



# ABSTRACT

On November 3-4, 2020, Ethiopia – supported by Eritrea and Amhara regional forces – launched a full-scale assault on Tigray. In the wake of this attack, the global Tigrayan Diaspora rallied in unified resistance, taking to both digital platforms and the streets to demand justice, visibility, and an end to the violence. Among the many forms of diaspora-led activism, social media campaigns quickly emerged as some of the most visible and influential, capturing global attention and shaping the international conversation at a critical moment for Tigray. These online advocacy efforts were more than just posts or statistics; they became living records of Tigray’s struggle, resilience, and determination in the face of a devastating and genocidal war.

This research explores the digital advocacy efforts of the global Tigrayan diaspora, comparing initiatives during the war with those from the pre-war period to present a comprehensive, data-driven account of first-hand advocacy experiences. The study is guided by five main objectives:

1. **Document and preserve** the historical record of this defining period in Tigrayan diaspora activism.
2. **Identify and analyze** the most effective digital advocacy strategies employed during the war.
3. **Evaluate** the role and potential of social media-driven movements in times of crisis, using the Tigray War as a central case study.
4. **Inform** future advocacy strategies for Tigray and other movements worldwide.
5. **Contribute** to the broader discourse on digital activism in the 21st century.

This study used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data from an online survey with in-depth, asynchronous email interviews with one vocal diaspora-based woman advocate. Eight other advocates – each from different locations around the world and recognized as subject-matter experts – were invited to provide feedback on the survey responses and preliminary findings.

The findings reveal a significant surge in digital advocacy and diaspora mobilization during the war compared to the pre-war period. The war galvanized many previously passive community members, turning them into active voices for Tigray. Twitter experienced the most dramatic shift, with daily use soaring from about 24 to 94 minutes, and posts more than doubling, from an average of six to nearly thirteen per day.

The analysis showed that the social media-led movement was driven largely by diaspora members who had migrated as young adults, those with one or more Tigrayan parents, and individuals aged 25-34. Respondents highlighted several strengths of these advocacy efforts, including raising global awareness, nurturing unity and solidarity, responding quickly to events, grounding messages in truth, organizing and mobilizing effectively, and successfully countering misinformation. At the same time, they identified notable challenges: limited coverage by mainstream media, overly emotional messag-

ing, the creation of echo chambers, information blackouts, exclusivity and bias, weak coordination with other communities, and the absence of a central, non-partisan leadership structure.

This study focuses solely on the digital advocacy efforts of the Tigrayan diaspora. It does not examine in-person resistance during the war, developments following the Pretoria Agreement, the relationship between online and offline activism, or the role of non-Tigrayan individuals and allies, who actively supported the Tigrayan cause. The analysis also excludes content reviews of individual social media posts or tweets.

**Keywords:** Tigray; Ethiopia; Eritrea; social media activism; Tigray War; genocide; digital advocacy; Tigrayan diaspora; Tigray communities

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Research can often be a lonely and intimidating journey, particularly for beginners with limited resources. This was especially true for me, as I conducted this study independently and without formal supervision. I am therefore deeply appreciative of the thoughtful feedback provided by Martin Onyango on each chapter and throughout my analysis, and to Gebreabzgi Pawlos, who served as both an accountability partner and a source of familial support during this process.

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## DEDICATION

In everlasting memory of two of the most dedicated and ambitious diaspora advocates of Tigray, Zuher Ibrahim and Aelaf Yfru – lives lost during the height of the genocide as they stood firm, fighting the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed on the people of Tigray. May their legacy remind the world: never again should such injustice be allowed against people in any part of the world.

# AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

I am a survivor of the Tigray Genocide, and since November 2020, I have dedicated myself to documenting the atrocities committed during the war. After publishing my memoir, Primed for DEATH, detailing my accounts of the genocide, I considered what other contributions I could make to raising awareness for and supporting Tigray. I sought to delve into a new independent project that would merge my passion for storytelling with my professional background, leading me to data analytics and data science – a field I studied for fifteen months before launching this research project.

Now equipped with new skills, I wanted to find a job primarily, and others advised me to do the same. But later, I remembered the life I had left behind in pursuit of the ideas in this project. Along the way, I realized there was no turning back – I had to finish what I had planned and start first.

I designed this project to quantify the historic, social media-led movement of the global Tigrayan diaspora during the active fighting of the genocide and the period prior to it, drawing parallels to the experiences of survival in Tigray chronicled in my works.

My overall journey in this project, particularly when writing the first special issue from our dataset at TDR, mirrors Tigray's struggles since November 2020 – one of unimaginable hardship, resilience, and survival for a dignified future. As such, this paper is not just a piece of paper; it is a symbol of my genuine interest and dedication to the topic and of all the love and support I received from my community throughout my journey. Through this process, I have learned that research is outstanding when done with a genuine desire to seek truth and contribute to the greater good – the just cause of the Tigrayan people and humanity. And I'm very proud that this report is our first special issue in our data repository. I hope this study is an initial resource for understanding the global Tigrayan digital advocacy efforts, paving the way for further inquiries and research.

# ABBREVIATIONS

AGOA – African Growth and Opportunity Act

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

Dr. – Doctor

DW – Deutsche Welle

IMF – International Monetary Fund

OSNIT – Open-source Intelligence

RQ – Research Question

SWT – Stand With Tigray Inc.

TDF – Tigrayan Diaspora Forces

TDR – Tigray Data Repository

TPLF – Tigray People’s Liberation Front

U.S. – The United States of America

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## NOTE ON KEY TERMS

**Data.** In data science, “data” refers to collections of facts, figures, or observations that can be measured, recorded, and analyzed to extract meaningful patterns and insights. Researchers define data in various ways, viewing it as information collected and used as evidence to support their claims. In this study, “data” refers explicitly to the responses collected from participants, organized into datasets, and stored in rows and columns within Excel sheets. The analyses conducted for the advocacy efforts using this data are referred to as data-based or data-driven analyses.

**Diaspora.** Diaspora describes a community of people who have been dispersed from their original homeland to various regions around the world. In this study, however, as Tigray (also spelled as Tigrai) was besieged and blockaded on all fronts by enemy forces, Tigrayans living in Ethiopia (outside of Tigray) also raised their voices for their people along with the diaspora abroad. Therefore, the definition of “diaspora” and their advocacy efforts in this study also include Tigrayans living in Ethiopia outside of Tigray.

**Social Media Activism.** Social media activism refers to collective communicative efforts on digital platforms aimed at addressing societal challenges (1). In this study, readers will notice that terms such as “digital advocacy,” “online activism,” “social media activism,” “social media advocacy,” and “advocacy efforts” are used interchangeably.

**Names.** In Ethiopia, naming conventions adhere to a specific structure. On passports and IDs, individuals typically use their first name as the given name, followed by their father’s name, and then their grandfather’s name as the last name. For example, the author, Goitom Mekonen Gebrewahid, is identified by his given name, Goitom, with his father’s name, Mekonen, and his grandfather’s name, Gebrewahid. Thus, for people of Tigrayan descent mentioned in this study, as well as those who hold Ethiopian citizenship, this naming format is used, using their given names or first names.

Throughout this report, the first-person pronoun (“I”) and the term “the researcher” are used interchangeably to refer to the author. The pronoun “our” (or “we”) is used when referring to work related to the Tigray Data Repository (TDR) – an online, general database developed in conjunction with this research project.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter sets the stage for the study by offering a brief overview of Tigray and the Tigray War, alongside a snapshot of the global Tigrayan digital activism that emerged in response to the war. In highlighting these efforts, I share the story of one Tigrayan woman advocate whose personal journey reflects the broader movement. The chapter also outlines the purpose of the study, guiding questions, and the extent of research, framing the context for the analysis that follows.

### 1.2 Tigray: Context and the Tigray War

Ethiopia, an African country located in the Horn of Africa, is a federal republic made up of twelve regional states and two city administrations.<sup>1</sup> Each regional state is primarily organized along ethno-linguistic lines. With over 80 ethnic groups and home to nearly 120 million people (2), the country is widely known for its cultural diversity and complex history. Ethiopia is often described as an empire-state (4,5), where Addis Ababa, the capital and dominant center, has historically ruled over diverse peripheral regions through force and centralization. Tigray, situated in Ethiopia's northernmost part, bordering Eritrea to the north, Afar region in the East, Amhara region to the south and southwest, and Sudan to the west, is home to an estimated 7 million ethnic Tigrayans, making up roughly 6% of the national population (2).

Ethiopia, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali<sup>2</sup>, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, along with Eritrea and the Amhara regional forces, waged an all-out war on Tigray on the night of the 3rd of November 2020 (3, 5, 6, 7) – a war that divided the lives of Tigrayans into “before” and “after.” The Tigray War is often rightly described as the deadliest wars of the 21st century (8). An estimated more than half a million Tigrayan civilians perished as a result of this war; either directly killed by the invading forces or died of deprivation of medicine and food due to the two-year long siege that partially remains in place to this day. The forces deliberately destroyed and systematically looted social and economic infrastructures. The entire region was besieged and put under complete communication blackout, the longest (i.e., two years) in history (12,13,14), making it difficult for people to obtain food, water, and other essential supplies for their survival. Many experts and organizations, including the United Nation's own International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, argue that starvation was used deliberately as a weapon of war (15). A particular case of the impact of these destruction and looting campaigns and subsequent siege is the near-complete collapse of the health care system in Tigray (16). The state-sponsored systematic “rape, gang rape, sexual mutilation, and sexual slavery” (10, p.13) were inflicted on an estimated over 120,000 Tigrayan women and girls (10) setting unprecedented degree of cruelty and inhumanity. Over 80% of school facilities and educational

materials in Tigray were damaged or destroyed (16, 17). However, in its official press releases, the Ethiopian government – echoed by some international actors – framed the war as a “Law Enforcement Operation” (18, 19).

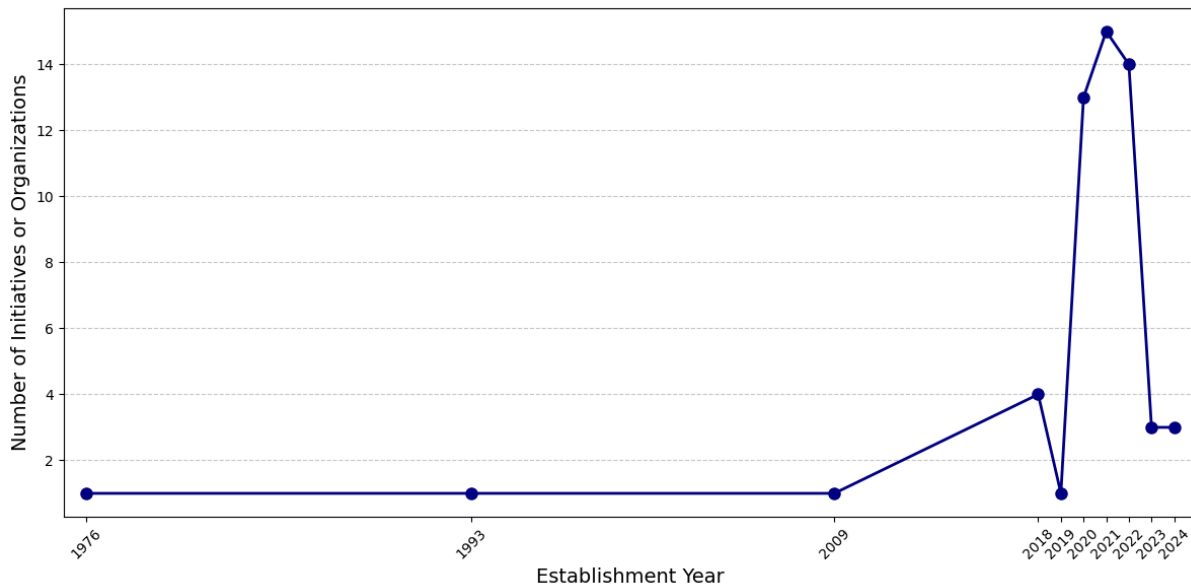
According to the Newlines Institute’s 2024 report, the atrocities committed against the Tigrayan people in the Tigray War amount to genocide (19). Human rights organizations documented ethnic cleansing committed by the allied forces in Western Tigray (21, 22). A detailed report (23) from The Sentry’s June 2025 release reveals how Eritrean military leaders systematically looted, committed grave atrocities, and entrenched a conflict-driven economy during the Tigray War. Although a ceasefire agreement<sup>3</sup> which was signed in Pretoria, South Africa, in early November 2022 officially ended the war, little has changed for the people of Tigray since then. The fragile peace accord has faltered under the weight of half-hearted commitment from its signatories, and the disengagement of the mediators and silence of the international community. This absence of mechanisms for accountability and justice for the crimes committed during the 2020-2022 Tigray War has kept tensions on a knife-edge, with Ethiopia and Eritrea – former allies turned adversaries – poised to reignite yet another war, which is likely to impact Tigray gravely (24).

### **1.3 Tigrayan Diaspora Digital Activism**

Ethiopia – backed by Eritrea and the Amhara regional forces, and deploying advanced military drones supplied by external actors, including the United Arab Emirates, China, Iran, Turkey, and Israel – launched a large-scale military campaign against Tigray that has been widely characterized as genocidal (20). In response, the global Tigrayan Diaspora rose in unified resistance, amplifying their voices across digital platforms and the streets alike, demanding an end to the violence, siege, and injustice. This was a generational history – one-of-a-kind type of phenomena. Despite formidable challenges – including the global disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic – Tigrayan diaspora communities, who often proudly refer to themselves as the public diplomats of Tigray, played a vital role in bringing global attention to the unfolding genocide. Through relentless advocacy, they called for urgent intervention from international community. Campaigning tirelessly, both in person in the streets and virtually on social media platforms, they pressed the international community to intervene and stop the escalating cruelty of the war before it claimed more innocent lives. According to Weyni (2021) in a piece contributed to *Omna Tigray*, the advocates engaged in multifaceted advocacy efforts through signing petitions, fundraising, disseminating information by making a good use of both digital and traditional media to raise global awareness and rally support, as well as organizing and participating in international protests (25). They established civic and charitable organizations on behalf of their communities and facilitated the delivery of necessary assistance to the people of Tigray.

It is worth noting that this movement was characterized by an increase in the number of initiatives and organizations established by the community, compared to the periods before the war and after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement. These entities were formed as part of the community’s collective resistance to provide support for the people of Tigray. They vary widely in type and focus, encompass-

ing civil and civic organizations, advocacy groups, media outlets, archival projects, social movements, and visual art collectives and movements, to name a few.



**Fig. 1 – Number of Initiatives and Organizations Established by Year (1976-2024).** (Source: Tigray Data Repository Initiatives and Organizations dataset.)

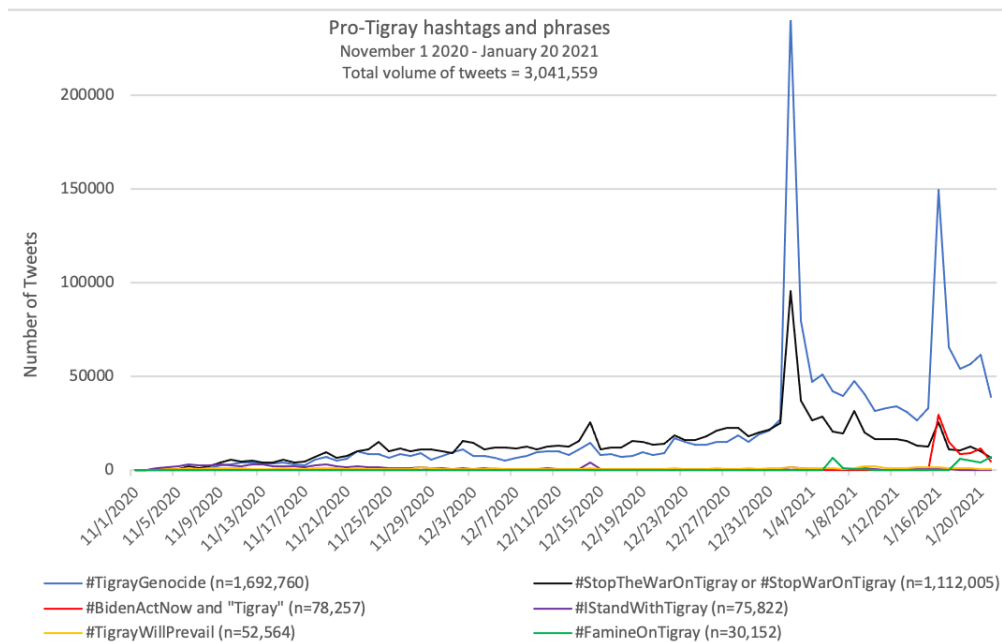
The line graph in Fig.1 illustrates the number of diaspora-based Tigrayan-owned initiatives and organizations established from 1976 to 2024. Initially, growth was stagnating, with only one initiative recorded in each year 1976, 1993, and 2009. A notable increase appears from 2018 onwards, reaching a peak of 15 in 2021 – the height of the genocide – underscoring a surge in advocacy and community mobilization during the Tigray War. The graph vividly illustrates this escalation, reflecting the Diaspora’s intensified efforts in response to the unfolding crisis. Although assessing the broader impact of these initiatives on community mobilization and analyzing the content shared on their platforms would offer valuable insights, such an exploration lies beyond the scope of this research.

Among the many notable efforts made by the Diaspora in the resistance, the social media-led advocacy gained global recognition and brought the kind of impact the community needed. Hashtags such as #TigrayGenocide, #FreeTigray, #StopWarOnTigray, #JusticeForTigray, #StoryOfTigray, #KnowMore and open spaces opened on Twitter and Clubhouse as the backbone of the advocacy. This marked a new and unprecedented phenomenon for the global Tigrayan online community. Social media and technology in general have empowered them with the tools and platforms necessary to reach and engage audiences worldwide for their just cause. According to the Washington Post article (26) titled “Ethiopia’s digital battle over Tigray region: Facts are casualties,” Tigrayan advocates exhibited significant digital fluency, generating original content and actively engaging in online discourse to amplify their cause. Notably, the article also highlights that over 3,000 new Twitter accounts were created between November 2020 and January 2021 alone – an early indicator of the rapid surge in online mobilization during the initial months of the war.

**Table 1 – Example posts from the #KnowMore and #TigrayIsAfrica Visual Art Movement**

Index	Post Owner (Handle)	Date Posted	Post
1	@dejuwani12	Feb 13, 2024	Tigray is Land of Beauty, land of history and Pride, land of Hero[es]. If Africans #KnowMore about Tigray; they will definitely stand with Tigray. Tigray is Africa. The ancient African civilization began in Tigray.
2	@TegaruUnited1	Jan 21, 2024	The #WarOnTigray wasn't about preserving Ethiopia's unity. Tigray is not an external enemy; Tigray was/is in Ethiopia and Tigrayans are Ethiopians. Before supporting the genocidal regime in the name of "pan Africanism", you should #KnowMore how Tigray is a pillar of Ethiopia.
3	@Behold_Abel	Dec 28, 2021	King Ezana of #Axum kingdom, present day #Tigray, was the first African King to embrace Christianity, after he was converted by his teacher, St. Frumentius. In the 4th century AD, King Ezana made Christianity the Axumite kingdom's official religion. #KnowMore #TigrayIsAfrica
4	@Behold_Abel	Jan 4, 2022	The Irob people live in a highland area in #Tigray. Despite their relatively small population, they have been at the forefront of African politics. During the Italian invasion, Irob patriots led an anti-Italian resistance movement from their base on Mount Asimba. #KnowMore

A widely cited commentary by The War Nerd Newsletter (2021) described the online Tigrayan diaspora communities during the Tigray War as “widespread, militant, young, and very, very online”<sup>4</sup>. In addition, Wilmot et al. (2021), in their academic case study (27), similarly underscore how Tigrayan diaspora activists swiftly mobilized on platforms like Twitter to raise awareness and combat misinformation.



**Fig. 2 – The total volume of tweets gathered using Twitter’s fire hose API, representing 80 to 100 percent of all tweets, analyzed via Meltwater software.** (Source: Washington Post, February 5, 2021.)

In a movement defined by collective solidarity against genocide, sharing and documenting the personal stories of vocal advocates served a vital purpose. These narratives not only broadened the movement’s reach by making it more relatable but also humanized the lived experiences behind the activism, transforming statistics into stories of resilience.

## 1.4 Story of a Tigrayan Diaspora Woman Advocate

Samrawit Neguse Silva, a 26-year-old (2024)<sup>5</sup> diaspora-based Tigrayan and recipient of the 2024 Black Excellence Fund Award, stands out as a compassionate humanitarian advocate for the people of Tigray. Born in Aksum, Tigray, she relocated to the United States in December 2004 at just seven years old, following the death of her father, accompanied by her two biological brothers. By the time the war in Tigray broke out, Samrawit had spent nearly 16 years building a life in the U.S.

“I am incredibly grateful to have been adopted into a loving family here in the U.S.,” she reflected, noting that she has also maintained strong ties with her biological mother and siblings who remain in Tigray.

In her advocacy, Samrawit consistently amplifies the plight of Tigray, dedicating her efforts to raising awareness about the #TigrayGenocide and the broader humanitarian crisis that has unfolded since the war began. Her commitment to justice extends beyond her homeland; she has also taken on leadership roles in local movements, addressing racial and environmental injustices through organizations such as Black Lives Matter New Hampshire. Outside of her activism, Samrawit works professionally as a legal accountant, balancing her career with a deep commitment to humanitarian advocacy.

Before the outbreak of the Tigray War, Samrawit had just returned from a trip to Tigray in 2019 and was planning to visit again in late 2020. However, her family in Tigray, aware of the growing tensions between the regional government of the Tigray region and the Ethiopian federal government, strongly advised against it. Even back in July 2019, sixteen months before the start of the war, she vividly recalls one family member mentioning the likelihood of Tigray being encircled by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. At the time, she dismissed the early signs, firmly believing that the Ethiopia she knew would never turn against its people.

“I was proudly Ethiopian,” she would later recall, her words heavy with grief as she witnessed the devastation the nation unleashed on Tigray and its people. “I wasn’t even aware of my Tigrayan identity until 2019.”

Rita Kahsay et al. (2024) provide detailed accounts of survivors on how organized and mass-scale rape and sexual violence were systematically used as weapons during the Tigray War. Rowena reflects, as

Samrawit did, on the profound rupture: “betrayal by the country we thought we were part of, and from friends we thought saw us as equals – this has been difficult to comprehend” (10, p.9).

Before the war, Samrawit primarily used social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to share personal updates and light-hearted content with friends. She described her pre-war online presence as “really funny,” outgoing, and centered around socializing and entertainment. While she occasionally used Facebook to speak out on racial issues in the U.S., her deep engagement with digital activism did not take shape until the onset of the Tigray Genocide. “I hadn’t been active on Twitter before,” she recalled, “but it quickly became my main platform for advocacy.”

Samrawit became deeply involved with Stand With Tigray (SWT) Inc.<sup>6</sup>, an initiative founded on November 6, 2020 – just two days after the war began – in direct response to the atrocities unfolding in Tigray. She contributed to and led efforts like click-to-tweet and email campaigns, helping mobilize global awareness and action.

“As the war escalated,” she explained, “I also turned to Instagram and Facebook to raise awareness, going live for the first time to break down complex information into content that people outside could easily understand. On Twitter, I had to create multiple accounts during the active fighting due to repeated bans.”

Through these efforts, Samrawit transformed from a casual social media user into a digital warrior, using her voice and platforms to fight for justice, visibility, and survival.

Initially, she believed the war would be short-lived, as many would expect, expecting that the Ethiopian public would swiftly demand an end to the violence. However, she was soon proven wrong and found it deeply striking that the only people who organized demonstrations under the banner “No to War in Ethiopia” were Tigrayans themselves.

The prolonged and total communication blackout in Tigray made it nearly impossible to grasp the full scale of the crisis. Yet, as harrowing reports of massacres<sup>7</sup> and atrocities slowly began to surface, it became unmistakably clear that this was no “ordinary” conflict or “law enforcement operation,” as framed by the Ethiopian government. What unfolded was a campaign of extreme brutality – one that left Tigrayans to confront the horrors of war in isolation, with little support or recognition from the outside world.

As the situation in Tigray worsened, she pivoted toward creating more targeted and educational content, offering clear explanations of the definition of genocide and how it applied to the Tigrayan context. One of her most impactful contributions was a video titled #CallItAGenocide<sup>8</sup>, which not only articulated the urgency of international recognition but also helped popularize the hashtag itself. The phrase quickly gained traction online, becoming a rallying cry among activists who urged the global community to acknowledge the atrocities as genocide – a recognition they saw as a critical first step toward meaningful intervention.

Her advocacy deepened through her involvement with SWT, where she played a key role in crafting tweets for coordinated digital campaigns. She later helped launch the *#KnowMore* movement – a counter-initiative to the pro-Ethiopian government *#NoMore* campaign that had gained international visibility. Expanding her content strategy, she began producing videos tailored for broader, non-Tigrayan audiences, aiming to educate and engage those unfamiliar with the crisis. These videos were widely shared across platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, amplifying her message far beyond her immediate community.

In addition to her social media activism, she engaged with various mainstream media platforms, participating in interviews with radio stations, local newspapers, the Nigerian-based news channel Central TV, and DW during her time in the refugee camps in Sudan. Currently, she has expanded her digital presence to TikTok, using it as a platform to continue raising awareness about the genocide in Tigray.

When asked what she had personally gained from her advocacy – particularly in terms of reconnecting with Tigray, its culture, language, and her own identity – Samrawit offered a deeply moving response. She wrote not only of personal growth but also of profound loss and collective resilience:

Advocacy has provided me with the opportunity to connect with remarkable individuals and has deepened my understanding of my history and origins, though I still have much to learn. It has grounded me and strengthened my identity as a Tigrayan. Although I – and we, as a people – have lost so much along the way – loved ones, sleep, and our mental and physical well-being – my commitment to advocating for Tigray has helped me retain my humanity. It allowed me to practice the idea of Ubuntu philosophically: ‘I am because we are.’

She continued, reflecting on how advocacy had shaped her very being:

The woman I have become today is rooted in my people’s history and origins. My existence as a Tigrayan is inseparable from the continued existence of the people of Tigray. And thus, I fully and continuously advocate for the people of Tigray – until Tigray is free and justice is served.

Samrawit expressed deep pride in the role that the nonprofit advocacy group SWT played in amplifying the voices of the Tigrayan people on a global scale. She described her involvement with the team – “small but mighty” – as both an honor and a defining chapter of her advocacy journey.

Through her work, she gained access to significant platforms, including two United Nations summits, where she was able to connect with fellow advocates and pose critical questions about Tigray in spaces occupied by those with the power and responsibility to act.

“I’ve also been fortunate to have my content shared by influential figures,” she noted, “including Amanda Seales, an American actress with millions of followers, and others with large platforms. Their

willingness to share our message has brought Tigray’s struggle into spaces it might not have reached otherwise.”

Looking ahead, Samrawit emphasized the importance of broadening participation in advocacy efforts. She encouraged more individuals to step forward – whether independently or in collaboration – to take bold initiatives that sustain the movement’s momentum. She also highlighted the need to create more inclusive spaces for diverse voices and talents within the community, noting that doing so could help distribute the workload more equitably and mitigate burnout, which she identified as a significant challenge faced by many long-term advocates.

Samrawit’s experiences are not isolated; they reflect a broader wave of digital activism that surged in response to the war in Tigray. Across the globe, advocates have raised their voices – often tirelessly, day and night – to reclaim truth, demand justice, and advocate for the survival and dignity of their people. In this context, the study extends beyond individual narratives to examine the collective efforts of Tigrayan digital advocates, exploring the impact of their work, the strategies they’ve employed, and the challenges they continue to face within the rapidly shifting landscape of global online activism.

## **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

Collecting comprehensive, tangible data on all the efforts made by the Tigrayan Diaspora during the resistance against the genocide is a complex and time-intensive task. However, social media campaigns offer a valuable source of historical data – data that can be systematically collected and analyzed using today’s advanced digital tools and analytical technologies.

I believe the advocacy efforts carried out during the war mark a pivotal moment in history, offering a profound glimpse into the heart and soul of a digital movement unlike anything previously seen among Tigrayan diaspora communities. These are not merely data points shared on social media –they are living chronicles of Tigray’s ongoing struggle and resilience amid a devastating crisis and genocidal war.

Learning about the sacrifices made by diaspora members through these platforms has deeply inspired me to explore this movement more critically and thoughtfully. As such, this project represents one of the first in-depth research efforts on this topic, building on a limited number of existing opinion pieces (25, 28, 29) and a few case studies analyzing advocacy posts scraped from Twitter (27, 30).

Starting with a preliminary exploration of the diaspora’s social media first-hand experiences – and quantifying those lived experiences – offers an important and necessary foundation before moving into deeper content analysis of digital posts. This approach not only centers the voices behind the movement but also sheds light on the human impact of digital resistance.

This research focuses on pro-Tigray digital advocacy efforts led by Tigrayan diaspora communities during the peak of the genocide, specifically from November 2020 to November 2022, concluding

with the signing of the Pretoria Agreement. It examines and contrasts these efforts with the pre-war period to provide a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of digital advocacy experiences.

By exploring changes in social media usage patterns, advocacy strategies employed, and the overall impact and effectiveness of these efforts as strategic tools, this study seeks to uncover the enduring impressions left by the advocates. It also considers the strengths, opportunities, and limitations observed within the broader digital advocacy landscape.

The research aims to achieve the following five objectives:

1. To document and preserve the historical record of this pivotal period in Tigrayan diaspora activism.
2. To identify and analyze effective digital advocacy techniques used during the war.
3. To understand the role and potential of social media-led movements in times of crisis, using the Tigray War as a case study.
4. To inform future advocacy strategies for Tigray and similar movements globally.
5. To contribute to the broader discourse on digital activism and its impact in the modern era.

## 1.6 Guiding questions

To address the objectives outlined above, this study poses four interrelated but distinct research questions aimed at analyzing the lived experiences of Tigrayan diaspora communities during the Tigray War:

- **RQ1:** How did social media usage patterns among Tigrayan diaspora communities shift during the height of the Tigray War compared to the pre-war period, and what insights can be drawn from this change?
- **RQ2:** Which segments and age groups within the Tigrayan diaspora were perceived as leading voices in social media advocacy against the war, and what factors contributed to their prominence?
- **RQ3:** Click-to-tweet and/or Email content was among the strategic tools used for digital advocacy during the Tigray War by the global Tigrayan Diaspora. What was the perceived impact of this tool in terms of audience engagement, reach, policy influence, and overall effectiveness?
- **RQ4:** More broadly, what opportunities and shortcomings can be identified in the global Tigrayan diaspora's digital advocacy efforts during the war?

## 1.7 Extent of the Research

This research project focuses exclusively on the lived experiences of social media-led activism within the Tigrayan diaspora during the Tigray War and the period leading up to the war. It does not examine

in-person resistance activities, events following the Pretoria Agreement, or the relationship between online and offline activism within the Tigrayan community.

The study also excludes the advocacy efforts of non-Tigrayan individuals or allies, who actively supported the Tigrayan cause. Furthermore, it does not engage in comparisons – as some existing case studies or reports have done (27,30) – between the Tigrayan diaspora’s small but powerful resistance movement and the larger, pro-Ethiopian government campaigns, which sought to undermine the Tigrayan struggle through coordinated disinformation.

Finally, this study does not include a content analysis of social media posts or tweets related to the research questions.

## CHAPTER TWO

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Overview

This chapter takes us through the methodological steps taken to achieve the research objectives, as suggested in the previous chapter. It covers aspects of the research design, the target population, and the sampling procedures used. In addition, this chapter elaborates on data collection methods and procedures followed in the preparation of the data, as well as qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches used to generate the findings presented in this report.

### 2.2 Research Design

Based on the research purpose, this study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative online survey data with in-depth, asynchronous email interviews with one vocal diaspora-based woman advocate and subject-matter experts' feedback. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of advocacy patterns or insights before and during the Tigray War. The idea behind adopting a mixed-methods approach was to harness the strengths and effectiveness of both types of data – quantitative data for generalizability and trend analysis and qualitative data for depth, context, and insight into lived experiences.

### 2.3 Participants

The participants of this research project included members of the global Tigrayan Diaspora who:

- Were at least 16 years old
- Identified to be Tigrayan descent
- Lived outside of Tigray
- Were active on social media advocating for Tigray before or during the war
- Could write in either Tigrinya or English

The online research survey of the global Tigrayan Diaspora, conducted using Google Forms, yielded 338 respondents (n = 338). Four responses were incomplete and, therefore, excluded from the analysis.

An asynchronous email interview was conducted with a diaspora-based Tigrayan woman advocate, who had been recommended by respondents during the pilot test (n = 24). Prior to the formal interview, I engaged in approximately 18 informal and unstructured email exchanges with her, supplemented by brief clarifications and follow-up conversations on WhatsApp and Instagram. The formal interview

itself unfolded primarily through three extended email exchanges, conducted in three parts: Part 1 on August 27, 2024; Part 2 on January 5, 2025; and Part 3 on February 15, 2025.

**Table 2 – Top seven most-mentioned Tigrayan Diaspora influencers (n=24)**

Rank	Name	Handle (Twitter)	Mention
1	Meaza Gidey	@meazaG_	8
2	Samrawit Silva	@SamruXoxo	7
3	Alula Solomon	@Alula_Solomon	5
4	Kassa Hailemariam	@KassaHMariam	4
5	Rishan Zeaxumawit	@Rishan_Axumawit	3
6	Dr. Tedros Adhanom <sup>9</sup>	@DrTedros	3
7	Simon Tesfay	@Simon_TE	3

Among Tigrayan diaspora influencers, Meaza Gidey emerged as the most frequently mentioned figure, cited eight times. Samrawit Silva closely followed her with seven mentions. Alula Solomon and Kassa Hailemariam received five and four mentions, respectively, while Rishan Zeaxumawit, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, and Simon Tesfay were each mentioned three times.

**Table 3 – Top seven frequently-mentioned non-Tigrayan influencers (n=24)**

Rank	Name	Handle	Mention
1	Martin Plaut	@martinplaut	6
2	Rashid Abdi	@RABdiAnalyst	4
3	Kjetil Tronvoll	@KjetilTronvoll	3
4	Timnit Gebru	@timnitGebru	2
5	William Davison	@wdavison10	2
6	Ximena Borrazás	@XimenaBorrazas	2
7	Mukesh Kapila	@mukeshkapila	2

In Table 3, Martin Plaut stood out as the most mentioned influential figure outside the community, with six mentions, followed by Rashid Abdi with four mentions and Kjetil Tronvoll with three mentions. However, a detailed story of any of the advocates listed in Table 3 is beyond the scope of this study.

The findings in Tables 2 and 3 were derived from a pilot test that involved 24 respondents. Feedback from the pilot suggested that the survey was excessively long, leading to the removal of certain questions and sections from the primary data collection process (refer to Appendix 1 for details). Nevertheless, the insights gained proved valuable, prompting a focused examination of Samrawit Silva's story to enrich the analysis and tell the lived experiences of the diaspora, particularly because her profile closely aligns with the findings presented in Chapter Three, Section 3.3. To position her story as an entry point into the lived experiences of diaspora advocacy, the study's introduction is presented by

employing a structure that intentionally departs from conventional academic norms. Following the collection of her responses, a narrative approach was employed to present the data. It involved synthesizing her statements into a cohesive story that captures her experiences and perspectives. Through framing her responses in a narrative format, I aimed to provide an engaging and relatable account that reflects the complexities of her advocacy journey. This approach enables a deeper emotional engagement while promoting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of advocates within the context of the study.

In addition to the primary interviewee advocate, eight other advocates were recruited, who had been active during the war and were based across five continents (referred to as ‘locations’). These advocates were selected as subject-matter experts to provide feedback on the survey responses and preliminary findings, therefore complementing and strengthening the results of the analysis. The observations of their active roles informed the selection during the advocacy period, and the expectation that they could provide valuable insights. The group was intentionally diverse, comprising individual advocates, including two of whom held leadership positions or were affiliated with organizations that played a leading role in the advocacy efforts. Attention was also given to ensuring representation across age groups, diaspora segments, and geographic locations spanning five continents, thereby enriching the study with a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Each potential participant was first approached privately to obtain their consent to join the group. Upon receiving confirmation of interest, an email survey (see Appendix 2) outlining the purpose of the study, the rationale for their involvement, and three guiding questions for their contributions was distributed. To provide context and a reference point for their feedback, a draft of the Results and Analysis chapter was attached alongside the survey.

A summary of respondents’ demographic data from the online survey is presented in Table 4, which includes gender, age, education, profession, and location.

**Table 4 – Summary of Respondent Demographics (Valid Responses: n = 334)**

Category	Sub-category	Respondent #	%
Gender	Female	184	55.09
	Male	149	44.61
	Decline to state	1	0.30
Age	16 – 24	24	7.19
	25 – 34	158	47.31
	35 – 44	98	29.34
	45 – 54	34	10.18
	>= 55	20	5.99

Category	Sub-category	Respondent #	%
Education	High school	22	6.59
	Undergraduate course work	35	10.48
	Bachelor degree	113	33.83
	Graduate degree	164	49.10
Profession	Technology and IT	71	21.26
	Education and Research	40	11.98
	Healthcare	37	11.08
	Business and Management	24	7.19
	Government and Public Service	16	4.79
	Artistic and Media	14	4.19
	Sales and Customer Service	14	4.19
	Trade and Skilled Labor	4	1.20
	Student	23	6.89
	Other	65	19.46
Location	Ethiopia (Outside of Tigray)	50	14.97
	Africa	37	11.08
	Middle East	7	2.10
	Europe	81	24.25
	North America	131	39.22
	Central/South America	2	0.60
	Asia	6	1.80
	Australia	7	2.10

## 2.4 Sampling Procedure

I used snowball sampling to acquire respondents to participate in the online survey. The initial respondents were reached via a survey link shared privately with key contacts and influencers on social media platforms upon invitation, who were then requested to invite others in their networks to participate. An extensive two-month mobilization campaign was run online in August-September 2024. Information about the project and the importance of the participation were regularly advanced across different social media, promoting the study across platforms such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Twitter (X), and other online Tigrayan community channels by using the researcher's account<sup>10</sup>, along with the support of other key influencers who used their handles to share updates regarding the project consistently.

## 2.5 Data Collection Procedures

The online survey was administered through a bilingual (English and Tigrinya) questionnaire to accommodate the respondent's language preferences. The questionnaire covered:

- Demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, level of education, profession and location.
- The questions related to the Advocacy contributions before and during the Tigray War, which were organized into five distinct parts:
  1. Respondents' contributions before the Tigray War.
  2. The contributions made during the Tigray War period.
  3. The impact and effectiveness of click-to-tweet and/or email content or campaigns.
  4. The participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women, which was used only for the pilot test.
  5. The lasting impressions of the advocacy efforts overall.

In the asynchronous email interview, I selected one advocate and conducted the interviews based on the feedback received from respondents during the pilot test. In addition, eight subject-matter experts from five continents were invited to provide feedback on the preliminary findings, aiming to support the survey results.

## 2.6 Instruments and Measures

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) included both closed- and open-ended questions. Advocacy-related questions were grouped into five thematic areas, as previously described.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

In this stage, since I had both qualitative and quantitative data, I conducted both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and each of these analyses was carried out as follows:

### 2.7.1 Quantitative Analysis:

For the quantitative data analysis, data handling processes such as cleaning, structuring, organizing, and analyzing were performed by relying on Advanced Python programming libraries that include Pandas, Matplotlib, and Seaborn. Other statistical methods were also applied, including the weighted mean.

The weighted mean calculation was applied when analyzing the ordinal data (categorical responses) presented in Table 5 (also refer to Parts II and III of the surveys in Appendix 1) for the average daily time spent and the average number of posts per day on each platform. Firstly, an extraction of the percentage of the respondents in each category (example: "less than 30 mins", "31-60 mins", "1-2 hours", and "more than 2 hours") was determined and these percentages were converted into decimal weights.

Secondly, I assigned a representative midpoint value to each category, for example, 15 mins for the category “less than 30 mins.” Third, I multiplied each midpoint by its corresponding weight. Finally, as elaborated in Fig. 3, I summed the weighted values across all categories and divided them by the sum of the weights (equal to one in this case, since the respondents’ percentages add up to 100%, resulting in decimal weights that sum to one).

Weighted averages are frequently used in scientific calculations. Denoting the measurements to be averaged as  $x_i$  and their weights  $w_i$  ( $i=1 \dots n$ ), we can straightforwardly calculate the weighted mean as:

$$\bar{x}_{wtd} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i x_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i} \quad (1)$$

where the subscript *wtd* indicates a weighted mean. In the trivial case that all the  $w_i$  are equal, this formula is equivalent to the familiar unweighed mean.

**Fig 3. Weighted mean calculation.** (Source: Data Analysis Toolkit #12: Weighted averages and their uncertainties, Prof. James Kirchner, 2006.)

In the click-to-tweet/email contents questionnaire (refer to Part IV of the questionnaire in the Appendix), I had categories such as “neither impactful nor unimpactful,” “neither effective nor ineffective,” and “I don’t know” to evaluate the effectiveness of the contents as strategic tools utilized in the advocacy. During the analysis, I avoided the “neither ... nor” categories, as they conveyed neutral opinions. It was interesting to have the number of responses for “I don’t know” higher than anticipated, prompting me to consider it valuable. I thus included it in the findings and did an analysis accordingly.

As I analyzed the donut chart graphs (see Fig. 5) that illustrate which diaspora segment and age group led the social media advocacy, I created an additional category labelled “Multiple Segments” to accommodate overlapping respondents’ identities such as “all of them” or “two of them,” which did not fit into a single category as provided in the questionnaire. Those individuals who selected more than one segment (e.g., identifying as both “Individuals that moved abroad as young adults” and “Individuals that moved abroad as adults”) or who wrote “all of them” were grouped under this separate category that had a frequency of 22 ( $n = 22$ ) to maintain clarity and integrity in the data presentation.

### 2.7.2 Qualitative Analysis:

To analyze the open-ended responses collected on the survey, I relied on ATLAS.ti<sup>11</sup> version 9 software to carry out the task. The process involved importing the datasets to ATLAS.ti, generate codes of the text responses and themes to capture meaningful recurring patterns in the data related to advocacy narratives and hence relevant to the thematic analysis in the report.

## 2.8 Ethical Considerations

In the data collection phase of the project, I had to protect the respondents' privacy and safeguard their trust. Hence, survey responses were collected anonymously. Once the survey closed, I organized and reviewed the data carefully before I set to do any analysis. This report's final findings represent only a portion of the data. After thorough cleaning and structuring, the cleaned datasets are now accessible to the public through the TDR<sup>12</sup>, which was established as part of this project. I aim to provide this repository as a practical resource for the Tigray community empowerment and researchers alike by providing access to data for those working on Tigray-related matters.

## CHAPTER THREE

# KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Overview

In this chapter of the report, I present the main findings of the research project and an analysis of the data related to the research questions discussed in Chapter 1 section 1.6, subtitled “Guiding Questions.” For clarity purposes, I have sorted out the research findings by theme, aligning them with each research question. The analysis used quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting the patterns, key insights, and notable contradictions that emerged during the activism period, both before and during wartime. Selections of direct quotes from respondents, including experts feedback, are included to support and illustrate the interpretations where necessary. The goal was not only to report the findings as they are but also to make sense of what they reveal about the dynamics of digital advocacy efforts by Tigrayan Diaspora communities worldwide, both before and during the war, as well as to highlight the lessons that can be drawn from this. Each research question will be addressed in turn in the following subsections.

### 3.2. Transformation of Social Media Use During the Tigray War

**Research Question: ‘How did social media usage patterns among Tigrayan diaspora communities shift during the height of the Tigray War compared to the pre-war period, and what insights can be drawn from this change?’**

In Fig. 4, the grouped bar chart shows the percentage of participation in various social media campaigns by Tigrayan Diaspora communities, comparing periods before and during the war. Participation was grouped into twelve campaign types to assess the nature of respondents’ involvement in their advocacy roles for Tigray during and in the periods before the war.

I had a category of respondents who, regardless of their online presence, never participated in any campaign. They indicated ‘no participation’ if they had not engaged in activities or campaigns explicitly related to Tigray.

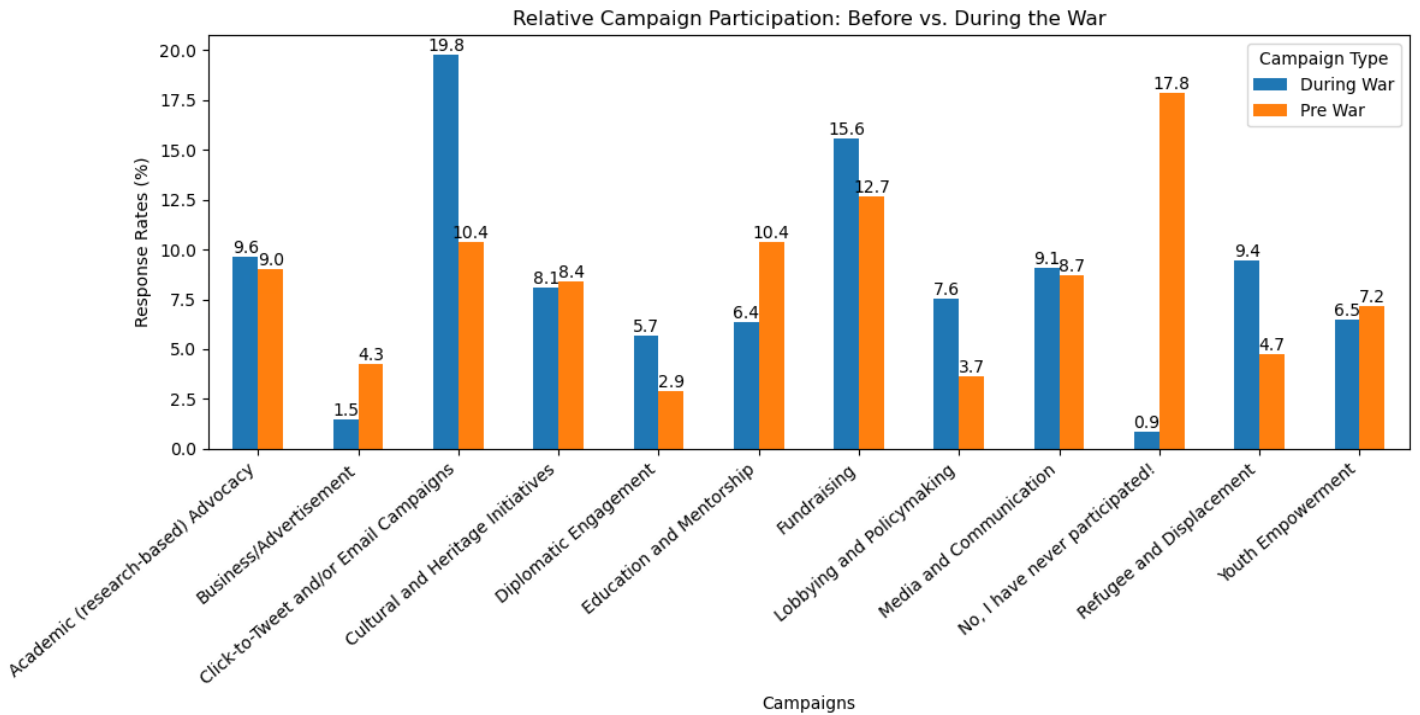
The second category was academic (research-based) advocacy, in which individuals campaign for their community by conducting research, providing credible evidence, and translating findings into clear messages through academic papers or related publications. In his interview with the Commons, Teklehaymanot Weldemichael, a thorough and dedicated Tigrayan advocate now based in Manchester, asserted, “When you have to fight fire all the time, you see a lot of propaganda and a lot of violence taking place, and as an academic, you are supposed to make sense of this.”<sup>13</sup>

Other categories included business and advertisement, education and mentorship, and youth empowerment. Business and advertisement referred to campaigns that leveraged digital platforms to promote or support Tigrayan-owned enterprises. Education and mentorship encompassed initiatives providing academic support, professional guidance, and skills training to community members. Youth empowerment involved activities aimed at enhancing the leadership, participation, communication skills, and overall capacity of youth.

Another key area of participation was the refugee and displacement campaign, in which individuals offered financial or logistical support to displaced persons or those unable to support themselves during times of crisis, such as the Tigray War.

Diplomatic engagement, lobbying, and policymaking formed two additional categories involving direct interaction with diplomats, policymakers, lawyers, and the governments of the countries where advocates reside on Tigray-related issues. In media and communication, respondents either established or worked with media outlets to share valuable information and raise global awareness about issues related to Tigray.

The final categories are fundraising, cultural and heritage initiatives, and click-to-tweet or email campaigns. While artistic and heritage efforts focused on preserving and sharing the identity and traditions of the Tigrayan community, fundraising aimed to gather resources for individuals and initiatives in need, particularly for emergencies. Click-to-tweet and email campaigns involved creating pre-written content for easy dissemination on platforms like Twitter and email, helping advocates share information widely with few barriers.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 4 shows the campaigns along with their response rates from the respondents**

There's a consistent and substantial rise in participation across nearly all campaign categories during the war period. Notably, campaigns such as Click-to-Tweet and Email Campaigns, along with Fundraising, demonstrated the most noticeable increases, underscoring how the urgency of war motivated a broader engagement within the online Tigrayan communities worldwide.

Overall, the grouped chart illustrates considerable variation in the participation of advocates in these efforts before and during the war. Click-to-Tweet and Email Campaigns, in particular, experienced the highest participation during the war at about 20%, nearly double the pre-war rate of about 10%. Fundraising followed closely at about 16%. In contrast, Business and Advertising recorded the second-lowest participation rate, just a little above the “No, I have never participated,” category, suggesting that the war period was rather critical for advocacy engagement. This indicates an intensified mobilization of digital advocacy efforts, reflecting how the urgency of the war broadened the involvement of advocates and the online community at large.

Additionally, categories such as Lobbying and Policymaking (around 8%), Refugee and Displacement (about 10%), and Diplomatic Engagement (about 6%) also saw participation nearly double during the war, demonstrating heightened urgency and action within the community advocacy efforts. Media and communication also showed a slight increase, rising from 8.7% before the war to 9.1% during the war. In comparison, while Fig. 4 shows only a slight increase in media communication campaigns during the war, Section 3.5.1, which discusses the weaknesses and challenges of the advocacy, reveals a more notable rate of increase. Although academic (research-based) advocacy did not show a substantial increase, it still experienced a slight rise from 9.0% before the war to 9.6% during the war.

Of particular note is that Youth Empowerment (7.2% during the war, compared to 6.5% pre-war), Cultural and Heritage Initiatives (8.1% during the war, down from 8.4% pre-war), and Education and Mentorship (6.4% during the war, down from 10.4% pre-war) saw higher participation before the war, indicating a shift in focus during wartime. Moreover, there was a sharp decline in the “No, I have never participated” category during the war (about 1%) compared to pre-war levels (about 18%), suggesting a significant surge in engagement as the war broke out.

What does this tell us about the online community? The findings highlight a notable increase in digital advocacy and diaspora mobilization during the war on Tigray, contrasting sharply with the pre-war period, when many were either uninvolved or focused on long-term initiatives such as youth empowerment and education. The war, therefore, transformed previously passive members of the community into active advocates, particularly in digital content preparation, policy-related advocacy, and refugee and displacement affairs. The increase in response rates for most campaign types during the war reflects a deep-seated instinct for survival, resistance, and collective action – a manifestation of what Hannah Arendt (1958) describes as the “political” coming alive when private grievances are transformed into public acts (31). The data, while statistical and opinionated on the surface, reveals resilience, solidarity, and the relentless human spirit that refuses to be silenced even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

**Table 5 – Average Daily Use in Minutes and Average Number of Posts Before vs. During War**

Platform	Before the war			During the war		
	Average daily use (in mins)	Average number of posts	Respondents active on each platform	Average daily use (in mins)	Average number of posts	Respondents active on each platform
Facebook	65.9	3.83	n = 215	84.25	5.95	n = 213
Twitter (X)	23.75	6.26	n = 146	94.45	12.72	n = 271
Instagram	53.05	3.77	n = 168	68.65	5.38	n = 161
LinkedIn	31.45	3.07	n = 160	38.35	3.6	n = 130
TikTok	57.2	3.52	n = 215	58.3	4.04	n = 109
Reddit	27.15	3.05	n = 31	27.7	3.43	n = 39
Others	54.05	3.77	n = 89	74.55	6.36	n = 106

Table 5 summarizes the data collected from respondents regarding their average daily use in minutes and the average number of posts per respondent, comparing the time during the war to the period before. This analysis included seven platforms: Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Reddit, and Others (YouTube, Clubhouse, etc.). It examines how these communities engage in online activities, including their frequency of use and the number of posts or tweets they created daily on the aforementioned platforms.

There was a notable increase in social media engagement during the war across all platforms. Before

the war, Facebook users spent an average of about 66 minutes daily, posting around four times, which rose to roughly 84 minutes and nearly six posts during the war. Twitter (X) experienced the sharpest growth, with daily use jumping from around 24 to about 94 minutes, while posts per day roughly doubled from six to nearly thirteen. That means, on Twitter, on average, one advocate posted up to thirteen times per day and spent around one hour and 30 minutes out of every 24 hours advocating to make the Tigrayan cause internationally recognizable. During the Syria war, Facebook served as the “primary information ecosystem for Syrian civil actors” (32, p.5). Similarly, during the Tigray War, Twitter played this role for Tigrayan activists and advocates. Instagram use increased from around 53 to 69 minutes daily, with posts rising from almost four to about five daily. Other platforms followed a similar pattern, with posting activity rising from nearly four to around six daily posts.

The survey findings indicate that the war period had a significant impact on social media advocacy among respondents. The sharp rise in Twitter activity suggests that the platform played a crucial role in real-time advocacy and mobilization during the genocide, serving as a key space for digital activism among the Tigrayan diaspora and their supporters. Data suggests that the Tigrayan online community became notably more engaged during the war, using these platforms to raise awareness, share updates, and mobilize collective action to support their people.

To the survey respondents who had not used social media before the Tigray War but began using it purposefully during the war, I asked them to share what motivated this change. Although the survey indicated that many respondents (n = 179) were already active on social media before the war, their use was limited to socializing and entertainment. During the war, however, it was noted that some respondents began using Twitter for the first time, and generally, 143 respondents shared their motivation for the overall shift. The motivations, based on thematic analysis of their open-ended responses, are summarized below:

**Awareness and Information.** The majority, about 45% of respondents (out of n= 143), reported that their primary motivation was to stay informed about developments in Tigray and to counter misinformation. As one respondent explained, “I wanted credible information on what was going on during the war, but I couldn’t find it anywhere else [but social media],” while also “the urgency of the [war] impact[ed] me to turn to social media as a vital communication and information-sharing tool in real-time,” said another.

**Advocacy and Activism.** Nearly 35%, the second majority of respondents, described using social media as a tool for advocacy on behalf of their community. One respondent noted:

I opened an X (formerly Twitter) account a week or so before the start of the war on Tigray. My purpose was to disseminate [or] promote my professional research outputs and engage with other people. When the war started, I abandoned my plan and used the platform for advocacy efforts. Within two years, my followers reached nearly 10,000.

Underscoring the platform’s role in facilitating online advocacy efforts.

**Community and Connection.** About 15% of respondents were also motivated by a need to connect with others who shared their experiences and concerns at the height of the genocide. “I wanted to find people who understood my pain and could relate to what was happening in Tigray,” shared one respondent. In addition, one of the experts aptly adds that among the reasons that motivated many in the diaspora to use social media during the war was their desire to connect with their homeland, Tigray, preserve collective memory, and learn more about their community overall.

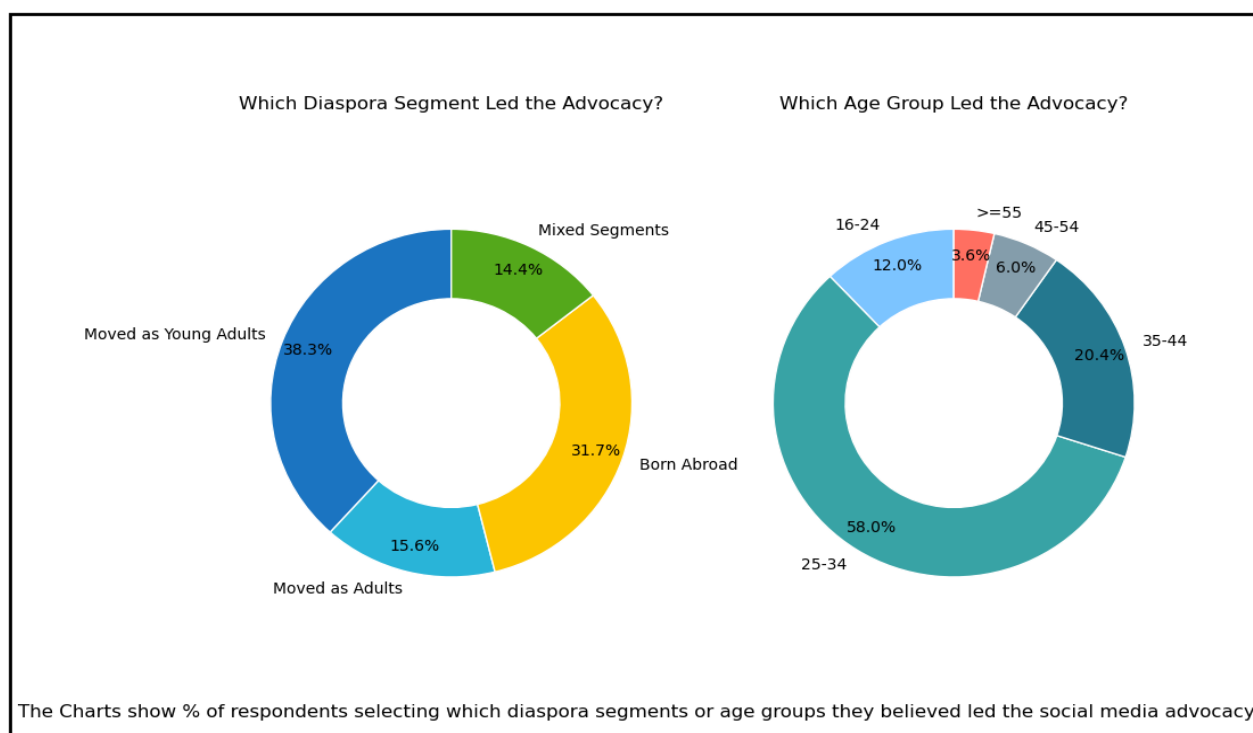
**Emotional Relief.** A few respondents, which account for about 5%, indicated that social media became a means of coping with the emotional toll of the war. One respondent noted, “Every time I post something, it feels like I’m contributing a tiny bit to rescue my family and people [back home].”

### 3.3. Leaders of the Advocacy Movement

Research Question: ‘**Which segments and age groups within the Tigrayan diaspora were perceived as leading voices in social media advocacy against the war, and what factors contributed to their prominence?**’

Globally, many communities have led movements that have brought about meaningful change for their people and created global awareness, and the Tigrayan communities are no exception. Among the top global examples, before we delve into the Tigrayan example, following the emergence of online activism, the Iranian Green Movement (2009)<sup>15</sup>, where Iranian youth and their diaspora activists used social media to organize protests and advocate for democratic reform against the 2009 presidential election; Black Lives Matter (2020)<sup>16</sup>, a global movement advocating for racial justice in the U.S., driven heavily by youth and black-women-led online activism; and the Gen Z-led protests in Kenya (2024)<sup>17</sup> supported by the diaspora, which involved mass digital activism and offline protests against proposed tax hikes in the country with the IMF and World Bank recommendation, and later against the president and his government.

Committed leadership and organization, as well as the unity of the people behind the cause, are key to the success of any movement. It is with this understanding that I undertook this analysis to recognize who led the social media advocacy efforts of the global Tigrayan community at the height of the #TigrayGenocide. The aim of this section, and the entire project, is to document the story and impact of this historic movement. This study aims the community to relearn from it, educate future generations of Tigrayans, inspire them to continue the struggle for justice and freedom and recognize those who made extraordinary efforts, particularly those in leadership roles. Importantly, while the movement was a collective effort of Tigrayans from all walks of life and influenced by many factors beyond this study’s scope, I do not intend to create division within the community, nor do I wish to minimize the efforts of any group. Instead, I emphasize the importance of recognizing such organizations and leadership in shaping more leaders and committed advocates for future efforts.



**Fig. 5 Donut charts showing the percentages of respondents by diaspora segment and age group that led the advocacy**

Overall, survey respondents believed that individuals in the diaspora who moved abroad as young adults, diaspora born to one or more Tigrayan parents, and community members aged 25-34 were seen as leading the social media advocacy efforts for the resistance against the war. The charts show that among the diaspora segments, those who moved as young adults (approximately 38%), those born and raised up abroad (approximately 32%), and the age groups 25-34 (about 58%) and 35-44 (roughly 20%) were perceived as primary leaders of the movement during the war.

Respondents noted that these two segments took on crucial roles in the advocacy for several reasons. Firstly, they know Tigray well and have a solid grasp of global affairs, which helped them connect cultures and communities. Secondly, their ties to their homeland, commitment, high online presence, and clear and passionate communication allowed them to share messages effectively. Thirdly, they understood how to use social media strategically and brought technical skills that enhanced their advocacy. Fourthly, many are fluent in English or other languages, and their education and familiarity with technology equipped them to lead advocacy efforts that made a real impact. While these reasons explain why individuals moved abroad as young adults and those born and raised abroad emerged as the most active leaders in the advocacy, perspectives on the leadership role within this demographic varied. As one respondent noted: ‘I don’t believe there is a significant difference between the [segments] [...] However, women had a notably visible impact on the advocacy against the genocidal war on Tigray,’ highlighting the often-under-acknowledged leadership roles of women in advocacy efforts in the community.

Building on these, respondents also input the following reasons explaining why the 25–34 age group,

followed by the 35–44 group, were at the forefront of the digital advocacy. Firstly, they were highly active on social media and had a deep familiarity with various platforms, using them wisely to advance their causes. Secondly, university-educated and well-informed, with optimism and a strong commitment to change, many in this group bring prior experience from other social justice movements. Thirdly, their technical proficiency, digital literacy, professional network, and resourcefulness allowed this age group to impact the advocacy efforts significantly. Fourthly, at this stage in life, they balance the stability of work and life with the energy and flexibility of youth while having fewer family obligations (i.e., many do not yet have a spouse or children). They also understood social media’s influence on policymakers and developed leadership and organizing skills that strengthened their advocacy efforts. Being tech-savvy, knowledgeable, and energetic, they are well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to diplomatic and advocacy work.

In this report, I lack precise metrics to confirm whether the indicated segments (“Individuals who moved abroad as young adults” and “Diaspora born to one or more Tigrayan parents”) and the age group (25–34) followed by the age group (35–44) fully overlap. From the reasons provided, I understood that there is likely considerable overlap. Future studies may consider collecting metrics to explicitly examine this overlap to strengthen targeted advocacy strategies and contribute to the ongoing conversation about the courage and remarkable work the advocates showed during the war.

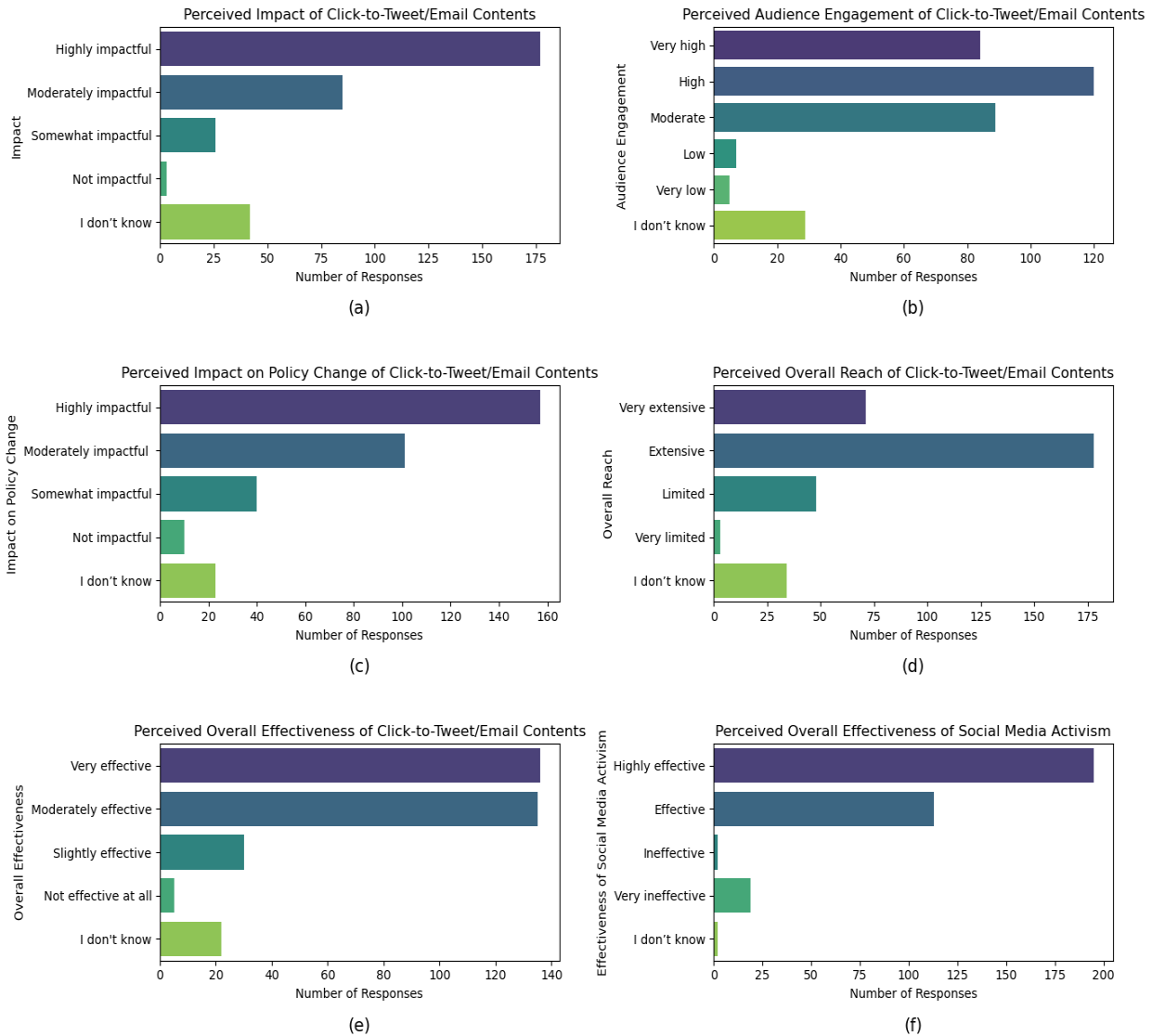
### 3.4. Strategic Use of Click-to-Tweet and Email Campaigns

**Research Question: ‘Click-to-tweet and/or Email content was among the strategic tools used for digital advocacy during the Tigray War by the global Tigrayan Diaspora. What was the perceived impact of these tools in terms of audience engagement, reach, policy influence, and overall effectiveness?’**

Click-to-tweet and email content, as the name suggests, consist of pre-made messages ready to be shared across various platforms from dedicated blogs. These tools serve as effective means of digital advocacy, boosting social shares and simplifying the process for advocates to spread messages online easily. During the digital advocacy efforts of the global Tigrayan Diaspora, primarily from November 2020 to November 2022, click-to-tweet and email content was strategically used for digital advocacy by the Tigrayan Diaspora.

Dedicated organizations, such as Omna Tigray<sup>18</sup> and SWT, along with other committed advocates<sup>19</sup>, prepared content for the community to share online, aiming to raise awareness and disseminate information. In response to the question, “Were you actively involved in preparing click-to-tweet and/or email content?” One hundred sixty-nine respondents (approximately 50%) answered “yes.” Meanwhile, for the question, “Did you use click-to-tweet and/or email content prepared by others?” Two hundred sixty-eight respondents (around 80%) answered “yes.” This highlights that while not all respondents were involved in preparing such content, click-to-tweet and email content was a widespread strategy as an advocacy tool.

Accordingly, I present a summary of respondents’ perceptions of this advocacy tool in raising awareness, mobilizing support, reach, and visibility about the Tigray War based on five metrics: impact, audience engagement, policy change or influence, overall reach, and overall effectiveness, as illustrated in the horizontal bar graphs grouped in Fig. 6.



**Fig. 6 Perceived impact, engagement, reach, and effectiveness of click-to-tweet and email content as tools of digital advocacy during the war.**

**Perceived Impact (Fig. 6(a)).** It turned out that respondents overwhelmingly identified click-to-tweet and email content as highly impactful during the advocacy in raising awareness, mobilizing support, and visibility about the Tigray War, with a smaller yet significant portion rating them as moderately impactful. Very few indicated the content was not impactful or were unsure of its influence.

**Audience Engagement (Fig. 6(b)).** Audience engagement was similarly rated highly, with most respondents selecting “high” or “very high.” A smaller but notable portion rated the content as “low” or indicated uncertainty regarding its influence on the target audience.

**Impact on Policy Change (Fig. 6(c)).** In this study, the term “policy change” refers to shifts in the international community’s stance and actions toward Ethiopia in response to its war on Tigray, particularly when compared to the diplomatic and economic relationships that existed prior to the war. As a result of the “gross violations of internationally recognized human rights” in the Tigray War, for example, the European Union Commission temporarily suspended its budget support aid to Ethiopia. The U.S. also put on hold Ethiopia’s benefits under (and eligibility for) the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).<sup>20</sup>

Perceptions of the content’s impact on policy change were more tempered. While most still rated the content as highly or moderately impactful, this proportion was lower than in other categories, reflecting the complexities of translating the click-to-tweet and email content as an advocacy tool into tangible policy outcomes, particularly in geopolitical crises involving limited access to decision-makers. One respondent noted, “I don’t think it brought a lot of change on the ground (in-terms of policy changes) but that isn’t the problem of the campaigns rather how the world politics works.”

**Overall Reach (Fig. 6(d)).** Respondents perceived the tool as having “extensive” to “very extensive” reach, reinforcing earlier findings on engagement and impact, suggesting that the content was successfully disseminated across various networks.

**Overall Effectiveness (Fig. 6(e)).** Many respondents rated the content as “very effective” or “moderately effective.” The alignment of perceived effectiveness with earlier findings on engagement and reach supports the notion that these tools played a meaningful role in sustaining the advocacy efforts throughout the campaign.

In sum, as one respondent fittingly reflected, which captures the perceived reach and multi-layered impact of the click-to-tweet and email content, both in raising global awareness and in providing a sense of agency for those who felt powerless during the war:

The world began to pay attention to the [war] after the ‘click-to-tweet’ campaigns started trending. These efforts were crucial in bringing the [crisis] to light and informing the global audience about what was happening in [Tigray]. They were so effective that the Ethiopian government felt compelled to organize a TV show to teach people [its supporters] how to use Twitter (X) while also launching pro-war campaigns that antagonized ours.

[...] these campaigns were also good for our [community’s] mental health, especially for those in Ethiopia (outside of Tigray). Because it helped give a sense of [agency] to people who felt trapped and burdened by survival guilt, as there was little that could be done – especially in the early days of the war – other than talking about it.

### 3.5. Strengths, Opportunities, and Weaknesses of the Digital Movement

Research Question: ‘More broadly, what opportunities and shortcomings can be identified in the global Tigrayan diaspora’s digital advocacy efforts during the war?’

Movements such as the Tigrayan diaspora inevitably carry both opportunities (strengths) and inefficiencies (challenges), particularly as it happens at a time of intense psychological trauma and disinformation campaigns orchestrated massively by those who supported the Ethiopian state’s war on Tigray. In this report, one of the aims of this study is to tell a story on the lasting impression from respondents’ opinions on the overall effectiveness of the activism, as well as the opportunities and inefficiencies from which the community and the general public could learn. A quick glimpse of these reflections is shared below in the final section of this chapter.

**Overall Effectiveness.** Regarding overall effectiveness in raising global awareness about the war on Tigray, the global Tigrayan social media activism during the war received the highest ratings (see Fig. 6(f)) compared to the other metrics presented in the figure. A significant number of respondents rated it as “highly effective,” followed by “moderately effective,” with a smaller portion selecting “very ineffective.” The result reflects a broader recognition of those social media platforms’ pivotal role in amplifying the marginalized voices of Tigrayans, countering narratives of denial and misinformation, and maintaining international visibility for the Tigray cause.

#### 3.5.1 Opportunities and Strengths

**Global Awareness.** One of the most frequently identified opportunities of the advocacy was its success in raising global awareness, aligning closely with its central objective. The digital advocacy efforts helped raise international awareness of Tigray, its people, and its devastation. As one respondent noted, “[The] Diaspora put Tigray [on] the world map. We competed for attention with Ukrainians and Palestinians.” This visibility was seen as a notable benefit brought to the community.

**Unity and Solidarity.** A second recurring strength was unity and solidarity. Despite the small size of the Tigrayan population in Ethiopia and abroad, unity and solidarity emerged as two key forces that helped sustain the community’s resistance during the war. As one respondent reflected, “[The advocacy] brought the kind of awareness that we needed to create and also united Tigrayans as one [globally].” This collective spirit was viewed as a solid pillar of the advocacy.

**Timeliness and Responsiveness.** The advocacy was also characterized by timeliness and responsiveness. Although information from Tigray was scarce due to the blockade and siege, the diaspora quickly shared updates when they became available, ensuring timely dissemination to the international community and global audience. “The rapid dissemination of information through social media platforms enabled advocates to share news, personal stories, and updates with a global audience almost instantaneously,” as described by one respondent.

**Truth-based Advocacy.** Another pattern noted by respondents was truth-based advocacy. Grounding the community’s efforts in facts and firsthand accounts of the atrocities helped maintain credibility and foster global support, even if that support remained minimal as the international community largely ignored the cause. One respondent explained, “Much of [the advocacy efforts] was organic, intense, creative, timely, and based on facts.” This approach motivated the online communities and supporters to engage confidently with the advocacy messages and advocates.

**Organization and mobilization** were also seen as another strength of the movement. The campaigns were perceived as organized and unified, with the young generation playing a vital role in online mobilization and advocacy. One respondent shared, “The young generation was extremely online, impactful, and collaborative during the war.” Another added, “The advocacy effectively replaced public diplomacy as Tigray didn’t have any institutions and tools outside to help the diplomacy.”

**Counter Misinformation.** Finally, countering misinformation was noted as another opportunity in the advocacy efforts. In the face of false narratives by the Ethiopian government and its allies, both locally in Ethiopia and globally, intended to discredit the advocacy, efforts to fact-check, correct misinformation, and archive records were seen as essential tactics for maintaining the narrative’s integrity and objectives of the cause. A respondent commented, “Both intentional and unintentional misinformation spread widely, complicating efforts to provide a clear, accurate narrative. Competing narratives and propaganda from various sides contributed to a polarized information environment, which sometimes undermined the credibility of [our] advocacy efforts.”

In sum, another respondent captured the collective spirit of these efforts, stating:

I think about the quote from a journalist covering the digital advocacy efforts of the Tigrayan diaspora during the war. “That diaspora is widespread, militant, young, and very, very online.”

We all mobilized online and cross-amplified each other’s posts. We did a good job of calling out hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation online. We operated as fact-checkers in that sense. We archived online social media posts and would repost them when someone tried to refute their prior statements. We shared anecdotes we heard on the ground about the people’s struggles. We effectively created a digital paper trail.

### 3.5.2 Inefficiencies and Challenges

**Mainstream Media Limitation.** Among the challenges identified, respondents noted mainstream media limitations. A lack of established Tigrayan media outlets and well-organized groups in the diaspora before the war limited the ability to transform advocacy momentum into sustained action, particularly in engaging influential individuals and politicians globally as soon as the war broke out. Although the diaspora later tried to adapt by establishing more new initiatives and media outlets – primarily online<sup>21</sup> – the lack of timely access to mainstream media significantly undermined the effectiveness

of the advocacy in its early months. Thus, this limitation limited the community's effort to transform advocacy momentum into sustained action, particularly in engaging influential individuals and politicians globally.

**Over-emotional messaging** was another inefficiency noted by respondents. Some described the advocacy as overly emotional and prideful, occasionally undermining their diplomatic progress. One respondent observed, "Sometimes [the advocates] got heated and they [went] down again with small wins which [had] a [destructive] diplomatic impact throughout the process." Additionally, excessive tagging of organizations and leaders sometimes led to account suspensions under Twitter's rules. "The sheer volume of information and the rapid pace of updates made it challenging for audiences to discern accurate and reliable sources. The fragmentation of information across multiple platforms [also] sometimes led to confusion and made it difficult to access comprehensive, nuanced perspectives," another explained.

**Echo chambers** were identified as another limitation, with the advocacy sometimes struggling to reach beyond the Tigrayan community. One respondent stated, "I think after a while, we were only speaking to each other – stuck in an echo chamber. I also think a small population of us (but that's a lot when our population is already small) were focused on the wrong people (ex.: spending time being hateful back to genocide deniers/justifiers)." Another added, "No bots, not enough OSINT capabilities, no ad spend permitted, limited messaging cohesiveness."

**Information Blackout.** The information blackout in Tigray, intentionally imposed by the Ethiopian government during the war's siege and blockade, severely constrained advocacy efforts. It limited timely and reliable information flow, forcing advocates to rely on pre-existing content. Most information was disseminated only through the efforts of a few dedicated individuals or humanitarian workers, resulting in delays in advocacy messaging. This situation sometimes led to the sharing of misinformation. As one respondent explained, "Due to the complete blackout of Tigray, it wasn't easy to get real-time info from Tigray. Hence, some people (Tigrayans) have been falling to fake pictures and videos intentionally released by Ethiopians and Eritreans to sabotage our advocacy with fake videos. This has sometimes caused negative effects such as trust issues on the advocacy."

**Exclusivity or Bias.** Instead of being led independently by civic organizations or non-partisan organizers, the advocacy was easily manipulated by the ruling party, the TPLF. As one respondent reflected, "The advocacy was led by people from the ruling party, and most advocates were easily manipulated by the party's cadres. Those with differing opinions were isolated from it." Some people supported the TPLF while others did not, creating rifts at a time when the primary focus should have been on freeing Tigray despite the advocate's political differences. This situation made the movement sensitive to criticism and bias, influenced by money, greed, and divisions among the influencers, and thus, it became a challenge for their advocacy efforts. Furthermore, although this movement was a widespread global advocacy effort, some communities were excluded or overlooked. As one expert noted, "even though the number of Tigrayan communities in the Asia Pacific and Middle East is increasing [rapid-

ly] – and that they contributed significantly to Tigray during the war – members in these regions are often undermined.”

**Lack of Meaningful Coordination with Other Communities.** The advocacy efforts often remained siloed within the Tigrayan community, as discussed in the “Echo Chamber” section, thereby reducing opportunities to build meaningful alliances and amplify messages to broader audiences, including other communities with shared values or similar causes globally. As one in the subject-matter experts’ group review noted, “a lack of strategic partnerships with other communities [limited] the impact and reach of our advocacy.”

Finally, a **lack of central coordination** was frequently reported, characterized by the absence of structured and coordinated leadership and a clear vision in advocacy efforts, resulting in resource wastage and reduced sustainability. Advocacy efforts often operated voluntarily without an organized framework or committed leadership, resulting in fragmented initiatives. The lack of international connections further limited the campaigns’ reach, especially in the early months of the war, confining most activities within Tigrayan networks.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# CONCLUSION

### 4.1 Overview

This chapter summarizes the study's purpose, methods, and key findings, reiterating the role of diaspora-led digital advocacy in raising global awareness during the Tigray War. It further considers the implications of these findings for Tigrayan diaspora communities worldwide and other relevant actors, highlighting the importance of sustaining such movements in rebuilding, remembrance and reclaiming narratives for the people of Tigray. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the study's limitations.

### 4.2 Revisiting the Study's Purpose and Method

This study examines the digital advocacy efforts of the Tigrayan diaspora during the Tigray Genocide – a period defined by an almost total communication blackout in Tigray and severe human rights and humanitarian devastation. With limited information emerging from the region, diaspora communities turned to social media to raise global awareness, mobilize support, and counter misinformation.

The research aimed to document these advocacy efforts, measure their reach, and assess the role of digital platforms in shaping global narratives about the largely invisible war. Using a mixed-methods design, the study combined quantitative and qualitative data from an online survey with asynchronous (email) interviews with one vocal diaspora-based woman advocate. Eight other advocates – each from a different location across the globe and recognized as subject-matter experts – provided feedback on survey responses and preliminary findings.

### 4.3 Synthesis of Key Findings

Results revealed a marked increase in digital advocacy and diaspora mobilizations during the war compared to the pre-war period, with many previously passive community members becoming active advocates. The movement was led predominantly by those who had migrated as young adults, individuals born to one or more Tigrayan parents, and people aged 25-34. Twitter emerged as the dominant platform for amplifying Tigray-related causes, with participation driven by personal connection, moral obligation, and frustration over perceived global neglect.

These findings underscore the scale and strategic importance of diaspora-led digital campaigns, offering lessons for future movements not only within the Tigrayan communities but also globally by highlighting both the strengths and the shortcomings of this advocacy model.

This digital movement marked a historic and extraordinary moment for Tigrayan communities worldwide, emerging at a time when the people of Tigray had little political representation and limited global recognition. It demonstrated the diaspora's ability to mobilize quickly, amplify marginalized voices, and influence global awareness. Harnessing the strengths and opportunities identified in this movement offers valuable lessons on the impact and potential of collective action – not only to respond to crises, but also to drive lasting change, foster innovation, and provide sustained support for Tigray.

#### **4.4 Future Implications**

It is therefore by building on these lessons that the diaspora and other relevant actors can ensure that such efforts evolve into a sustained force for rebuilding, remembrance, and reclaiming narratives for the Tigrayan people, while contributing to the broader good of humanity. To safeguard this mission, advocates are strongly encouraged to remain independent from political bodies, keeping their focus squarely on the needs of the people of Tigray – especially those still living in the region – and on actions that will most benefit them.

The historic movement documented in this study centered primarily on raising global awareness of the devastation endured by the people of Tigray during the war. Looking ahead, advocacy efforts should also place a stronger emphasis on diplomacy. As one expert emphasized: “For upcoming efforts, it is vital that stronger diplomatic engagement is undertaken to secure policy changes and ensure that global leaders pressure all actors involved to end the ongoing suffering of the people of Tigray, and to prevent similar atrocities from occurring in Ethiopia or anywhere else in the world.”

#### **4.5 Limitation of the Study**

The primary methodology used in this research was an online survey. While effective for gathering broad input, this approach carries inherent limitations, including selection bias, limited depth in responses, difficulty verifying respondent identity and eligibility, survey fatigue, and potential misinterpretation of questions<sup>22</sup>. These challenges were also observed in this study.

For example, the reported percentages of campaign participation across different categories (see Fig. 4) and the usage patterns of various social media platforms (see Table 5) before and during the war showed no major differences, contrary to initial expectations. However, other patterns and insights, combined with experts' reviews, revealed that the nature of the movement had fundamentally shifted from the pre-war period, both in participation and in platform usage.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1 Overview

This chapter presents both practical and scholarly recommendations derived from the study's findings, identifying areas where further research is needed to advance the documentation and preservation of Tigrayan history.

### 5.2 Future Research Opportunities

For future research, it is recommended to complement online surveys with in-depth interviews, triangulate findings with data scraped directly from social media platforms, and employ digital ethnography – such as observing advocacy chat groups or channels (with consent) – to capture richer, more nuanced insights and strengthen the overall impact of the study.

While this study sheds light on the digital advocacy efforts of the global Tigrayan diaspora during the war, it also leaves several important questions for future exploration. Was there a correlation between the online and offline activism of the diaspora as a whole? How did in-person resistance activities complement online campaigns? What changes occurred in the community's advocacy following the Pretoria Agreement? And what roles did non-Tigrayan advocates play in amplifying the Tigray cause and supporting the efforts of Tigrayan activists?

In addition, because this research did not include a detailed content analysis of specific posts or tweets, questions remain about the tone, framing, and virality of advocacy messages – areas that warrant deeper examination in future studies.

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## REQUEST TO READERS

This research was partly funded by members of the Tigrayan community. Recognizing that many Tigrayans who could benefit from this work lack access to online payment systems, we at TDR are making this publication freely available on our platform – datafortigray.org.

If you are reading this on your computer and are able to contribute, we warmly welcome your support for our upcoming data-driven projects and publications. Every contribution, regardless of size, helps us document and preserve Tigrayan stories from around the world for future generations, guided by our motto: “Data for Tigray, Knowledge for Generations.”

You can contribute through our ongoing fundraiser on GoFundMe. Thank you for standing with us and being part of this movement.

Gofundme link at: <https://gofund.me/5c859648>

# ENDNOTES

- 1 See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>
- 2 See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abiy-Ahmed>
- 3 Read details about the agreement at <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/cessation-of-hostilities-agreement-between-the-government-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-and-the-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-tplf>
- 4 See <https://x.com/MarkAmesExiled/status/1419404104720388102>
- 5 The interview with Samrawit Neguse was conducted in August 2024 and early 2025
- 6 See <https://standwithtigray.com>
- 7 See, for example, one of the author's stories from the Aksum massacre, which has received nearly 150,000 views since its publication, <https://tghat.com/2021/02/13/what-happened-in-aksum-my-personal-account/>
- 8 Watch the video at <https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=1716484285225018&vanity=samrawit.neguse.56>
- 9 Dr. Tedros Adhanom is the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), <https://www.who.int/director-general/tedros-adhanom-ghebreyesus>
- 10 See for example [https://www.instagram.com/p/C\\_n1Y8UtVNt/?igsh=Mm15NnUxdjh0a20z](https://www.instagram.com/p/C_n1Y8UtVNt/?igsh=Mm15NnUxdjh0a20z)
- 11 See <https://atlasti.com/>
- 12 See <https://www.datafortigray.org>
- 13 Commons: Journal for Social Criticism is a left-wing Ukrainian media platform founded in 2009. The full interview, “It Feels Like It’s Only Happening to You”: A Conversation with Geographer Tekle Weldemichael on the War in Tigray and the Scholar’s Role in Opposing Violence’ is available at <https://commons.com.ua/en/conversation-war-tigray-and-scholars-role/>
- 14 See also <https://visualmodo.com/clicktotweet-share-contents-twitter/#:~:text=It%E2%80%99s%20a%20Twitter-related%20service%20called%20ClickToTweet%20that%20creates,on%20Twitter%2C%20your%20blog%20post%20gains%20more%20exposure>
- 15 See <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/34206>
- 16 See <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/may/27/what-i-learned-black-lives-matter>
- 17 See <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/jan/14/how-do-you-teargas-a-baddie-kenya-gen-z-revolutionaries>
- 18 See <https://omnatigray.org/>
- 19 Watch Melles, one of the advocates, as he gives a tutorial on how to tweet and retweet using pre-made click-to-tweet content on his YouTube channel, QntShara. The video is in Tigrinya and may require translation for non-Tigrinya speakers. <https://youtu.be/gElvdiJxoUw?si=YdSIvgOtIFEXnsTi>
- 20 See <https://addisfortune.news/ethiopias-agoa-exit-looking-beyond-the-headlines/>
- 21 List of Tigrayan media outlets published at TGHAT <https://www.tghat.com/2023/01/12/a-list-of-tigrayan-media-outlets/>
- 22 See <https://swoogo.events/blog/advantages-disadvantages-online-surveys/#:~:text=While%20online%20surveys%20>

offer%20numerous%20advantages%E2%80%94such%20as%20broad,will%20discuss%2C%20advantages%20%26%20disadvantages%20of%20online%20surveys

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Online Research Survey

A revised version of the study’s online research survey is included here as part of the report for readers to reference.

### Online Research Survey: “Conversation with a Historic Movement: An Analysis of Global Tigrayan Digital-Advocacy Efforts” – CHM-S Questionnaire

#### Introduction

Hi,

My name is Goitom Mekonen, author of *Primed for DEATH*, a memoir on the Tigray Genocide. I am currently working on a project titled “Conversation with a Historic Movement: An Analysis of Global Tigrayan Digital-Advocacy Efforts,” which focuses on pro-Tigray digital advocacy efforts made by Tigrayan diaspora communities at the height of the genocide, specifically from November 2020 to November 2022, up to the Pretoria Agreement, in comparison to the period before.

I believe the efforts made, especially during the war, stand as evidence of a pivotal moment in history, offering a window into the heart and soul of the digital advocacy that emerged among Tigrayan communities in the diaspora. These are not merely data shared on social media but living chronicles of the people of Tigray’s ongoing struggle and resilience amid the crisis and genocidal war. I want to begin with a preliminary study of the firsthand experiences of the online community by quantifying these efforts before examining the data scraped from social media platforms.

The objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive data-based analysis of digital advocacy efforts during the active fighting period of the Tigray Genocide in comparison to the time before. By examining social media usage patterns, advocacy strategies, and their impacts and effectiveness, this research aims to:

1. Document and preserve the historical record of this crucial period
2. Identify effective digital advocacy techniques
3. Understand the role and potential of social media-led movements in times of crisis
4. Inform future advocacy efforts for Tigray and similar causes globally
5. Contribute to the broader understanding of digital activism in the modern era

The first phase of the research is estimated to run from May 12, 2024, to September 28, 2025. Research findings will be published in phases in our TDR Journal of the Tigray Data Repository journal.

Throughout this research project, I will employ two methodologies: an online survey to gather first-hand experiences from community members and the collection and advanced analysis of scraped social media data on advocacy using some keywords or hashtags. The survey will serve as a preliminary step to the in-depth analysis of the posts scraped from various social media platforms.

The online survey will use the snowball sampling method. The survey link will be shared with respondents on social media upon invitation, and respondents will be encouraged to refer others to participate.

I would like your help in bringing this project to life. Your honest response will be invaluable in understanding the role of social media activism in shaping narratives, combating misinformation, and mobilizing support during crises.

Thank you for completing the survey, which will take approximately 30 minutes.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

Participants must be 16 years old or older, be of Tigrayan descent, reside outside of Tigray, have been active on various social media platforms elevating Tigrayan causes, and able to speak and/or write in English or Tigrinya to complete the survey.

## **Confidentiality**

Your responses are organized in a way that ensures your anonymity and cannot be traced back to you. At the end of the study, the data collected will be compiled into a research report and the datasets will be made available to the public on our data repository – the Tigray Data Repository.

## **Consent Form**

I have read and understand the purpose of this survey and agree to participate voluntarily. I understand that my responses will be used for research purposes and will ensure my anonymity.

- I agree to participate

## Part I: Participant's Demographics

Gender:  Male  Female  Other

Age (in years):  16-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65 and above

Level of Education Completed:

None  High school  Undergraduate coursework  Bachelor's degree  Graduate degree

Profession: [Education and Research, Technology and IT, Business and Management, Government and Public Service, Artistic and Media, Healthcare, Trade and Skilled Labor, Sales and Customer Service, Self-Employed (Business Owner), Student, Other (Please specify): [Short answer]]

Location:

- Ethiopia (Outside of Tigray)  Africa  North America  Central/South America  
 Asia  Europe  Middle East  Australia

## Part II: Contributions Prior to the Tigray war

1. Did you use social media prior to the Tigray War?
  - Yes
  - No [skip to part 3]
2. [If yes, to question 1], Individuals exhibit varying levels of technological proficiency and interest. What was your level of familiarity with and usage of social media?
  - Mostly read and browsed
  - Mostly posted content
  - Actively posted and read
3. Which social media platform(s) did you use most frequently?
  - Twitter/X
  - Facebook
  - Instagram
  - TikTok
  - LinkedIn
  - Reddit
  - Others (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. How often did you use the social media platform you used the most? [repeat questions 4 through 6 for each social media platforms selected in question 3]
- Less than 10 minutes per day
  - 11-30 minutes per day
  - 31 minutes to 1 hour per day
  - 1-2 hours per day
  - More than 2 hours per day
5. On average, how many posts or tweets did you create per day on this platform?
- Less than 5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 21
6. For what purposes were you using this platform? Please select all that apply:
- Advocacy/awareness creation
  - Campaigns/Fundraising
  - Socializing/entertainment
  - Education/information/news
  - Business/advertisement
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
7. Were you participating in any of the following campaigns on social media before November 2020? Please select all that apply:
- Academic (research-based) Advocacy
  - Education and Mentorship
  - Click-to-Tweet and/or Email Campaigns
  - Lobbying and Policymaking
  - Fundraising
  - Cultural and Heritage Initiatives
  - Media and Communication
  - Diplomatic Engagement
  - Refugee and Displacement Support
  - Youth Empowerment
  - Business/Advertisement
  - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### Part III: Time During the Tigray war

8. Did you use social media during the Tigray war?

- Yes
- No [skip to part 4]

9. If you did not use social media before the war and started to use it during the war, how did you get engaged on social media? And what motivated you to use social media?

[Short answer]

10. What was your level of familiarity with and usage of social media?

- Mostly read and browsed
- Mostly posted content
- Actively posted and read

11. Which social media platform(s) did you use most regularly?

- Twitter/X
- Facebook
- Clubhouse
- Instagram
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- Reddit
- Others (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

12. If you selected your most frequently used platform(s), how often did you use this platform?  
[repeat questions 5 through 7 for each social media platform selected in question 4]

- Less than 10 minutes per day
- 11-30 minutes per day
- 31 minutes to 1 hour per day
- 1-2 hours per day
- More than 2 hours per day

13. On average, how many posts or tweets did you create per day on this platform?

- Less than 5
- 6-10
- 11-20

- o More than 21

14. For what purposes were you using this platform? Please select all that apply:

- Advocacy/awareness creation
- Campaigns/Fundraising
- Socializing/entertainment
- Education/information/news
- Business/advertisement
- Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

15. Did you participate in any of the following campaigns on social media platforms? Please select all that apply:

- Academic (research-based) Advocacy
- Education and Mentorship
- Click-to-Tweet and/or Email Campaigns
- Lobbying and Policymaking
- Fundraising
- Cultural and Heritage Initiatives
- Media and Communication
- Diplomatic Engagement
- Refugee and Displacement Support
- Youth Empowerment
- Business/Advertisement
- Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

16. In your opinion, which of these Tigrayan diaspora community segments was at the forefront of the social media led advocacy to stop war on Tigray? Please select the option that best reflects your view.

- o Diaspora born to one or more Tigrayan parent
- o Individuals that moved abroad as young adults
- o Individuals that moved abroad as adults

17. Please explain why your choice in Q16 played a crucial role.

[Short answer]

18. In your opinion, which age group do you believe was at the forefront in driving the social media led movements during the war? Please select the option that best reflects your view.

- o 16 - 24

- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and above

19. Please explain why you believe this age group played the most crucial role.

[Short answer]

#### **Part IV: Impact and effect of Click-to-Tweet and/or Email Campaigns**

\* Click-to-tweet and email contents are pre-written messages that advocates create to make it easy for supporters to share information on Twitter or through their email accounts.

20. Were you actively involved in preparing click-to-tweet and/or email contents during the war?

- Yes
- No

21. Did you use click-to-tweet and/or email contents prepared by others during the war?

- Yes
- No

22. If you were engaged in preparing or using click-to-tweet and/or email contents, how impactful do you believe they were in raising awareness, mobilizing support and visibility about the Tigray War?

- Not impactful
- Somewhat impactful
- Moderately impactful
- Highly impactful
- Neither impactful nor unimpactful
- I don't know

23. How engaging were the click-to-tweet and/or email campaigns for the target audience?

- Very low
- Low
- Moderate
- High

- o Very high
  - o I don't know
24. How impactful do you believe the click-to-tweet and/or email campaigns were in influencing advocacy and achieving policy change?
- o Not impactful
  - o Somewhat impactful
  - o Moderately impactful
  - o Highly impactful
  - o Neither impactful nor unimpactful
  - o I don't know
25. Overall, how extensive was the reach of the click-to-tweet and/or email campaigns?
- o Very limited
  - o Limited
  - o Moderate
  - o Extensive
  - o Very extensive
  - o I don't know
26. In general, how effective do you think click-to-tweet and/or email campaigns were as tools? (Please consider the following criteria: reach and visibility, engagement, action taken, and impact on tactic and decision-making.)
- o Not effective at all
  - o Slightly effective
  - o Moderately effective
  - o Very effective
  - o Neither effective nor ineffective
  - o I don't know
27. Based on your observations, who were the three most influential Tigrayan diaspora individuals on social media platforms known for providing accurate and timely information about the war? Please provide their names and/or handles. [Only used during the pilot test.]
- [Short answer]
- [Short answer]
- [Short answer]

28. Based on your observations, who were the three most influential individuals outside of our community on social media platforms known for providing accurate and timely information about the war? Please provide their names and/or handles.

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

29. Based on your observations, please provide the names and/or handles of the top three diaspora-based NGOs or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) supporting the Tigrayan causes that were actively engaged on social media.

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

30. Based on your observations, which are the top three used hashtags by the Tigrayan diaspora community to inform the public about the war on social media?

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

31. Based on your observations, which are the top three used hashtags by the large Ethiopian diaspora community to mis/disinform the public about the war on social media?

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

[Short answer]

## **Part V: CSOs and Women Participation (Only used for pilot test)**

32. Were you involved in any CSOs established during the war?

- o Yes
- o No [Skip to part 6]

33. If yes, what is (are) the name(s) of the organization(s)?

[Short answer]

34. Are (or were) you part of the organization's leadership and able to provide detailed information?

- o Yes
- o No [Skip to part 6]

35. How many founders were involved in establishing the organization(s)?

[Short answer]

36. Where is the geographic origin of the organization(s)?

- |   |                              |                                     |   |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Ethiopia (Outside<br>of Tigray) | <input type="radio"/> Africa | <input type="radio"/> North America | <input type="radio"/> Central/<br>South America |
| <input type="radio"/> Asia                            | <input type="radio"/> Europe | <input type="radio"/> Middle East   | <input type="radio"/> Australia                 |

37. What percentage of women are part of the organization(s)?

- o Less than 50
- o 50
- o More than 50
- o Zero

38. What was the aim or reason of establishing the organization? Please select all that apply:

- Education and Youth Empowerment
- Humanitarian Efforts
- Advocacy and Awareness
- Women Affairs
- Cultural and Heritage Preservations
- Civic Associations and Movements
- Media and Information
- Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

39. Could you briefly describe the organization's ongoing operations, and the impact it has made?

[Short answer]

## Part VI: Lasting Impressions

40. How effective do you think social media activism was in efforts to raise global awareness about the war on Tigray?

- Very ineffective
- Ineffective
- Effective
- Highly effective
- Neither effective nor ineffective
- I don't know

41. Overall, what do you think were the strengths of the digital advocacy efforts made to help raise global awareness about the war on Tigray?

[Short answer]

42. Overall, what do you think were the weaknesses of the digital advocacy efforts made to help raise global awareness about the war on Tigray?

[Short answer]

43. Lastly, could you briefly share any unique memorable experience, story while advocating during the war? (only used for pilot test)

[Short answer]

### Conclusion:

Thank you for completing this detailed survey. Your participation is highly appreciated.

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions with a Woman Advocate

1. To start, could you please share a bit about yourself? What's your name, where were you born, and what do you do? Feel free to share whatever you're comfortable with so our readers can better understand your background.
2. Who were you, and what were you doing prior to the war? How much did you know about Tigray before the Tigray War broke out? How were you using social media at that time, and what kinds of campaigns or causes did you participate in, if any? Were any of these related to Tigray? (Keep in mind that I'm also studying the patterns of Tigrayans' social media usage and the types of campaigns they participated in before and during the war.)
3. In November 2020, the Ethiopian state waged war on Tigray. And what was your initial reaction to the outbreak of the war?
4. How did things unfold for you after that and what was your immediate reaction to it?
5. How did you become involved in the work you're currently engaged in, especially considering what you were doing prior to the war? (Again, I'm trying to uncover the patterns in Tigrayans' social media usage and campaigns before and during the war.)
6. What have you personally gained from being an advocate of Tigray, particularly in terms of reconnecting with Tigray, its culture, language, and identity? What does Tigray and its community mean to you, and how do you envision its future in comparison the current predicament Tigray facing?
7. How has your advocacy and influence contributed to taking this campaign to a global stage?
8. I know you shared your opinions in the earlier phases of our interview, but I'd like to conclude your story by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the advocacy efforts you've witnessed from your perspective. What are your thoughts on this?
9. Were there any unique observations or memorable experiences during your advocacy work? If yes, could you elaborate on that.
10. And lastly, what recommendations would you offer for future advocacy efforts of the global Tigrayans?

## Appendix 3: Subject-matter Experts Group feedback Guide and Questions

Greetings!

I hope this message finds you well.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this expert group. I have invited eight vocal Tigrayan advocates from different regions of the world to share their perspectives and provide feedback on my ongoing research project. Attached to this email is the draft Results and Analysis chapter for your review.

I am pleased to share these preliminary findings and look forward to your input. Since the results reflect perceptions collected from the broader online community, incorporating this additional method – an expert survey with leading advocates – will enhance the analysis and help present a more impactful and educational account of the historic advocacy efforts undertaken during the war. Your feedback will be invaluable to achieving this goal.

Your contributions will be integrated into the report as appropriate, either through direct quotations, paraphrased insights, or within a dedicated section of the Results and Analysis chapter. In addition, all expert feedback will be compiled anonymously into a dataset that will be uploaded to our repository for public access.

To guide your reflections, here are a few questions you might consider while sharing your feedback on the results:

1. **Do the results (see Chapter Three) reflect your experiences or observations of the advocacy efforts?**
2. **Are there any observations, surprises, or areas you feel need further clarification, exploration, or exclusion? Is there anything you disagree with?**
3. **What recommendations would you offer for future advocacy efforts based on the key findings?**

Lastly, when you send your feedback, please include your signature, which should contain your full name, the organization you represent or founded (if applicable), your age and diaspora segment (or age group, as indicated in the results), as well as your location at the time of advocacy and your leadership role during that period.

Thank you so much for your time and for being part of this community-centered endeavor. I look forward to your insightful feedback. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

**I would appreciate receiving your feedback within a week to keep the project on track.**

Best regards,

Goitom