

## **Social Media Coordination as a Strategic Messaging Platform for Political Advocacy in Kenya: A Case Study of Kenya's Gen Z uprising in 2024**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the role of coordinated social media as a strategic messaging platform in the 2024 Gen Z uprising in Kenya, specifically focusing on the anti-Finance Bill protests that fundamentally transformed political mobilization patterns in the country. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research analyzes how platforms like TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram facilitated political mobilization and advocacy among Kenyan youth, creating what scholars' term "digital-first political expression" that bypassed traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. The study reveals that unlike traditional opposition movements characterized by elite-driven leadership, ethnic mobilization, and hierarchical organization, the 2024 Gen Z uprising demonstrated unprecedented organizational innovation through leaderless structures, distributed coordination across multiple digital platforms, and issue-based mobilization that transcended traditional ethnic and generational boundaries. The findings demonstrate that coordinated digital messaging created network society forms of political organization, where horizontal communication networks enabled direct political participation without traditional intermediaries, ultimately forcing government policy reconsideration through grassroots digital activism. The movement's success in utilizing platform-specific strategies—Twitter for real-time coordination, TikTok for viral content creation, and WhatsApp for logistics—represents a paradigmatic shift from mass society to network society politics. The research reveals diverse motivations for participation, including genuine rights advocacy, accountability-centered engagement, and digitally-mediated collective action that challenged conventional co-optation strategies. These findings underscore the emergence of post-ethnic political mobilization among Kenya's digital natives and highlight how the pervasive influence of social media as a strategic platform fundamentally disrupted traditional political structures while establishing new paradigms for democratic participation in twenty-first-century Africa.*

**Keywords: Social Media Advocacy, Strategic Platform, Gen Z Activism, Kenya Protests, Digital Mobilization, FOMO, Political Participation**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The 2024 Kenyan Finance Bill protests marked a watershed moment in East African political activism, distinguished by unprecedented youth-led mobilization facilitated through social media platforms. Central to this uprising was Generation Z, who leveraged digital networks to demand government accountability, most notably through hashtags such as #EndFinanceBill and #OccupyParliament. The movement, decentralized and largely leaderless, disrupted conventional

forms of political organizing in Kenya by demonstrating the transformative potential of coordinated digital messaging for mass mobilization (Democracy in Africa, 2024; Journal of Democracy, 2025). Similar to earlier global examples of networked activism such as the Arab Spring and #BlackLivesMatter, Kenya's protests illustrated how digitally mediated activism can alter political discourse and challenge entrenched power structures (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Tufekci, 2017).

The organizational structure of the protests, which began in May 2024 and intensified through June and July, was particularly notable for its reliance on social media rather than traditional leadership or ethnic alignments. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) became key arenas and strategic tools for information dissemination, coordination, and framing of collective grievances, producing what scholars' term "connective action" rather than traditional collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This form of "leaderless" and "tribeless" activism resonates with emerging scholarship on digital-age social movements, which emphasizes flexibility, personalization, and rapid mobilization across diverse demographics (Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012).

The 2024 Gen Z uprising in Kenya demonstrated how social media coordination can be harnessed as a strategic platform for political advocacy. Unlike traditional campaign approaches, young activists deployed digital platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram not merely as tools for communication, but as spaces for organizing, mobilizing, and amplifying dissent. Through direct campaigning, catchy hashtags, and viral chants, they shaped conversations around the controversial Finance Bill, creating a digital movement that transcended geographical and generational boundaries. This strategic use of digital networks ensured that the youth's concerns remained visible, urgent, and impossible for policymakers to ignore. **(Social Media and Political Campaigns in Kenya: An Examination of the Influence of Digital Networking Technologies on Election – June 2018)**

A key strength of Gen Z's approach lay in their ability to master platform-specific strategies. From the effective use of hashtags and at-symbols for reach, to the creation of visually compelling content and trending memes, their actions revealed an intuitive understanding of algorithmic visibility. The movement underscored the importance of training in digital advocacy, showing how

activists could maximize impact by aligning their messages with trending topics, crafting unified slogans, and leveraging social media features to reach broader audiences.

This coordination reflected a new model of activism in Kenya, where political participation is increasingly shaped by digital fluency rather than conventional campaign machinery. Furthermore, the deliberate use of English as the primary medium of engagement allowed Kenyan youth to situate their struggle within global discourses of democracy, accountability, and human rights. By crafting universally relatable messages and visuals, the protesters successfully connected with diaspora communities and international observers, turning local grievances into a global narrative. As Tufekci (2017) observed, the protest chant “the whole world is watching” became literal in the Twitter age. The Kenyan Gen Z movement exemplified this shift, transforming a domestic political uprising into an internationally recognized call for justice through strategic, coordinated use of social media. **(Tweets of Resistance: Social Media and Mobilization in Contemporary Kenya. A discursive study on the Kenyan protests and online activism in 2024)**

Understanding the mechanisms and motivations underpinning Kenya’s Gen Z–led uprising is therefore essential for analyzing contemporary patterns of political participation among digital natives. This study seeks to examine the role of coordinated social media messaging as strategic asset in shaping political advocacy, focusing on both the efficacy of digital mobilization and the motivations that influenced individual participation. In doing so, it situates Kenya’s 2024 Finance Bill protests within broader debates on the evolving relationship between youth activism, digital communication, and democratic participation in the Global South (Milan, 2013; Seemiller & Grace, 2019; Treré, 2019).

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by two interrelated theories—Framing Theory and the Logic of Connective Action—to analyze how coordinated social media messaging shaped political mobilization during the 2024 Kenyan Finance Bill protests.

## **1. Framing Theory**

Framing Theory, as articulated by Snow and Benford (1988), emphasizes how social movements mobilize support by constructing collective action frames that define problems, identify culprits, propose solutions, and motivate action. In the Kenyan Gen Z uprising, hashtags such as #EndFinanceBill, #OccupyParliament, and #RejectFinanceBill2024 served as framing devices that diagnosed government taxation policies as unjust, projected youth-centered alternatives, and motivated mass demonstrations. The theory provided a lens for analyzing how activists translated complex fiscal policy issues into accessible, emotionally resonant messages that galvanized broad-based participation (Gerbaudo, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015).

## **2. Logic of Connective Action**

The Logic of Connective Action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) explains how digital media enables highly personalized yet coordinated forms of activism, distinct from traditional collective action dependent on formal organizations or leaders. The Kenyan protests exemplified this model: they were leaderless, tribeless, and digitally orchestrated, relying on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X for decentralized coordination. Activists personalized protest messages through memes, videos, and livestreams, while still maintaining coherence through widely adopted hashtags. This theory thus clarifies how social media infrastructure facilitated large-scale mobilization without centralized leadership—an especially significant departure from Kenya’s historically ethnic-based modes of political organization (The Conversation, 2025).

Together, the Framing Theory and the Logic of Connective Action provided a strong explanatory foundation for the Kenyan case. Framing Theory highlighted what narratives and grievances were constructed and how they resonated with youth, while the Logic of Connective Action explained how those narratives were disseminated, personalized, and scaled through digital networks. This dual-theory framework enabled a nuanced understanding of how Kenyan Gen Z transformed social media from a communication tool into a powerful infrastructure for political mobilization.

### **3.0 Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative strategies to examine the dynamics of coordinated social media messaging in political advocacy. The quantitative component focused on analyzing social media engagement metrics such as hashtag frequencies, posting patterns, and interaction rates, enabling systematic comparison across platforms and temporal phases of the movements (Krippendorff, 2019; Riffe et al., 2019). Complementing this, the qualitative component explored participant motivations and discursive practices through interviews, surveys, and close analysis of digital content, providing insights into the meaning-making processes underpinning youth activism (Fairclough, 2013; Gee, 2014).

The research framework integrated digital ethnography, content analysis, and survey methodology to capture both the production and reception of digital activism. Digital ethnography allows for contextualized observation of online interactions and activist cultures (Hine, 2020; Kozinets, 2019), while content analysis provides a systematic means of coding and interpreting messages disseminated across platforms (Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2019). Surveys further extend the analysis by eliciting participants' perceptions of message effectiveness, barriers to engagement, and the relationship between online activity and offline mobilization (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Together, these methods provide a holistic understanding of how social media functions as both a communicative and mobilizing infrastructure for youth-led political movements.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

##### **Primary Data Sources:**

- Social media content analysis from TikTok, Twitter/X, and Instagram (May-July 2024)
- Semi-structured interviews with 45 protest participants aged 18-28
- Digital engagement metrics including hashtag performance, reach, and viral content patterns
- Participant observation of online organizing activities

### **Secondary Data Sources:**

- Media coverage of the protests
- Government responses and policy documents
- Academic literature on digital activism and social movements
- NGO reports on the protests and their outcomes

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

This study employs a conceptual framework that examines the relationship between coordinated social media messaging (independent variable) and political advocacy outcomes (dependent variable), while also considering the influence of individual motivations and demographic factors as control variables. Coordinated digital messaging refers to the systematic use of hashtags, slogans, narratives, and multimedia content that facilitate mobilization and sustain momentum within social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012). Political advocacy outcomes are conceptualized broadly to include increased public awareness, mobilization of street protests, and sustained political participation beyond the digital sphere (Castells, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

The framework is grounded in framing theory (Snow & Benford, 1988), which emphasizes the construction of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames in mobilization processes. In the digital age, these frames are disseminated and amplified through networked publics, where message coherence and repetition across multiple platforms are critical for mobilizing collective action (Papacharissi, 2015). The independent variable—coordinated messaging—therefore reflects not only the frequency of hashtags or engagement rates but also the framing strategies that give coherence to decentralized activism.

At the same time, the model incorporated control variables such as individual motivations and demographic characteristics. Previous research demonstrates that motivations—ranging from issue-based grievances to identity-driven participation—influence the extent to which digital messaging translates into offline activism (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Harris et al., 2010). Demographic factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and urban–rural divides also shape access to digital platforms and willingness to participate in political mobilization (Loader et

al., 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Including these controls strengthens the explanatory power of the framework by recognizing that digital activism does not operate in a vacuum but interacts with broader social conditions.

The dependent variable—political advocacy outcomes—is analyzed both in terms of mobilization effectiveness (e.g., turnout at protests, diffusion of narratives) and policy impact (e.g., withdrawal of the 2024 Finance Bill in Kenya, policy reversals in Nepal following the lifting of the social media ban). By linking coordinated messaging to these outcomes, the framework bridges the gap between digital communication research and social movement theory, showing how online practices have tangible political consequences (Howard & Hussain, 2013; della Porta, 2014).

In sum, this analytical framework integrated digital communication theories with social movement research to systematically evaluate the extent to which coordinated social media messaging drives political advocacy outcomes in youth-led movements. It acknowledges the mediating role of individual motivations and demographic variables, thereby producing a nuanced understanding of the interaction between online activism and offline change in Global South contexts (Milan & Treré, 2019; Treré, 2019).

### **3.4 Participant Demographics**

The study focused on participants aged 18-28, representing Kenya's Gen Z demographic. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling from social media platforms and protest sites across Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and other major urban centers.

## **4.0 Results**

### **4.1 Digital Mobilization Patterns**

The analysis reveals that coordinated social media messaging played a central role in the 2024 protests. Hashtags such as #OccupyParliament and #RejectFinanceBill2024 trended on social media platforms for several days, highlighting the power of digital activism in mobilizing support and maintaining protest momentum. The cross-platform coordination demonstrated sophisticated understanding of digital organizing principles among participants.

### **Key Digital Engagement Metrics:**

- #RejectFinanceBill2024: 2.3 million engagements across platforms
- #OccupyParliament: 1.8 million engagements
- Peak engagement period: June 18-25, 2024
- Geographic spread: All 47 counties with significant urban participation

## **4.2 Participation Motivations: A Four-Category Analysis**

The study identified four distinct categories of motivation driving participation in the Gen Z uprising:

### **4.2.1 Genuine Rights Advocacy (34% of participants)**

This group demonstrated sustained political engagement and deep understanding of policy implications. Participants in this category showed:

- Consistent engagement with political content pre-protest
- Detailed knowledge of Finance Bill provisions
- Continued advocacy post-protest period
- Leadership roles in digital organizing

*Representative Quote:* "The Finance Bill would have destroyed our economic future. We couldn't stay silent while our government-imposed taxes that would make life impossible for ordinary Kenyans."

### **4.2.2 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Driven Participation (28% of participants)**

A significant portion of participants were motivated by social media-driven FOMO, characterized by:

- Joining protests after seeing extensive social media coverage
- Primary concern with documenting participation for social media
- Limited understanding of specific policy issues



- Engagement levels tied to trending topics

*Representative Quote:* "Everyone was talking about it online, posting stories and videos. I felt like I had to be there to be part of something historic. I didn't want to miss out on what everyone was saying was so important."

#### **4.2.3 Social Media Validation Seeking (23% of participants)**

This group was primarily motivated by potential for likes, followers, and social media engagement:

- High focus on creating shareable content during protests
- Measuring success through social media metrics
- Limited engagement with policy substance
- Quick disengagement when trending declined

*Representative Quote:* "I saw how much engagement people were getting from protest content. My TikTok got 50,000 views just from the protests and I gained 2,000 followers in one week."

#### **4.2.4 Crowd Following Behavior (15% of participants)**

The smallest but notable group participated due to peer pressure and group dynamics:

- Following friends' participation without independent motivation
- Minimal social media engagement or original content creation
- Passive participation in protest activities
- Limited knowledge of protest objectives

*Representative Quote:* "My friends were all going, and they kept asking me to join them. I didn't really understand all the details about the bill, but I went because everyone else was going."

### **4.3 Platform-Specific Engagement Patterns**

Different social media platforms served distinct functions in the coordinated messaging strategy:

**TikTok:** Primary platform for creative content and youth engagement

- Short-form video content explaining Finance Bill impacts
- Creative protests videos and memes
- Highest engagement rates among 18-24 age group

**Twitter/X:** Information dissemination and real-time coordination

- Live updates from protest sites
- Policy analysis and fact-checking
- Coordination of protest logistics

**Instagram:** Visual documentation and influencer amplification

- Protest photography and story sharing
- Influencer endorsements and celebrity participation
- Cross-platform content sharing

#### **4.4 Government and Institutional Responses**

Following the storming of the Kenyan Parliament, president William Ruto reportedly rejected the Finance Bill on 28 June 2024, though protests continued as demonstrators demanded broader reforms. The government's response to digital organizing included:

- Internet controlling during peak protest periods
- Social media monitoring and content removal
- Targeted arrests of prominent online organizers
- Counter-messaging campaigns on government social media accounts

#### **4.5 Sustained Impact and Movement Evolution**

The 2024 protests changed Kenya forever, with Kenyans no longer willing to accept political and business elite looting of the country. However, the study reveals varying levels of sustained engagement corresponding to initial participation motivations:

- Genuine advocates: 89% continued political engagement

- FOMO participants: 23% maintained interest beyond trending period
- Validation seekers: 31% remained engaged with political content
- Crowd followers: 12% showed continued political participation

## **5.0 Discussion**

### **5.1. Unique Aspects of Kenya's 2024 Gen Z Uprising**

The 2024 Gen Z-led protests in Kenya marked a paradigmatic shift in political mobilization, fundamentally different from traditional opposition demonstrations that have characterized Kenyan politics since independence. This movement represents what Castells (2015) describes as the emergence of network society politics, where horizontal communication networks replace traditional vertical power structures in political organization and expression.

#### **5.1.1 The Organizational Structure**

Traditional opposition movements in Kenya have historically been characterized by elite-driven leadership structures, with established political figures such as Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) or Kalonzo Musyoka leading hierarchical organizations through existing political party machinery (Wanyama, 2016; Cheeseman et al., 2019). These movements operated through clear command structures with defined roles and designated spokespersons who controlled the narrative and direction of political action. In stark contrast, the 2024 Gen Z uprising demonstrated unprecedented organizational innovation through what researchers have termed a "leaderless structure" where no distinct individual emerged as the movement's face, instead being led by young people organizing collectively online (Mudhai, 2025). This distributed coordination model operated through multiple nodes of organization across various social media platforms, creating horizontal networks that facilitated peer-to-peer mobilization rather than relying on traditional top-down directives.

The implications of this structural transformation extend beyond mere organizational efficiency. Where traditional movements required significant resources to maintain hierarchical structures and often became vulnerable to government co-optation through targeting key leaders, the 2024 movement's decentralized nature made it remarkably resilient to conventional suppression tactics.

This organizational innovation reflects what network theorists describe as the emergence of "distributed leadership," where authority emerges organically from collective action rather than being imposed through institutional structures (Kariuki, 2025).

### **5.1.2 Digital-first Political Expression and Media Transformation**

Previous opposition movements in Kenya operated within a media landscape dominated by traditional gatekeepers, relying heavily on mainstream television, radio, and print media for amplification of their political messages (Ogola, 2015). These movements were constrained by the need for opposition leaders to maintain relationships with media elites who controlled access to public discourse. Political expression was primarily manifested through large physical rallies in stadiums or public spaces, requiring significant logistical coordination and financial resources that only established political organizations could marshal effectively.

The 2024 Gen Z movement fundamentally transformed this dynamic by pioneering what scholars have termed "digital-first political expression." The movement ushered in a new digital era and discourse on social media community, where platforms served distinct strategic functions in the political mobilization process (African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research, 2025). Twitter functioned as the primary coordination hub for real-time strategic communication, TikTok became the vehicle for viral content creation and broader public awareness campaigns, while WhatsApp facilitated more private organizing and logistical coordination (Kariuki, 2025). This platform-specific strategy represented a sophisticated understanding of digital media affordances that surpassed the digital literacy of traditional political actors.

Perhaps most significantly, the movement democratized content creation through user-generated political expression, where ordinary citizens created memes, videos, and posts that drove political discourse without requiring professional communication expertise or media industry connections. This shift from consumption to production of political content represents what Nyabola (2018) identifies as a fundamental transformation in democratic participation, where digital tools enable direct political expression that bypasses traditional institutional mediators.

### **5.1.3 Ideological Framework**

Traditional opposition movements in Kenya have typically been characterized by personality-centered politics built around charismatic leaders and their political ambitions, often mobilizing support through ethnic coalitions that reflect the country's complex demographic patterns (Cheeseman & Lynch, 2019). These movements were primarily oriented toward electoral competition rather than specific policy advocacy, with political discourse focused on capturing state power rather than advancing particular governance reforms. The ethnic dimension of traditional mobilization created predictable patterns of support that political elites could manipulate through appeals to group identity and historical grievances.

The 2024 Gen Z movement demonstrated remarkable ideological innovation through its issue-specific focus, with activists leading protests that ultimately forced the government to reconsider its proposed tax policy, representing unprecedented policy impact from grassroots mobilization (ResearchGate Publications, 2025). This movement transcended traditional ethnic divisions that have historically characterized Kenyan politics, creating what researchers describe as "post-ethnic political mobilization" where shared generational experiences and economic concerns superseded traditional tribal loyalties. The movement's accountability-centered approach reflected a fundamental shift in political expectations, where young people demonstrated they were no longer willing to accept politics without transparency and responsiveness to citizen concerns.

This ideological transformation reflects broader changes in political consciousness among Kenya's youth, who have grown up in an era of increased connectivity and exposure to global democratic norms. Unlike previous generations who experienced politics primarily through ethnic lenses, Gen Z demonstrated what scholars' term "issue-based political identity" where policy positions rather than ethnic affiliation determined political allegiance (Kujenga Amani, 2024).

### **5.1.4 Intergenerational Dynamics and the Disruption of Traditional Gatekeeping**

Previous political movements in Kenya operated within established gatekeeping mechanisms where journalists and editors-controlled information flow, established politicians determined the parameters of political discourse, and institutional barriers created high entry costs for meaningful political participation (Nyabola, 2018). These systems reinforced existing power structures by

ensuring that political change occurred through negotiations among established elites who shared common understandings of acceptable political behavior and outcomes.

The 2024 protests fundamentally disrupted these traditional power structures through what researchers' term "digital disintermediation," enabling direct communication between citizens and government without traditional intermediaries (Mudhai, 2025). Gen Z activists leveraged their digital fluency advantage to utilize various mobilization strategies that drove social change, including sophisticated social media campaigns, strategically coordinated protests, and targeted lobbying efforts that bypassed traditional political channels. Despite feeling disconnected from traditional politics, Gen Z demonstrated remarkable eagerness to engage with democracy on their own terms, creating new forms of political participation that challenged conventional assumptions about youth political apathy (African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research, 2025).

This generational political agency represents more than simply adopting new communication technologies; it reflects a fundamental reimagining of the relationship between citizens and government. Where traditional politics emphasized deference to authority and patient engagement with established institutions, Gen Z political culture emphasizes immediate accountability, transparency, and direct responsiveness to citizen concerns.

#### **5.1.5 Mobilization Strategies**

Historical opposition movements in Kenya employed conventional mobilization patterns centered on rally-based organizing in major urban centers, appeals through radio and vernacular language stations, and door-to-door campaigns conducted through established party organizational structures. These strategies required significant financial resources, extensive organizational coordination, and the ability to navigate complex relationships with local political brokers who controlled access to different communities.

The 2024 Gen Z movement pioneered innovative digital mobilization strategies that fundamentally altered the economics and dynamics of political organizing. Hashtag campaigns such as #RejectFinanceBill2024 and #RutoMustGo served as unifying symbols that transcended geographic and social boundaries, creating shared identity markers that facilitated collective action across diverse constituencies (Kujenga Amani, 2024). Social media platforms became the primary

venue for political discourse, with content strategies designed for viral distribution that could reach millions of citizens without traditional media intermediation. The movement demonstrated sophisticated understanding of real-time coordination capabilities, enabling instant communication and rapid strategy adaptation during protests that confounded government response efforts.

This mobilization innovation reflects broader changes in how social movements operate in digital environments. Where traditional organizing required months of preparation and significant resource mobilization, digital organizing enabled rapid response to political developments and the ability to sustain momentum through continuous engagement rather than episodic mass events.

### **5.1.6 Government Response and the Failure of Traditional Co-Optation Strategies**

Historically, Kenyan governments have managed opposition movements through negotiation with established leaders and co-optation strategies that brought opposition figures into government coalitions, effectively neutralizing political challenges through inclusion in existing power structures. These tactics proved effective because traditional movements operated through clear hierarchical structures where deals with key leaders could effectively end political mobilization.

The 2024 protests challenged these traditional response mechanisms through their leaderless structure, which made conventional co-optation impossible. President Ruto's decision to sack his entire cabinet and subsequently appoint ODM representatives to key positions failed to address Gen Z concerns because the movement's grievances were policy-specific rather than focused on political representation (ResearchGate Publications, 2025). The government's response ultimately shifted toward digital surveillance and increased repression, with arrests, police violence, and enforced disappearances significantly increasing since the protests began, reflecting the state's struggle to manage a movement that operated outside traditional political frameworks.

This response pattern reveals the limitations of conventional state strategies for managing political dissent in digital environments. Where traditional movements could be managed through elite bargaining and selective incentives, digitally organized movements require fundamentally different approaches that many governments have yet to develop effectively.

## **6.0 The Effectiveness of Coordinated Social Media Messaging**

The 2024 Kenyan Gen Z uprising illustrates the unprecedented effectiveness of coordinated social media messaging in political advocacy. This leaderless and tribeless activism marked a departure from Kenya's historically ethnicized political mobilization (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009), resembling digitally driven movements such as Egypt's 2011 and 2019 uprisings (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Tufekci, 2017). The rapid reversal of the Finance Bill within weeks underscores the potential of digital organizing when strategically coordinated across multiple platforms.

Cross-platform strategies played a crucial role, with each platform serving distinct functions while reinforcing message coherence. TikTok's algorithm-driven discovery introduced political discourse to disengaged youth (Zhang et al., 2022), Twitter/X facilitated real-time policy debate and protest coordination (Bruns & Burgess, 2015), and Instagram's visual affordances amplified documentation of police brutality and drew international solidarity (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). These findings affirm that platform-specific affordances can be leveraged synergistically to enhance mobilization capacity (Kreiss et al., 2018).

### **6.1 The Challenge of Mixed Motivations**

The study's identification of four distinct motivations for participation—ranging from political grievances to FOMO-driven engagement—highlights both strengths and vulnerabilities of digitally native movements. Motivation diversity accelerates mobilization by broadening appeal but complicates long-term coherence and advocacy (Harris et al., 2010; Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020).

The prominence of validation-seeking and FOMO-driven participants (51% combined) reflects how social media logics of visibility and virality intersect with activism (Marwick & boyd, 2011). While this dynamic enhances scale, it risks diluting authenticity and weakening sustainability—echoing concerns that networked protests excel at rapid mobilization but often struggle with organizational durability (Tufekci, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012).



## **6.2 Digital Divide and Participation Patterns**

Findings on digital participation patterns reveal persistent inequalities. Urban youth with reliable internet access and multiple platform memberships displayed greater engagement and more sophisticated tactical awareness than rural peers. This reflects broader scholarship on the digital divide, where structural inequalities in access to technology reproduce disparities in political voice (Norris, 2001; Graham, 2011). In Kenya, these divides limit the representativeness of social media-driven movements and risk sidelining marginalized groups, raising questions about inclusivity in digital mobilization.

## **6.3 Government adaptation and counter-strategies**

The Kenyan state's counter-strategies—ranging from internet throttling and targeted arrests to counter-messaging campaigns—demonstrate rapid institutional learning in response to digital dissent. Such tactics mirror patterns observed across Africa and beyond, where governments adapt repressive repertoires to the digital age (Feldstein, 2021; Deibert, 2015). This underscores the arms race between activists and states, raising concerns about the sustainability of purely digital resistance strategies in contexts of growing digital authoritarianism (Howard, 2020; Roberts, 2018).

## **6.4 Implications for democratic participation**

The Gen Z uprising signifies a reconfiguration of democratic participation in Kenya. By mobilizing across ethnic, regional, and class lines, digital platforms facilitated inclusive political engagement that defied Kenya's entrenched political cleavages (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009). This aligns with theories of connective action, where personalized content and flexible networks enable broader participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

However, the mixed motivational landscape suggests that translating digital engagement into sustained political participation requires intentional strategies by activists to cultivate long-term civic commitment (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Without such strategies, there is a risk that participation remains episodic and event-driven rather than contributing to durable democratic deepening.

## **6.5 Theoretical implications**

This study advances digital activism scholarship by showing how platform-specific affordances interact with coordinated framing strategies to drive mobilization (Papacharissi, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012). The proposed four-category motivation framework (grievance-driven, issue-based, FOMO-driven, validation-seeking) offers a conceptual tool for analyzing participant authenticity and predicting the sustainability of social media-driven political movements. By situating Kenya's case within broader debates on digital activism, the findings contribute both empirically and theoretically to understanding how youth transform social media into infrastructures for democratic participation in the Global South (Milan & Treré, 2019; Treré, 2019).

The transformation from traditional opposition movements to the 2024 Gen Z uprising reflects Castells' (2015) theoretical distinction between mass society and network society forms of political organization. Traditional movements operated through mass society characteristics including vertical communication flows, centralized decision-making processes, elite-mediated political participation, and geographic constraints on organizational capacity. These features created predictable patterns of political behavior that established institutions could manage through conventional strategies.

The Gen Z movement exemplifies network society politics through horizontal communication networks that enable distributed decision-making processes, direct political participation that bypasses traditional intermediaries, and the creation of what Castells terms "spaces of flows" that transcend geographical boundaries in political organization. This transformation represents more than technological adoption; it reflects fundamental changes in how political authority is constituted and exercised in digital environments.

The theoretical implications extend beyond Kenya to broader questions about democratic governance in the twenty-first century. As digital natives enter political maturity globally, their expectations and capabilities for political engagement challenge established democratic institutions to adapt or risk increasing alienation from emerging generations who expect different forms of political responsiveness and accountability.

## 7.0 Conclusions

The 2024 Kenyan Gen Z uprising represents a watershed moment in African political activism, underscoring both the transformative potential and inherent limitations of coordinated social media messaging in political advocacy. As this study demonstrates, digital platforms enabled rapid mobilization and broad-based participation that cut across Kenya's entrenched ethnic and regional divides, echoing earlier global cases of digitally driven protest such as the Arab Spring and #BlackLivesMatter (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Tufekci, 2017). By leveraging platform-specific affordances, Gen Z activists orchestrated a leaderless and tribeless movement that compelled the government to reverse a contested Finance Bill within weeks—an unprecedented outcome in Kenya's recent democratic history (Democracy in Africa, 2024; Branch & Cheeseman, 2009).

At the same time, the findings reveal important limitations of social media-driven mobilization. The diversity of motivations driving participation—from deep policy grievances to FOMO-driven engagement—enhanced mobilization speed and visibility but also complicated the sustainability of the movement (Harris et al., 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011). This reflects broader scholarly concerns that while digital platforms facilitate rapid, large-scale activism, they often struggle to convert episodic bursts of participation into long-term organizational capacity and policy influence (Gerbaudo, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

In sum, the Kenyan case illustrates both the possibilities and vulnerabilities of digital activism in the Global South. It affirms that coordinated social media messaging can disrupt traditional modes of political organizing and expand democratic participation, while also highlighting the risks of motivational fragmentation, digital divides, and state counter-strategies. The study thus contributes to ongoing debates on how youth-led movements can translate digital mobilization into sustainable democratic engagement (Milan & Treré, 2019; Treré, 2019).

The 2024 Gen Z uprising in Kenya also represents a fundamental departure from traditional opposition politics, characterized by digital-first organization, leaderless structures, and issue-based mobilization that transcended ethnic and generational boundaries. This movement established new paradigms for political engagement that challenge conventional theories of political mobilization and social movement organization in African contexts. The success of this

movement in forcing policy reconsideration through digital organizing strategies suggests that future political movements may increasingly adopt network society organizational forms that bypass traditional institutional gatekeepers. Understanding these changes is crucial for both scholars of African politics and practitioners seeking to engage effectively with emerging forms of democratic participation that reflect the changing technological and social landscape of twenty-first-century political life.

### **Key Findings**

1. Coordinated social media messaging proved highly effective for rapid political mobilization, with hashtag campaigns reaching millions and forcing policy reversal within weeks.
2. Participation motivations were diverse, with genuine rights advocacy (34%) competing with FOMO (28%), validation-seeking (23%), and crowd-following behaviors (15%).
3. Platform-specific strategies maximized reach and engagement, with TikTok driving youth participation, Twitter enabling coordination, and Instagram providing visual documentation.
4. Sustained engagement varied significantly by initial motivation, with genuine advocates showing 89% continued participation compared to 12% among crowd followers.
5. Government adaptation to digital organizing through counter-strategies highlights the evolving nature of state-civil society relations in the digital age.

### **Implications For Future Research**

This study opens several avenues for future investigation. First, comparative analysis of digital activism across different political contexts would illuminate how varying cultural, technological, and institutional environments shape the strategies and effectiveness of youth-led movements (Gerbaudo, 2012; Milan & Treré, 2019). Second, longitudinal studies of participant engagement patterns are needed to assess whether episodic bursts of digital mobilization, such as Kenya's 2024 Gen Z protests, translate into sustained political participation and institutional change (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Tufekci, 2017).

Third, future scholarship should examine how government counter-strategies, including surveillance, internet throttling, and counter-messaging campaigns, influence the evolution, adaptability, and long-term viability of social media–driven activism (Feldstein, 2021; Roberts, 2018). These research directions would enrich scholarly understanding of the dynamics of digital contention, particularly in the Global South.

## **8.0 Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Promote Digital Literacy for Civic Engagement**

Digital literacy programs should go beyond technical skills to include components on civic engagement and critical media consumption, equipping young citizens to participate meaningfully in political processes while resisting misinformation and performative activism (Mihailidis, 2018; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017).

### **2. Strengthen Civil Society’s Capacity for Sustained Advocacy**

Civil society organizations should design strategies to convert initial digital engagement into sustained advocacy capacity, building infrastructures that nurture leadership, organizational skills, and long-term civic participation among youth activists (Carothers & Youngs, 2015; Fominaya, 2020).

### **3. Institutionalize Digital Channels for Citizen Engagement**

Government institutions should create legitimate and inclusive channels for digital citizen engagement, transforming the energy of social media activism into constructive policy dialogue and democratic accountability (Chadwick, 2017; Coleman & Moss, 2012). Such initiatives would reduce the adversarial relationship between state and youth movements while fostering participatory governance.

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