

# MONTHLY BRIEFING

With selected case studies on information disorder in Ethiopia

**Voice up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project**  
**Reporting Period: September 21 - October 20, 2025**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Between September 21 and October 21, 2025, Ethiopia found itself amid an intensifying wave of information disorder and hate speech that touched nearly every aspect of public life. What was once largely confined to political discourse has now expanded into social, educational, and economic domains, reshaping how citizens access and interpret information. Misleading narratives, doctored visuals including deep fakes, and coordinated disinformation campaigns spread rapidly across social media platforms.

These distortions not only disrupted public understanding but also threatened the nation's digital safety, strained economic confidence, and deepened public mistrust toward institutions. As a result, the country's information ecosystem became increasingly polarized and fragile leaving individuals, communities, and organizations struggling to navigate a landscape dominated by uncertainty and manipulation.

During the monitoring period, we identified and debunked numerous coordinated hate speech and disinformation campaigns. The project's trainees debunked a number of local and international claims, such as the grade 12 exam with clickbait posts that tricked people into registering and joining groups to view their results and false claims that the government would force them to join if they didn't pass the national exam. certain heated discussions pertaining to the recently launched GERD and early false allegations, with some global influencers covering the dam's inauguration on TikTok, the trainees countered the controversial wage increase allegation, which is also included in the monitoring period.

Fake sponsor games include scam online alleged betting games, traditional false perceptions of our society, particularly in relation to nutrition and food consumed by our society, and strong claims that could cause chaos, such as false claims of Ethiopia's new nuclear program, which were linked to the current stability of the region, and alleged Ethiopia's ambition to conquer other areas, including the Red Sea and ports, by force. The claims that were refuted included the ongoing conflicts in the Amhara region and the unrest in Tigray.

The Tikvah editorial team also noticed an enormous amount of disinformation and hate speech spread throughout that time. This year's Irreecha celebration was rife with disinformation and hate speech; not only were the claims directed at Ethiopia, but the use of artificial intelligence was also detected. False claims about the

current conflict in Ethiopia were made, some of which included Fano, Eritrea, and the TPLF as they attempted to collaborate and fight the federal government.

# KEY FINDINGS

## **Synthetic Narratives and Deepfake Manipulation can go viral**

Fabricated video mashups and synthetic edits were used to falsely depict global celebrities endorsing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), and the cultural celebrations like Irrecha were also a victim of deep fake manipulation. Unrelated international news clips were spliced together to fabricate support statements, illustrating how visual disinformation increasingly merges entertainment cues with political narratives to shape public sentiment.

## **Geopolitical Narratives Portraying Expansionist Ambitions**

Claims alleging that Ethiopia harbors “expansionist ambitions” toward Red Sea territories resurfaced alongside GERD related discussions. These narratives, unsupported by credible sources or official policy, attempt to recast Ethiopia’s water diplomacy as regional militarism. Fact-checking investigations traced such claims to coordinated social media networks tied to external interest groups often emerging during critical diplomatic or border-related moments.

## **Fraud and Deceptive Online Campaigns**

During the monitoring period, a surge of fake sponsored pages were observed, many of which promoted fraudulent investment opportunities or impersonated betting platforms. These pages often used stolen logos or celebrity endorsements to appear credible. Notably, several were linked to online gambling promotions, reflecting a growing trend of betting addiction and financial exploitation in Ethiopia’s digital space.

## **Coordinated campaigns on national and geopolitical issues have a high chance to spark widespread attention and online momentum.**

Propaganda contested victories also took over the trend specially in the ongoing war in Amhara region, which also resulted in a disinformation along with a disputed alleged hacked document to surface online as Ethiopia ordered new SU-35 jets from Russia. This changed the conversation as Ethiopia is preparing to destabilize the horn of Africa and its alleged expansionist ambition.

### Verification Barriers and Media Literacy Gaps

Many misleading narratives circulate on social media platforms including Telegram groups, Facebook communities, and on TikTok, restricting a speedy detection by fact-checkers. Limited digital literacy and the lack of robust verification mechanisms leave audiences more susceptible to persuasive disinformation campaigns, underscoring the urgent need for media literacy interventions and accessible fact-checking channels.

## APPROACH AND SOURCES

This briefing was compiled during the project period (September 21 - October 20, 2025) under the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project, combining fact-checking, field reporting, original interviews, fact-checking submissions, audience input, and editorial analysis. It draws on verified inputs from 24 trained participants, Tikvah Ethiopia's editorial team, and cross-referenced media sources to capture how misinformation and disinformation circulated during this time.



### CORE INPUTS

**Fact-checking reports from VIP trainees** - 24 participants delivered structured reports on viral claims, verification, and analysis. These reports provided crucial insight for the case studies presented here.

**Tikvah Ethiopia news and editorial resources** - published news, unpublished stories, and interviews, supported by monitoring teams and on-the-ground checks carried out by reporters.

**Media Monitoring outputs** - External media monitoring reports from social media, local and international outlets, used to be cross-check narratives and highlight discrepancies.

**Polls and perceptions** -

# EDITORIAL PROCESS

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Every piece of content has been analyzed, verified, and organized following Tikvah Ethiopia's editorial process. The report included both institutional assessments and grassroots observations through the inclusion of trainees fact-checking reports and Tikvah Ethiopia's media coverage capacities.

# CASE STUDIES

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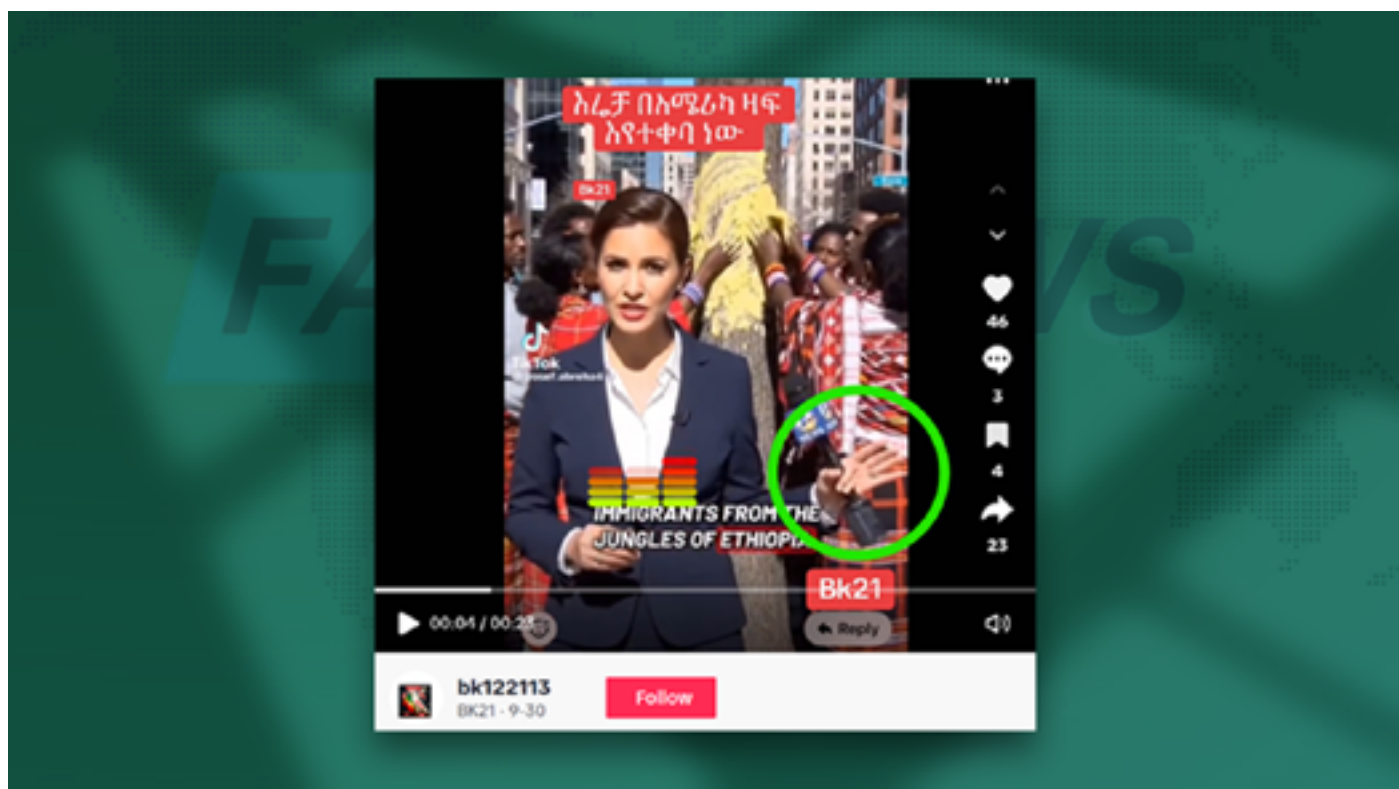
The case studies used in this report demonstrate how information disorder was spread online, including diluted information in which truth and lie were used in tandem to deceive public opinion during the specific monitoring period, and how it affects various areas of the country's current sociopolitical, conflict, economic, cultural, religious, and other dynamics.

## CASE STUDY 1:

# Irrecha celebration and the use of AI and deep fake to promote disinformation and hate speech

The Irrecha celebrations are held every year. The 2025 Oromo thanksgiving festival, was marked by heightened tension and controversy. While the event traditionally symbolizes unity and gratitude, this year's celebrations were overshadowed by violence, reported detention, inflammatory rhetoric, and a widespread circulation of hate speech and disinformation across social media platforms.

Among many series of hate speech and disinformative contents circulated online, one of them is that "Oromo immigrants in the United States are performing a ritual involving painting trees with butter, and another video claimed as if the Minnesota governor doesn't act, the U.S. military will be sent in."



Nonetheless, we have proved that the video is made using AI. We noticed a few errors similar to those commonly made by AI tools, for example, generating images with too many fingers on one hand. Our effort to check using online AI detection tools also prove that the video is AI-generated with a score of more than 90%.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study demonstrates how debunking such claims is critical since such situations are more sensitive in Ethiopia, and in recent years, such cultural and religious festivities have become fertile ground for shifting their primary goal to political and ethnic-based concepts and grounds.

## CASE STUDY 2: False AI generated photos illustrating the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gedu Andargachew

A viral image claimed to show Gedu Andargachew, Ethiopia's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, working as a parking attendant. He appeared in a neon vest, holding a radio. The image spread quickly due to his political prominence. The image in question is not a photograph. It is a digital creation. The distorted text, warped geometry, and artificial lighting expose its synthetic nature. The taxi, the vest, and the setting are all products of algorithmic imagination.

There is no evidence to support the claim that Gedu Andargachew works as a parking attendant. The image is a fake, intended to deceive rather than inform.



### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study highlights how AI manipulation is used not just on random individuals but also on significant figures like politicians, who can mislead others into believing disinformation. Because it has some satirical humor, the image also gains popularity on social media sites. Therefore, disproving such statements is crucial since it can raise public awareness.

## CASE STUDY 3: False allegations regarding the prohibition of selling alcohol in Harrar

Recently, during the month of October, a [report](#) surfaced online claiming that alcohol is illegal to sell in Harar. The claim spread through personal and group accounts on Facebook. Nonetheless, the trainees approached the region's mayor's office and received a straight answer from the right person, stating that the claim is completely false and was done on purpose to cause chaos in society and get an economic advantage over others.

The responsible person did agree, however, that in order to provide a good learning environment, bars and some entertainment places with alcohol are not permitted to open within a 200 meter radius.



## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study emphasizes that false allegations or disinformation like claiming alcohol sales are banned in a certain area often spread because they serve a purpose or exploit confusion. Sometimes, they're pushed deliberately by competitors, activists, or groups with moral or political agendas who want to sway public opinion or hurt a business.

Other times, they spread unintentionally when people mishear, misinterpret, or repeat unverified information. In communities where official communication is unclear and trust in authorities is low, rumors fill the gaps fast. Cultural sensitivities around alcohol can make such claims even more believable, allowing disinformation to take root and spread before the truth catches up.

## CASE STUDY 4: Alleged Claims about the resignation of Abune Matthias

Among the hotly debated allegations circulating online was the resignation of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Patriarch Abune Matthias. According to social media claims, the Patriarch is about to quit due to a health condition. Because of these unsubstantiated accusations, other ideas arose surrounding this claim, including the resignation and replacement of someone in their position due to a political case from behind, among others.



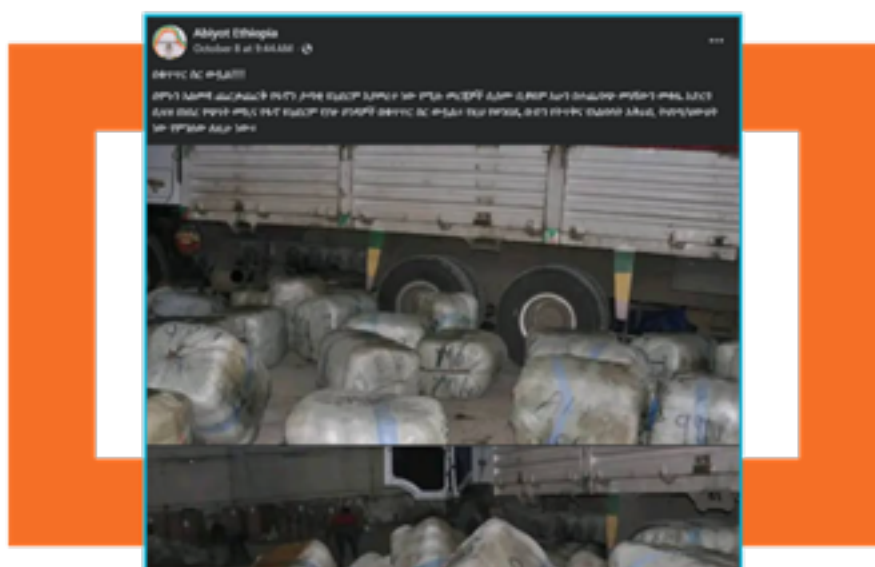
The idea that the alleged swap individuals, like Abune Sawiros, are about to be in the position where the patriarch was causing some controversy because, a year ago, there was a contentious issue raised about the Church Synod being split in two, which attracted a lot of attention and anger from the general public. However, the Patriarch secretary office [condemned](#) the claim repeatedly on different platforms and ways.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study demonstrates how disinformation makers may attempt to leverage sensitive themes such as religion to trigger the public. A swift response from the Patriarch's secretary office is appreciated since they address it in a variety of ways and platforms, preventing the political side from causing disorder, as the culprits mostly reflected that area.

## CASE STUDY 5: False images circulating online asserting that military uniforms from Almeda textile

A widely circulated Facebook image purported to depict a truck carrying Fano militants uniforms from Mekelle. The post suggested a connection between the Almeda Textile Factory, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and Fano militias, with hints of Eritrean participation.



A reverse image search and traced the photo to a September 7, 2021 [post](#) by the Ethiopian Federal Police. The truck was intercepted in Sebeta Hawas woreda, Oromia Region. It was transporting 155 tons of counterfeit clothing from Hosanna to Addis Ababa via Butajira. The goods were valued at over 1.5 million birr.

In the midst of these circumstances, the Ethiopian foreign affairs minister recently wrote a [letter](#) to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, accusing the Eritrean government of interfering with Ethiopia's internal affairs and allegedly supporting the TPLF and Fano in their rebellion against the Federal government. The claim appeared on the back drop of this situation.

#### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study proved that disinformation is mostly shared relying on current and controversial issues. Debunking this claim is absolutely critical when the two nations are on the brink of war, especially over something as strategically sensitive as a red seat. In such high-stakes situations, disinformation can act as a spark in a powder keg. A single false claim, say, that someone seized control of the port, moved troops there, or violated an agreement can inflame public outrage, harden political positions, and push leaders into rash decisions. By debunking false claims quickly and publicly, governments, media, and international bodies can prevent escalation, maintain diplomatic channels, and preserve trust.

## CASE STUDY 6: Deepfake video of President Trump praising Prime Minister Abiy Amhed and his administration

A Facebook [post](#) circulated online claiming that U.S. President Donald J. Trump had praised Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his administration in a video. However, upon closer examination, the footage was found to be a deepfake clear digital manipulation was visible, particularly around Trump's mouth movements and a brief glitch in the frame.

The video appears to have been intentionally crafted by pro-government actors to create the impression that Trump had expressed support for Abiy's leadership. In reality, Trump had previously taken a stance favoring Egypt in disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), often criticizing Ethiopia's position during different occasions.



This incident highlights how synthetic media and deepfake technologies are increasingly being used in Ethiopia's political narratives to shape public perception and rewrite geopolitical realities.

#### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This case study sheds light on how disinformation driven by deepfake technology is strategically used to manipulate public perception and influence political narratives. By fabricating convincing yet false visuals, such content aims to reshape reality in the eyes of the audience, blurring the line between fact and deception. It also underscores how political actors and their supporters may exploit such digital tools to gain legitimacy, sway opinions, or secure public acceptance, particularly in polarized or sensitive political environments.

## CASE STUDY 7: False allegation and defamation regarding the Faro foundation school

The Faro Foundation has been providing educational services for almost five years. It operates a boarding school for girls in Homosha district, Asosa zone, and a primary and secondary school in Asosa town, Benishangul Gumuz area. Students who pass the admission exam and get a score of 50 or more are admitted to the

program, starting in primary school. According to the principal of the Benishangul Gumuz region’s Faro Foundation School. Students in grades 9 to 12 take classes as well at the boarding school for girls.

Similarly, female students from all three zones and one special district in the region are taught in this way. However, we recently came across pages disseminating misleading [posts](#) about the school.



Our trainee fact-checkers spoke with some parents of the students, who did not want their names to be disclosed, who said that the school is not based on race, color, or religion, but rather on the ability of students from all ethnicities, and that their children are achieving good results. Our trainees also disclosed student data at the school and also confirmed that there is a mix of all ethnicities, except there might be a difference in number, which can happen in any circumstances. This applies to both small and large numbers of students.

As someone who lives in the area, they have also observed that the ethnicities listed above, which are considered to be the existing ethnicities of the region and which are considered to be excluded, are studying at the Faro Foundation Educational Institution from primary school to the girls’ boarding school.

**WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

Debunking such claims is crucial because misinformation targeting schools or educational institutions can have serious social and emotional consequences. When false allegations suggest that a school discriminates against certain ethnic groups, it doesn’t just harm the school’s reputation it fuels division, resentment, and mistrust within the community.

By verifying facts and countering these baseless accusations, fact-checkers help to prevent escalation of ethnic tensions, protect the integrity of the institution, and promote social cohesion. Leaving such claims unchallenged can normalize hate speech, discourage diversity, and even endanger students and staff.

## CASE STUDY 8:

# Fake sponsored pages and scam online gaming advertisements

In recent months, we have witnessed a surge in social media [promotions](#) for on-line games like “Chicken Road,” a crash-style gambling app promising quick and substantial winnings in Ethiopian Birr (ETB). These promotions often appear on Social media platforms using fake sponsor pages disguised as legitimate advertising agencies. Users are lured with fabricated bank credit notifications from the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE), claiming deposits of ETB 270,000 or more from entities like “Smart Forex Investment Ltd.” Links direct to suspicious sites like [plink01et.com](#), where players are encouraged to deposit money for “guaranteed” multipliers like (7.8x - 25x).



Telegram messages claiming account credits are displayed in screenshots (e.g., *Account \*\*\*\*5687 credited with ETB 270,000 or 360,000 via wire transfer, updating balance to ETB 320,679.04*). Although they come from unverified groups, these use CBE branding and encourage users to “join” in order to receive more “investments.”

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

According to this case study debunking this specific scam matters profoundly because it directly protects vulnerable individuals from substantial financial harm, upholds the integrity of crucial national institutions, and combats a pervasive form of digital fraud.

By exposing that the bank notifications are fabricated and the promised winnings are illusory, we empower people with the knowledge to recognize the deception, thereby preventing them from losing their savings to a sophisticated ruse designed to exploit economic desperation.

## **CASE STUDY 9:** **Wrong claims surfaced as newly formed appointments were made by the prime minister in various government positions.**

In recent times, social media platforms have increasingly become sources of unverified claims about government appointments and resignations. One notable example was the wave of posts surrounding the alleged appointment and resignation of the National Bank of Ethiopia's governor, Mamo Mihretu. Following the official announcement shared by the former governor on his X (formerly Twitter) account, various social media pages began spreading conflicting narratives, some claiming he resigned to distance himself from the economic challenges he had caused, while others alleged he was dismissed directly by the Prime Minister.



### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

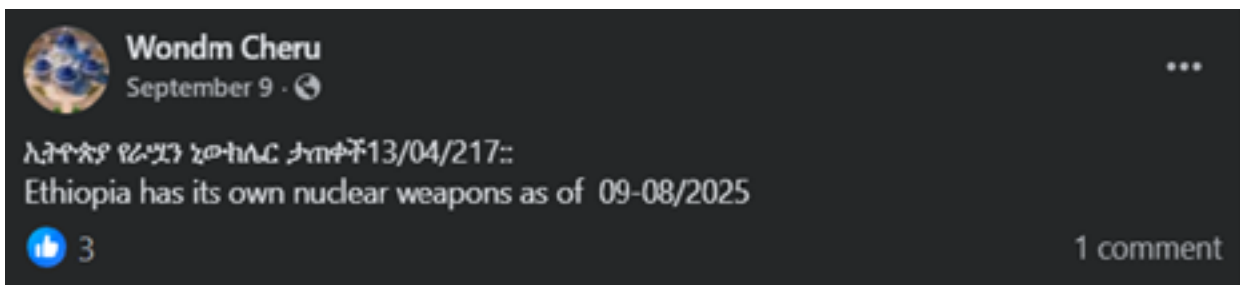
Including this incident as a case study on controversial and disinformative content is crucial, as it helps the public understand how misinformation can quickly spread, distort facts, and influence perceptions about national institutions and leadership decisions. Such analysis promotes media literacy and encourages people to verify information before sharing or believing it.

## CASE STUDY 10: The Disinformation Behind the Nuclear Energy Agreement

Ethiopia [signed](#) a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia on October 23, 2019, during the Russia–Africa Summit held in Sochi, Russia.

The agreement was signed between Ethiopia’s Ministry of Innovation and Technology and Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom). It focuses on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, including plans for building a nuclear science and technology center, developing nuclear power infrastructure, and training Ethiopian specialists in the field.

However, the disinforming actors used this opportunity to deceive the public as the government is building nuclear weapons for a war purpose.



### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When people are misled to believe that a peaceful nuclear deal is intended for military purposes, it not only distorts the government’s intentions but also undermines national stability and international credibility.

Clarifying the facts helps the public understand the true purpose of the project in this case, the peaceful use of nuclear technology for energy, medicine, or research rather than associating it with weapons or war. It also strengthens transparency and accountability, encourages informed public debate, and prevents foreign or domestic actors from exploiting false narratives for political gain.

# Patterns and Trends

The ten case studies covered in this monthly briefing demonstrate a broad spectrum of information disorder in Ethiopia, including politics, economics, technology, culture, and society. While the cases vary in content, certain recurring concepts appeared in the specific monitoring period:

## 1. The Weaponization of Generative AI

Generative AI has emerged as a powerful new driver of misinformation. Its ability to create highly realistic but fabricated images, videos, and audio narratives marks a qualitative shift. These AI-generated materials lend a false sense of credibility to disinformation campaigns, allowing them to spread more quickly and posing a severe challenge to fact-checking organizations and public discernment.

## 2. Scams Preying on Economic Anxiety

Fraudulent schemes targeting personal finances remain prevalent by exploiting hopes and fears. Scams related to betting websites, fake job opportunities, fraudulent investment schemes, and false scholarship offers thrive because they prey on widespread economic vulnerability. The impact is multi-faceted, resulting not only in financial loss but also in significant emotional distress and damaged personal relationships for the victims.

## 3. Strategic Defamation and Political Narratives

Disinformation is increasingly deployed as a weapon for character assassination and political warfare. A common tactic involves the circulation of false allegations and fabricated scandals about newly appointed government officials or influential figures. The goal is to damage credibility, sow public discord, and derail political processes before they even begin.

## 4. Fabricated Geopolitical Allegations

Complex international and regional conflicts are fertile ground for orchestrated disinformation. We have observed the use of completely fabricated images, and letters attributed to governments to amplify specific narratives. These trends are designed to create a perception of alliances, conflicts, or diplomatic crises where some false information is used to manipulate public opinion on a macro scale.

## 5. Cultural and Religious Sabotage via AI

Malicious actors are now using AI to attack cultural and religious celebrations directly. This includes generating deepfake images of revered leaders or creating synthetic videos to mock sacred cultural celebrations. The aim is to provoke social unrest, undermine communal harmony, and destabilize society from within.

## 6. The Chilling Effect on Information Sharing

In conflict zones and politically sensitive environments, a pervasive culture of fear inhibits the free flow of information. Potential sources, even when guaranteed anonymity, are often too fearful of monitoring and reprisals to come forward. This creates a critical challenge for fact-checkers and journalists, who are left with limited access to verifiable on-the-ground information.

# Overall Trend

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The common thread in these diverse and far-reaching threats is a terrifying, emergent intersection of disinformation and scams where seemingly unstoppable, AI-driven systems utilize the most substantial weaknesses in our digital and institutional tapestry in real-time. Bad actors leverage institutional silence and a climate of intimidation to create information deserts, which are promptly filled with wholly plausible, AI-generated lies, from fabricated political intrigue and geopolitical misinformation to toxic cultural performance, all designed to destroy trust and undermine social cohesion.

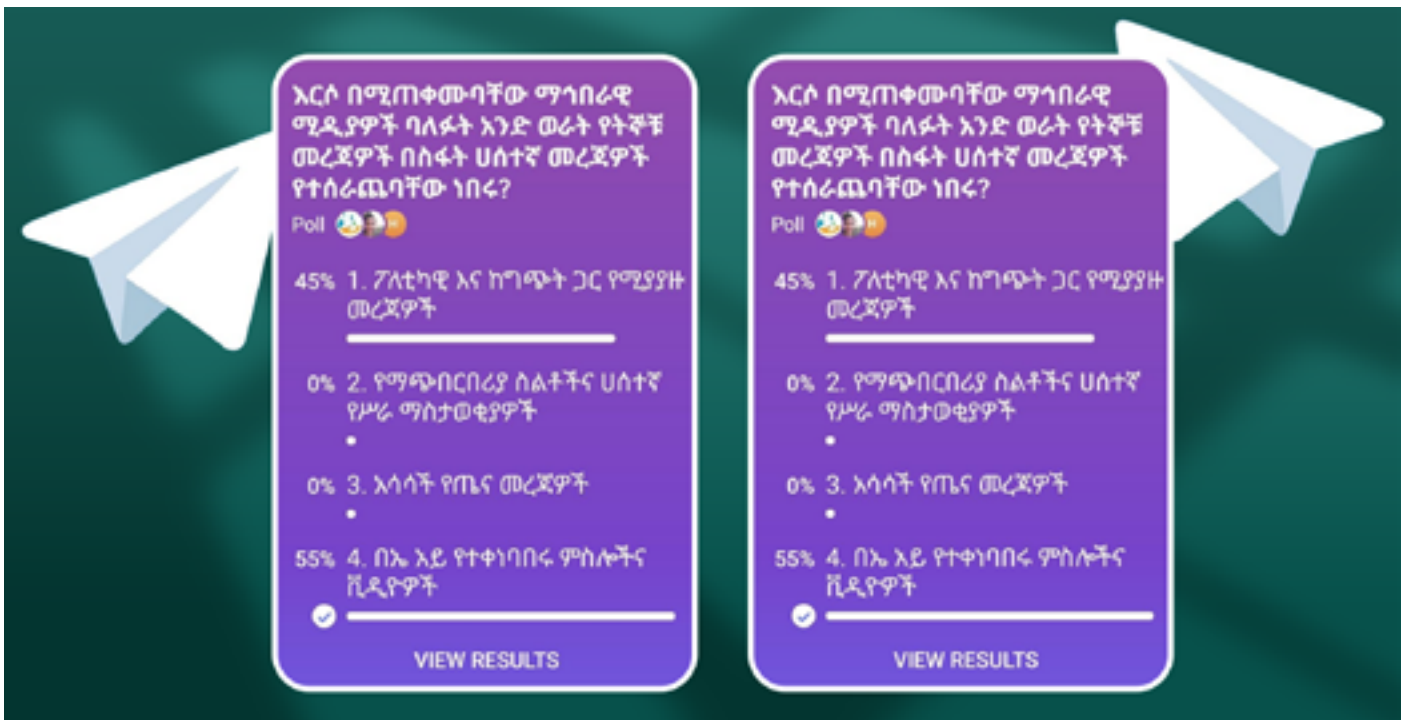
The same milieu of fear and digital precarity also powers scams that exploit economic insecurities to assault the very idea of financial security in the most literal sense, the public is being attacked for their safety and for their sanity in equal measure. Both trends demand immediate institutional responses and durable, community-centred defenses against the cradle of this new threat landscape.

# Poll on Misinformation Trends

A brief survey was conducted as part of this monthly briefing under the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project in order to gather input from the general public as well as VIP trainees. The aim was to understand how misinformation circulated during this reporting period and how it was perceived by different groups.

## Vip Trainees

The VIP participants were allowed to select multiple options, since they are expected to observe more than one type of distortion in their fact-checking and verification work.

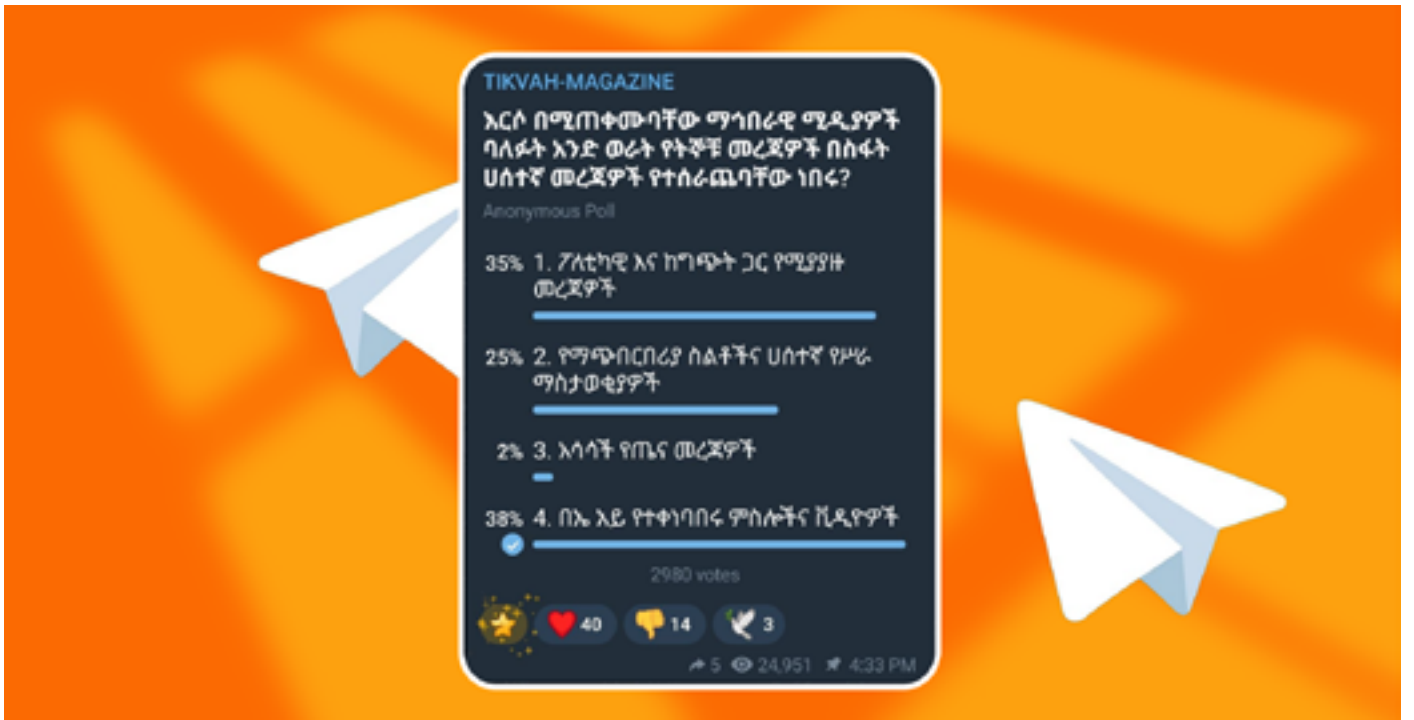


Journalists

Students

## General Audience (Participants)

When it comes to the general audience, they were limited to one choice to identify which type of disinformation had the greatest impact on them personally.



## Question:

“Which types of misinformation did you most frequently encounter on your social media platforms in the past month?”

Options:

1. Political and conflict-related content
2. Scams and fake job advertisements
3. Misleading health information
4. AI-generated images or videos

## Findings

- Among the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project student trainees, AI-generated images or videos were the most frequently encountered, followed by political and conflict related contents and fake job advertisements.
- Among the journalist trainees, political and conflict-related content and AI-generated images or videos were the most common, and they didn't that much detect scams and fake job advertisements which are not voted on.

- Among the general audience, AI-generated images or videos were observed more often followed by political and conflict-related content.
- In this period across all groups, there was also a notable and growing presence of AI-generated content.

## Impression

These survey findings show similar to the previous report still holding the increasing dominance of AI-generated content across different groups, which shows how the disinformation atmosphere is shifting to synthetic media. While students are more frequently exposed to AI-driven manipulations, this time they experienced political and conflict related claims followed by fake job advertisements.

As of the survey, the majority of the journalists selected political and conflict-related contents, which might be a result of the current political instability in the country.

Meanwhile, audiences face heavier exposure to politically and conflict-driven narratives with AI-generated contents surfacing online. The pattern highlights the various ways in which disinformation tactics have been diversified and at the same time, it points out the necessity for targeted awareness creation, particularly during this conflict period, and for training to cope with AI-generated information disorders.

## Overall Reflections

The dissemination of information disorder in Ethiopia is turning into a complex and deeply rooted phenomenon that goes much beyond the usual political narratives. The political and conflict-related sensitivities are still very high, sometimes even leading to divisive rhetoric and increasing local tensions, but the spread of disinformation is becoming more and more intertwined with peoples' lives. Claims about salaries, education systems, social benefits, and gender-related issues that are wrong have now become widely shared in the digital world, making it hard to distinguish between rumor and reality. Misinformation related to scams, in particular, has become more intricate, taking advantage of both the economic crisis and the public's lack of access to reliable information.

The factors that are observed this month illustrate how AI-generated contents, digital insecurity, online harassment, and restrictions on press freedom create a situation where misinformation flourishes. Silence that comes from fear, censorship, or uncertainty lets speculation fill the gaps. Still, through local fact-checkers' work under the Voice up information for peace (VIP) Project, the situation is seen as a hurdle to overcome and a place of hope. Their persistent attempts to prove claims right or wrong, to disseminate knowledge, and to establish trust among the people demonstrate that even with the presence of systemic barriers, media literacy and fact-checking projects that are rooted in the community can help the misinformation tide to recede and make the public sphere more informed.

