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WhatsApp for Social Activism in Ethiopia? Research in Progress from US Diplomacy Lab

Devendra Potnis
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, dpotnis@utk.edu

Dawit Demissie
Updated - AIS, demisd@sage.edu

Jeni Trimmer
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, jtrimmer@vols.utk.edu

Jamie Cleek
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, jcleek1@vols.utk.edu

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Devendra Potnis
University of Tennessee at Knoxville
dpotnis@utk.edu

Dawit Demissie
The Sage Colleges
demisd@sage.edu

Jeni Trimmer
University of Tennessee at Knoxville
jtrimmer@vols.utk.edu

Jaime Cleek
University of Tennessee at Knoxville
jcleek1@vols.utk.edu

ABSTRACT

WhatsApp with over a billion users has emerged as one of the most popular communication channels for spreading text, audio, and video messages in a timely manner to thousands of people in developing countries. Its ability to broadcast messages to masses in an instance has a unique significance for and application in social activism. This study investigates the factors influencing the youth's intention to spread the US message using WhatsApp in Ethiopia. Our preliminary findings suggest that the high cost of accessing the Internet, slow speed of mobile Internet data plan, reluctance of students to forward government messages, and a negative image of students about the United States deter youth in Ethiopia from forwarding the US message over WhatsApp. Study findings will inform US embassies in developing countries for crafting strategies to engage with local youth for virally reaching out to masses using mobile apps like WhatsApp.