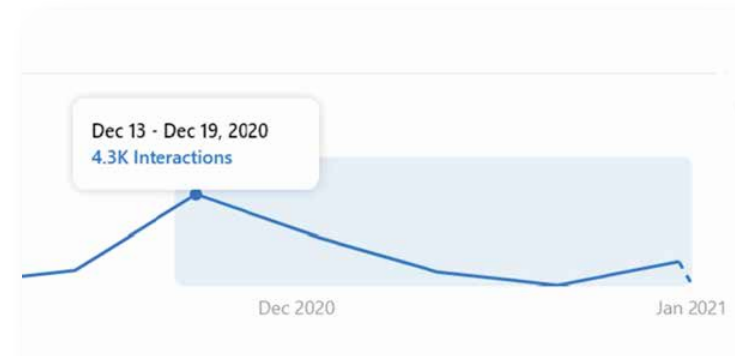


Chart 1: Mentions of the term 'Shanqila' on Facebook

Chart 1 shows the mentions of the term 'Shanqila' on Facebook. As it can be seen above, the word has shown an increase through December 13-December 19th.



Image 4: This **post** contains a hate speech message against others (the Gumuz, in this case) and promotes violence, calling people to be armed and fight.

Translation of the post in Image 4:

“Hello, hello shanqila Gumuz and animal OLFs, do you hear? Heroism is not about killing the poor in your village, it is about doing a history through marching like what Fanno[9] Amhara have done.”

The continued tension between Ethiopia and Sudan (December 16th)

The tension between Ethiopia and Sudan had not yet subsided by the time this report was compiled. Sudan accused the Ethiopian army and its militias of ambushing its forces inside the Sudanese territory killing 4 elements, including an army officer and wounding 12 others, according to the Sudan tribune **report**. Soldiers are said to have been killed on their way back from inspection in Jebel Abu Teyyor, inside Sudanese territory. The Sudanese army said it will vigorously repulse any attack on the country’s territories from invasion.

PM Abiy Ahmed Ali, on a message **posted** on his twitter account stated that the government was closely following the recent incident on the border between Ethiopia and Sudan. Such incident will not break the strong ties between the two countries: He said the two countries would resolve their differences through dialogue.

Social media reaction

Here are some of the social media interactions that were witnessed



Image 5: A response under the **comment** section which calls for an attack by Sudan and Egypt against Ethiopia.

Translation of comment on image 5:

"I wish the massacre of the North Command was true, but it was just a drama, but I hope we will see you being massacred by Egypt and Sudan. The day is not far when we will see Abiy Ahmed's soldiers who ruthlessly massacred children and women be burnt."

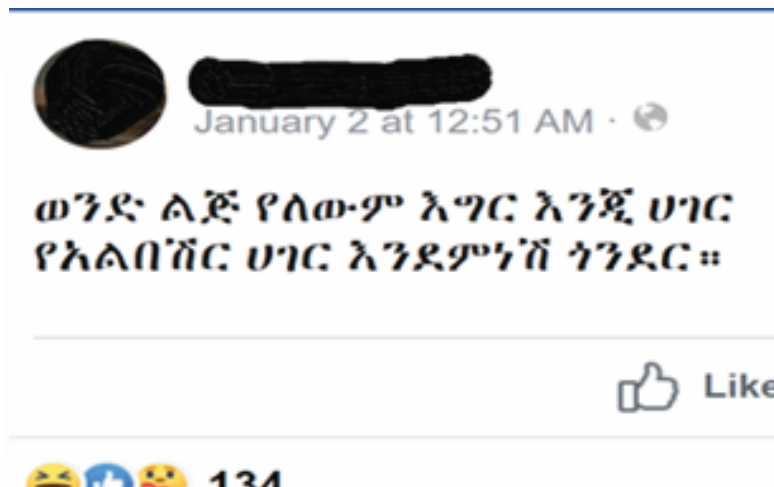


Image 6: A post that contains a message that Gondar belongs to Sudan.

Translation of the post on Image 6:

"A man has no country, but legs; the nation of Al Bashir, how are you Gondar?" (it is a poetic expression defected a little bit. Originally the first line is versed in political debates against ethnic-politicians.)



Image 7: A post by the Embassy of Ethiopia in Sudan claiming that the notice which was being circulated on social media was fake.

The Embassy of Ethiopia in Sudan **posted** on its official Facebook page claiming that a post being circulated on social media (the letter in the screenshot) was a fake notice which was not issued by the embassy. It added that such false information is disseminated by those that wish to create discord between the people and governments of Ethiopia and Sudan.

A Twitter campaign with the hashtag #Plus178CandidatesBehindBars (December 18th).

According to the campaign organizers, a 24 hours' campaign had been prepared with the aim of notifying that 178 individuals who may represent Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo Federalist congress (OFC) in the Oromia region during this year's elections were arrested. The campaign was held with the hashtag #Plus178CandidatesBehindBars.



Image 8: Call for the campaign using the hashtag #Plus178CandidatesBehindBars.



Chart 2: Mention trend of the campaign. 288,000 tweets were made with the hashtag by 9468 unique authors

Chart 2 depicts the trend of mentions made using the hashtag #Plus178CandidatesBehindBars from the 16th-22nd of December. We can see that there were no engagements with regards to that tweet or hashtag prior to the 17th of December but it reached its peak on the 18th of December which was the date of the campaign.

A twitter campaign with the hashtag #StopAmharaGenocide

A campaign to condemn the 'genocide against the Amhara people' and to inform the international community took place using the hashtag #StopAmharaGenocide.



Image 9: Poster for the campaign using the hashtag #StopAmharaGenocide



Chart 3: Mention trend of the campaign. 1230 tweets have been made with the hashtag by 447 unique authors during the first two weeks in 2021.

PM Abiy Ahmed had speaks with residents in Metekel, Benishangul Gumuz (December 22th)

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed held a discussion with residents of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State in Pawe. He said action would be taken against those who failed to enforce the law. He said the government had put in place other solutions including reconciliation and that it would provide a platform for the ruling party to discuss Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz parties. "Ethiopia's enemies are still trying to divide the people along ethnic and religious lines," he said, adding that he had learned from that day's discussion that the people were united despite divisive agendas.

Social Media interactions: Various responses such as the ones below were reflected following the news.



Image 10: A post claiming that the discussion the PM had in Metekel is not public, rather fake.

Translation of the post on image 10:

"Let your lies have Limits...!! ...The shameless propaganda machine reported that "there was a public discussion in Metekel and the people said this...,' posing the zone's chief administrator Atinkut Eshetu like a commentator among the residents. Then the lies the made is that "there was a massacre of the Gumuz people, similar to the Maikadra". It was better Takele Uma et al spoke themselves from behind the curtain!!!"

This is a well-interacted **post** which contains a message that considers the news reported by state media regarding the discussion in Metekel Zone as false and fait accompli where the government media took the comments of the Zonal Administration Chief as public comments by misrepresenting the people.

The killings of Civilians in Benshangul Gumuz, Metekel (December 23rd)

On December 23, it was **reported** that more than 90 people had been killed in an attack by militants in Kuji Kebele, Bulen Woreda, Benishangul Gumuz Metekel Zone and more than 50 homes had been set on fire. With time, the number of deaths reported started increasing. The Woreda Communication Bureau, told BBC Amharic that a total of 207 people were killed in the attack. The local authorities buried all the dead in mass graves.

Of those killed, 133 were males and 35 were females. 17 children were killed in the attack, including a six-month-old baby, according to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). EHRC **verified** the attacks by speaking with victims and other sources in Bekuji Kebele, a home to ethnic Amharas, Oromos, and Shinashas, and 90 kilometres away from Bulen Woreda's capital, also called Bulen. PM Abiy Ahmed **described** the attack as a "massacre". "I am deeply saddened by the inhumane treatment of our people," he said.

Social media interactions:

People on social media voice their anger about the massacre in Metekel. Other responses stated that attempts are being made to invade Benishangul Gumuz, naming the Amhara's in Benshangul-Gumuz as 'Sefari', and 'Mette' and blaming the TPLF and OLF shane for what's happening in the area. Additionally, there were responses which blamed the ethnic federalism for such massacres. it is the result of federalism so dismantle federalism, they were saying.

On the side of Amhara activists there was an open call for violence against the Benishangul Gumuz and naming them cannibals and '*shanqilas*'.

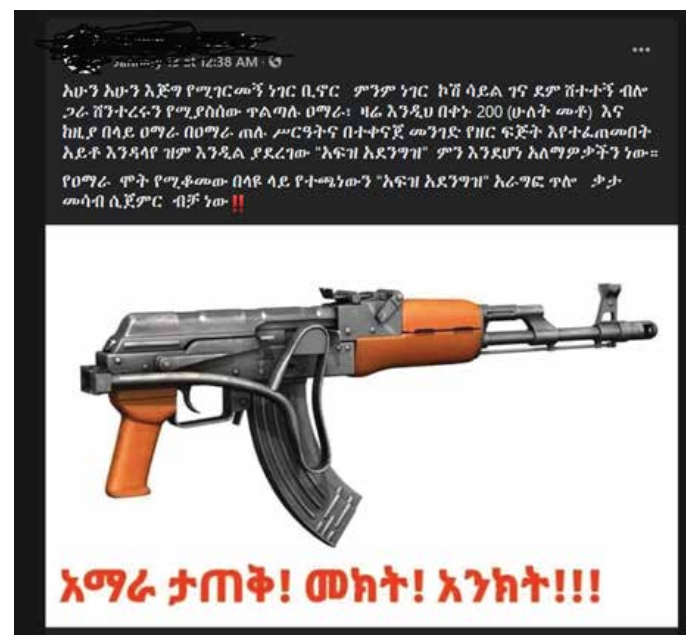


Image 11: Post that calls the Amhara for violence against Benshangul-Gumuz

Translation of the post on image 11:

“The only thing that really amazes me these days is that the Amhara, who cross mountains, saying I smelled blood without any incident is now silent when 200 or more Amharas have been subjected to genocide in a coordinated manner. We don’t know what kind of dizziness and numbness silenced them. Amhara's death will stop only when it is able to throw away its negligence and start to bring up its refiles. Amhara be armed! defend! Kill!”

Another Facebook **post** contains a message that explains the barbarity or the awfulness of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia and its bad consequences of taking human life.



Image 12: A post blaming ethnic federalism for the massacres in the country.

Translation of the post on image 12:

“How long are we going to be patient of this stupid ethnic federalism? How many Ethiopians are supposed to be killed to dismantle this stupid ethnic federalism?”

Other concerns

It can be recalled that, in the social media health report of the month of November, it was mentioned that new and viral words used by government officials in their speeches in the media might be paving the way for newly emerging hate terms. The word ‘Junta’[11] has been discussed as a concern of newly emerging hate terms. And nowadays, it is being noticed that this word is being used against Tigrayan social media users. (See the image 13 below)



Image 13: An offensive message against Tigrayan using the word Junta

Post translation on image 13:

“You Juntit (female junta), it was where the Junta was hiding, good thing its turned to ashes. You will also fall apart.”

CONCLUSION

This report has analyzed the online behavior of social media in Ethiopia by using SM monitoring tools, discourse and content analysis. The social media controversy has continued, depending on the agenda set. Though there have been various agendas reported throughout the month, the major topics of discussions on social media, especially those following the rivalry between the Benishangul-Gumuz and the Amhara prosperity parties and the killings of civilians in Metekel have resulted in various extremist responses and are still are a concern.

This month's monitoring concluded that the controversy between government officials, is opening the door for hate, extremism and incitement among the public. ***It is still a concern that new and inflammatory words used by the government officials in their speeches in the media might be paving the way for newly emerging hate terms and Cyber bullying.*** Public figures need to be responsible and be cautious about their interaction with each other on the public sphere, resolve their issues on their own in a civilized way that doesn't affect the well-being of their communities, and be cautious of the words they use and the way they present them to the public. Particularly, it's difficult to determine what the current rivalry between the two regional prosperity parties might cause in the offline space as a consequence.

Comment sections are also the main sources of such behaviors. The assessment observed that there is an overlap in what people are talking about and sharing on social media. The usage of different facts might be a contributing factor towards the low level of shared attention. There are varying realities shared and therefore people are exposed to different opinions. Social media users, rather than being open and having a civil conversation, prefer using insults and inflammatory terms against each other.

In conclusion, this report posits that the overall social media engagement is pretty unhealthy. Hateful and inflammatory content and calls for violence are circulating at an alarming rate. Moreover, government officials are also contributing for the spread of hate and conflict.

APPENDICES

[1] Benshangul Gumuz is one of the regional states of Ethiopia and is located in the north-western part of Ethiopia; the locals speak different Nilo-Saharan family languages including Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha and etc.

[2] Amhara is member of an ethnic tribe located at the north and north west of Ethiopia whose dominant language is Amharic (Semetic).

[3] Benishangul-Gumuz prosperity party and Amhara Prosperity Party are the Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara region branches, respectively, of the ruling party in Ethiopia.

[4] Neftegna ("riflemen" in English) is a term formerly used to define soldiers of Emperor Menelik II. However, it has currently developed a derogatory connotation in reference to the Amhara people.

[5] Sefari' in Semetic languages and Arabic it means residence or resident. Someone who has come from a different place and settled in another one. It is a term meaning 'settler'; it has an derogatory connotation of saying 'you don't belong here'

[6] Tigray people liberation front (TPLF), popularly known as Wayane, is a **political party** in **Ethiopia** which made it through 17 years of guerilla fighting to rule Ethiopia. It was the dominant group of a coalition of regional political parties named the **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front** (EPRDF) from 1989 to 2018. TPLF after leaving EPRDF when the latter dissolved to form the unified Prosperity Party and continued to lead Tigray region until November when it went to armed conflict with the federal government and left in defeat.

[7] OLF Shane is a faction of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) that remained to be armed when OLF entered an agreement with the government to function civilly. OLF Shane is accused of undergoing armed insurgency in Western Oromia part of Ethiopia.

[8] The term Shanqila refer to dark-skinned persons as opposed to majority Ethiopians who have lighter black skin colors or someone from the Benishagul Gumuz or Gambella regions. It is offensive because it colorism.

[9] Fanno is an informal ethnic Amhara armed group.

[10] Al-Nejashi, located in Tigray region, town of wukro is said to be the first mosque in Africa which is registered as one of the world heritage sites by the UNESCO. It is named after Nejashi, who hosted companions of the Prophet who escaped persecution in Mecca.

[11] Junta is a term mostly used to refer to an army (part of an army/government) who has been identified as a "bandit" or treacherous. PM Abiy Ahmed, in this case, refereed TPLF as a greedy junta.