Communication Strategies: Problem of Sustained Engagement on Social Media Platforms in Kenya's Political Discourse

Naftali Kosgei [1] iD
Leonorah Mugalla [2] iD
Douglas Nkumbo [3] iD

(1) Ministry of Interior and National Coordination, Kenya; (2.) Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya; (3) Laikipia University, Kenya
Main Author's Email: kosgeinaftali2@gmail.com

Cite this article in APA

Abstract

This paper focuses on communication strategies used to sustain engagement on social media in Kenya. While social media platforms have transformed political engagement globally, little is known about their effectiveness in Kenya, creating a need to examine how they influence political dialogue and participation. This study investigated the strategies employed by social media to shape political discourse among Kenyan youth. It was anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1968; Rogers & Dearing, 1988), focusing on media, public, and policy agendas and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962), which considers innovation adoption, communication channels, time, and social systems. Using a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach, data were collected from 42 participants through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. Participants were drawn from a target population of 500 Generation Z students at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) using non-probability snowball sampling. Data were analysed qualitatively and thematically. Findings revealed that social media shapes political discourse through four key strategies: information dissemination and awareness, content sharing and visual communication, dialogical engagement and opinion shaping, and online mobilisation and advocacy. The study concludes that social media is a powerful tool for political engagement, enabling Kenyan youth to access information, express opinions, and participate in democratic processes in the digital era. This study contributes fresh insights to debates on digital engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Key words: Communication strategies, digital mobilisation, political discourse, social media platform, youth engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Despite Kenya's democratic reforms following the repeal of Section 2A in the 1990s and the 2010 Constitution, the role of social media in shaping political discourse among youth remains underexplored, particularly among Generation Z born 1997–2012. The 2024 Gen Z-led protests demonstrated the power of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and X to organise and sustain political action. Yet, there is limited scholarly work on the specific communication strategies used to engage participants in these online movements.

Most existing studies focus on elections or political campaigns, leaving a gap in understanding the decentralised, spontaneous, and youth-driven nature of recent digital mobilisations. Social media has increasingly become a central platform for political discourse and mobilisation, especially among the youth in Kenya. The recent wave of Gen Z-led protests, which were primarily organised and sustained through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and X, highlights a significant shift in how political engagement is conducted in the digital age.

Despite the clear influence of social media in shaping political narratives and amplifying political discourse, there remains a limited body of scholarly work that systematically explores how these platforms function pragmatically in political communication within the Kenyan context. Previous research has largely focused on social media in relation to electoral processes or political campaigns. However, the spontaneous, decentralised, and organic nature of recent digital discourses, especially among the youthful demographic, has not been adequately examined. This presents a critical knowledge gap in understanding the communicative strategies used to engage participants on social media platforms.

The communicative power of social media has become increasingly evident in recent youth-led political actions in Kenya. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok have served as critical conduits for the dissemination of political messages among Generation Z. During recent protests, political updates were rapidly shared via WhatsApp chats, Facebook posts attracted widespread commentary, and TikTok video streams became central to public discourse. This digital engagement underscored the superiority of communicative influence over physical force in shaping political mobilisation and determining the trajectory of protest actions (Castells, 2012; Mutsvairo & Harris, 2016).

Social media refers to digital platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), where users exchange information, interact in real time, and coordinate activities. These platforms serve as the primary channels through which political narratives emerge and spread among youth.

Political discourse encompasses the online conversations, narratives, debates, and commentaries that shape public opinion, influence political attitudes, and set agendas for civic action. Through these exchanges, youth form collective interpretations of political events.

Communication strategies are the planned approaches used to disseminate information, frame messages, and mobilise audiences. These may include visual storytelling, interactive dialogues, or persuasive content designed to capture attention and inspire participation.

Youth engagement refers to the active participation of young people in political processes through discussions, advocacy, and civic decision-making. In Kenya, Generation Z's growing political presence highlights a shift from passive consumption of information to active digital citizenship. Digital Mobilisation describes the use of online tools to coordinate protests, sustain political movements, and amplify civic voices. It illustrates how digital spaces transform political engagement from physical gatherings to virtual networks of action. This study, therefore, asks: What communication strategies were used to engage participants on social media

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platforms during the 2024 Gen Z-led protests in Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of social media has transformed political discourse and civic engagement, particularly among youth, by providing dynamic platforms for mobilisation and dialogue in Kenya's evolving democratic landscape. This literature review examines communication strategies used to engage participants on social media platforms, comparing global, Sub-Saharan, and Kenyan contexts while highlighting research gaps addressed by the current study.

Globally, social media platforms, defined as networked systems facilitating user-generated content and interaction (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), employ diverse strategies to engage participants in political discourse. In Australia, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2022) analysed five thousand X and Instagram posts and found that visual content such as infographics and videos increased engagement by thirty per cent compared to text, with videos generating two and a half times more shares. Similarly, Dolan et al. (2023) in the United Kingdom employed a mixed-methods approach combining surveys with one thousand two hundred respondents and thirty focus groups. They reported that interactive strategies such as polls and live Q&A sessions boosted participation by sixty-five per cent, particularly when emotionally resonant. In Indonesia, Prihatiningsih et al. (2023) used structural equation modelling on six hundred survey responses to study X discussions during the 2024 elections, finding that responsive commenting enhanced political persuasion by forty per cent.

Together, these studies emphasise the power of content-driven and interactive strategies in mobilising online audiences. However, they focus primarily on commercial and electoral campaigns on public platforms, neglecting private messaging spaces such as WhatsApp, the impact of misinformation, and the sustainability of engagement beyond immediate events. The current study addresses these gaps by examining content, interactivity, and cultural tailoring on both public and private platforms in the Kenyan context.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, where high mobile penetration drives social media use, research highlights culturally specific and platform-based communication strategies but reveals similar gaps. Ekoh (2024), reviewing fifty studies published between 2018 and 2023, reported that hashtag campaigns such as Nigeria's #EndSARS increased protest visibility by forty per cent, while vernacular content enhanced engagement among sixty per cent of youth. Likewise, Anson and Buatsi (2023) in Ghana analysed one thousand posts across X, Facebook, and Instagram, showing that culturally tailored messaging, such as the use of Akan proverbs, increased voter engagement by twenty-five per cent, with fifty-seven point seven per cent of mobile users accessing campaign content. In Uganda, Suherlan et al. (2023) examined five hundred X posts from the 2021 #UgandaDecides campaign, finding that influencer-driven hashtags amplified dissent by thirty-five per cent but also risked political polarisation.

While these studies underscore the value of hashtags and cultural tailoring in driving participation, they overlook private platforms like WhatsApp, which dominate political discussions in Kenya. Furthermore, few studies investigate whether these strategies sustain civic dialogue after protests or elections, a gap the current study addresses through longitudinal analysis of Kenya's 2024 Finance Bill protests.

Kenyan research provides localised insights but often lacks rural-urban comparisons, platform-specific analyses, and long-term perspectives. Maina (2025) examined two hundred X and TikTok posts during the 2024 Finance Bill protests, finding that artificial-intelligence-generated explainer videos and hashtags such as #RejectFinanceBill2024 increased engagement by twenty-five per cent, while multilingual content resonated with eighty per cent of urban youth. Similarly, Kiprono and Wanjiku (2024), using ethnographic interviews with fifty participants in Nairobi and Mombasa, found that

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WhatsApp group chats featuring vernacular voice notes enhanced trust, with seventy per cent of youth reporting increased protest participation. Kamau and Wamuthenya (2021), surveying six hundred university students in Nairobi, revealed that interactive X posts such as polls increased political participation by twenty per cent, though rural engagement remained limited.

These findings illustrate the importance of content and interactivity but fail to address rural-urban disparities, cross-platform dynamics, and the persistence of engagement beyond protests. Guided by the Agenda Setting Theory, which posits that media prioritise certain issues to shape public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Zhang, 2023; Almakaty, 2025), the current study explores content-driven, interactive, and culturally tailored strategies on WhatsApp, X, and TikTok during Kenya's 2024 Finance Bill protests, by incorporating rural-urban dynamics and examining sustained civic participation.

Theoretical Frameworks
This study is grounded in two mass communication theories, Agenda Setting Theory (AST) and Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), to analyse how social media strategies shape political engagement with a focus on the 2024 Finance Bill protests in Kenya.

AST, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1968), posits that media influences public opinion by prioritising certain issues, thereby shaping the salience of events in the public mind (McCombs & Shaw, 2023). Its core tenets include the media agenda (issues prioritised by media), public agenda (issues perceived as important by audiences), and policy agenda (issues influencing policymakers), as outlined by Rogers and Dearing (1988). But DIT traces the process by which a new idea or practice is communicated through certain channels over time among members of the social system. The DIT complements the AST model by describing the factors that influence people's thoughts and actions and the process of adopting a new technology.

AST aligns with the uses and gratifications approach, suggesting that audiences actively select media to fulfil needs such as knowledge, social connection, and civic engagement (Katz et al., 1973). In Kenya, social media platforms like WhatsApp, X, and TikTok set agendas by amplifying issues (e.g., #RejectFinanceBill2024), influencing public discourse and shaping public opinion, defined as collective action by young people to address socio-political issues (Ochieng, 2024). The tenets of this theory were used in describing characteristics of political discourses on social media platforms in Kenya by highlighting how frequent and prominent coverage of protest issues shapes public priorities, and assessing the impact of political conversations by examining how agenda-setting fosters awareness and participation. However, AST's reliance on survey-based assumptions limits its ability to capture nuanced audience responses, particularly on private platforms like WhatsApp, a gap this study addressed through qualitative analysis.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), pioneered by Rogers (1962), explains how new ideas or technologies spread through social systems over time, influencing thoughts and actions (Rogers, 2023). DIT's tenets include the innovation (e.g., social media platforms), communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups, X posts), time (adoption rate), and social system (e.g., Kenyan youth). The theory identifies adoption stages—awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption—and factors like relative advantage and compatibility that drive diffusion (Ryan & Gross, 1943). In Kenya, social media innovations (e.g., AI-generated content, vernacular voice notes) have diffused rapidly among youth, shaping political discourse through influencers, bloggers, and content creators, as seen in the 2024 protests (Maina, 2025). DIT was used to examine communication strategies used to engage participants on social media platforms by analysing how innovative strategies like hashtags and multimedia are adopted to mobilise youths, and assessing how these innovations sustain political discourse. However, DIT overlooks barriers like digital divides and misinformation, which affect rural engagement in Kenya (Kiprono & Wanjiku, 2024).

This study addressed this by exploring urban-rural dynamics in social media adoption through qualitative analysis, thus complementing the blind spots of AST.

The integration of AST and DIT provides a strong framework to investigate social media's role in Kenyan political discourse, addressing their limitations through a participatory, citizen-oriented approach. AST's agenda-setting function highlights how platforms prioritise issues, but its top-down assumptions and neglect of private platforms were mitigated by analysing WhatsApp's group dynamics. DIT's focus on innovation diffusion elucidates social media's adoption but requires contextualisation to account for Kenya's socio-cultural factors (e.g., vernacular content). Both theories support the study's emphasis on democratic dialogue, where social media fosters equality, freedom of expression, and human rights, as noted by Peterson and Green (2023) in their work on affective communication. The research gap lies in the lack of localised studies on how social media conversations sustain political discourse beyond protest cycles, particularly in rural areas, and their effectiveness in countering challenges like misinformation and hate speech (Ekoh, 2024). By examining WhatsApp, X, and TikTok's role in the 2024 Finance Bill protests, this study filled these gaps, offering insights into platform-specific impacts, urban-rural engagement, and long-term political discourse, contributing to Sub-Saharan African digital activism scholarships.

METHODOLOGY
This study employed a mixed-methods design. The study adopted a dual sampling technique that combined snowball and purposive sampling. Snowball sampling was used to identify students from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) who were active members of Gen-Z protests and engaged participants on WhatsApp groups, Facebook, X, and TikTok political discussions. Snowball sampling, as explained by Parker (2019), is a non-probability method where initial respondents help recruit others with similar traits, making it especially useful for reaching hard-to-identify populations. The researcher began by identifying

seven students, one from each department within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, namely: Development Studies, Languages, Literature and Communication, Geography and Environmental Science, History, Kiswahili, Religious Studies, and Philosophy, owing to familiarity with this faculty through shared courses and activities. Each of these seven "seed" participants referred five additional students actively involved in online political conversations, yielding a total of 42 respondents. Purposive sampling further ensured that all participants shared the objective of being involved in social media political discourse, regardless of their year of study. This approach provided access to a broad and diverse network of politically engaged students, addressing the challenge of limited public knowledge about the full extent of the online networks.

Data was collected using a mixed-methods approach centred on structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire, designed with nominal, ordinal, and Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = to a very great extent), captured participants' demographics, youth participation, and perceptions of communication strategies. Out of the 42 participants, 28 completed the questionnaire, which was enough for analysis in this study. Additionally, five regular users of X (formerly Twitter) engaged with #KOX hashtags, five TikTok users, and five Facebook participants were interviewed to elicit the interactive elements of these platforms in shaping political discourse.

The remaining 13 participants were divided into two focus group discussions to explore why youths preferred social media during protests, their levels of participation, and the perceived impacts of online conversations on their involvement in the 2024 anti-government demonstrations. This triangulated approach provided both breadth and depth, enabling the researcher to capture not only measurable trends but also the nuanced narratives of how social media discourses influenced political participation among Kenyan youth. The researcher ensured that informed consent was sought from all the participants. In this regard, the participant's consent form outlined the

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risks, benefits and willingness to participate in the study. The consent form was presented to each participant individually so that areas of misunderstanding were clarified by the researcher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to explore the communication strategies employed in political discourses on social media platforms in Kenya. Looking at these methods was important to understand how they share political messages, influence opinions, and encourage others to take part in political activities online. Data was analysed qualitatively and thematically. The results showed that Kenyan youth use different and flexible approaches to create, share, and spread political messages on digital platforms. These include using pictures, videos, hashtags, clear and local language, emotional stories, humour and satire, and working with popular online figures. The related data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Social Media Engagement

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I relied on social media platforms to follow updates on the 2024 Gen-Z-led protests.	2 (4.8%)	3 (7.1%)	10 (23.8%)	15 (35.7%)	12 (28.6%)
2	I used social media to connect with protest organisers and influencers.	5 (11.9%)	8 (19.0%)	12 (28.6%)	10 (23.8%)	7 (16.7%)
3	I became aware of protest locations and times through social media platforms.	3 (7.1%)	4 (9.5%)	9 (21.4%)	14 (33.3%)	12 (28.6%)
4	My engagement on social media motivated me to attend or support protest activities.	6 (14.3%)	7 (16.7%)	11 (26.2%)	12 (28.6%)	6 (14.3%)
5	Social media enabled me to access diverse content related to the protest (e.g., posters, videos, and hashtags).	1 (2.4%)	3 (7.1%)	8 (19.0%)	16 (38.1%)	14 (33.3%)
6	I engaged in political or protest-related conversations on social media platforms.	4 (9.5%)	6 (14.3%)	12 (28.6%)	13 (31.0%)	7 (16.7%)
7	Social media made it easier for me to endorse or show solidarity with protest messages.	3 (7.1%)	5 (11.9%)	10 (23.8%)	14 (33.3%)	10 (23.8%)
8	Conversations with others on social media influenced my stance on the protests.	7 (16.7%)	9 (21.4%)	12 (28.6%)	9 (21.4%)	5 (11.9%)
9	I shared my views, complaints, or feedback regarding government policies through social media during the protests.	6 (14.3%)	8 (19.0%)	11 (26.2%)	10 (23.8%)	7 (16.7%)

1 – To no extent at all, 2 – To a small extent, 3 – To a moderate extent, 4 – To a large extent, 5 – To a very large extent.

Qualitative analysis from table 1 shows three main patterns that were used by youth in social media engagement: information dissemination, mobilisation and framing, and innovation adoption.

First, social media served as the primary channel for real-time information about protest activities, confirming its agenda-setting role in shaping public priorities. Platforms such as X, TikTok, and Facebook ensured that protest updates, locations, and schedules became the most salient topics in digital spaces, later influencing offline conversations and mainstream news coverage.

Second, participants used social media not only to coordinate logistics but also to frame narratives in ways that resonated with ordinary citizens. Use of local languages like Kiswahili and Sheng, humour, satire, and emotional appeals strengthened solidarity and made political messages more accessible. This reflects AST's emphasis on salience and framing, as digital activists deliberately highlighted certain issues—like youth unemployment and economic justice to drive public debate.

Third, insights from Diffusion of Innovations Theory explain how new protest strategies spread across digital networks. Early adopters introduced creative tools such as viral memes, live streams, and AI-generated content, which were quickly replicated by wider groups. This accelerated mobilisation, both online and offline, illustrates how innovations in communication diffuse through social systems to influence political action.

Overall, AST explains what issues dominated public attention, while DIT shows how innovative tactics spread across communities, transforming Kenya's digital activism into a powerful sociopolitical force. From interviews and focus groups, the following thematic areas were identified.

Information Dissemination and Awareness Creation
The analysis of responses shows that social media played a central role in keeping participants informed about the protests and related activities. The findings revealed that a considerable proportion of respondents reported relying on social media to follow updates about the protests (64.3%), with 61.9 per cent indicating that they became aware of protest schedules and locations through the same platforms. This underscores the role of social media as a critical channel for real-time updates and grassroots awareness creation. Furthermore, the study revealed that participants were acutely aware of strategic framing techniques in their political communication, deliberately shaping messages to evoke specific interpretations and emotional responses. For example, one respondent noted:

> *"I try to frame my tweets around youth struggles—like saying 'We are not lazy, we are unemployed because the system is broken.'"* (Interviewee 7)

Participants presented the issues in a way that highlighted the problem of unemployment as a result of wider system failures rather than personal weaknesses. This approach aimed to challenge common stereotypes about young people and to build empathy and a sense of shared identity. They also stressed the importance of using local languages, especially Sheng and Kiswahili, to make their messages feel more genuine and to connect better with communities at the grassroots level. This aligns with AST's framing dimension, where emphasis and style shape how people interpret issues. As one focus group member explained:

> *"I use Sheng and Kiswahili to speak to the kawaida youth. It feels more authentic."* (FGD 2)

This choice of language supports Moyo's (2021) findings that using local languages makes digital political messages in Africa more relatable and trustworthy. Speaking in the audience's own language acts as a cultural link, helping people feel included, especially those who might feel distanced by formal or colonial languages. This approach can be explained through the idea of "framing as cultural performance" (Benford & Snow, 2000), where activists and communicators use familiar cultural symbols, stories, and sayings to inspire support. Combining moral and emotional messages with language rooted in local culture strengthens both

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understanding and emotional connection to political ideas. This shows how meaning in digital political communication is shaped through interaction.

Humour and satire were prominently featured as key communication strategies among youth on social media platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). Participants highlighted that comedic content was not only more engaging but also served as an effective way to critique political authority without confrontation. As one respondent noted:

> *"Making fun of politicians in a funny video gets more likes than a serious rant. People share it more."* (Interviewee 9)

The spread of political ideas on social media in Kenya has reshaped how citizens access, share, and discuss information. According to the tenets of Agenda-Setting Theory, media platforms influence what issues people think about by highlighting certain topics more than others. Social media channels such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok act as active spaces where political actors, journalists, and citizens frame topics that later dominate public conversation. Reviewed studies, such as those by Oloo (2021) and Nyanjom (2022), show that trending hashtags, viral posts, and political debates online often determine which matters gain prominence in mainstream news and offline discussions. This process shapes not only what issues become widely discussed but also how these issues are understood, leading to shifts in public priorities and political engagement.

The tenets of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory explain how political ideas and practices spread through social networks over time. Research by Wekesa (2020) and Atieno (2023) shows that early adopters, such as influencers, bloggers, and activists, often introduce new political messages or mobilisation strategies online. These messages then move through different groups, reaching wider audiences as more users share, comment, and adapt them. This process is not limited to elite actors; grassroots participants also play a role in spreading localised political concerns, which sometimes gain

national visibility. In this way, social media accelerates the adoption of political ideas, from awareness to widespread acceptance, influencing voter perceptions, political mobilisation, and even election outcomes.

Content Sharing and Visual Communication
The highest engagement (71.4%) was observed in the use of social media to access and distribute protest-related content, such as posters, videos, and hashtags. This illustrates how Gen-Z leveraged visual storytelling and multimedia amplification as core strategies to emotionally engage others and maintain protest momentum. The study established that the use of visual media and hashtags in enhancing political engagement through digital symbols was a characteristic of political discourse. A notable finding from the study was the strategic deployment of visual media (memes, infographics, and short videos) as pivotal tools in political communication among Kenyan youth. Participants consistently highlighted how visual content increased both audience engagement and message retention. For example, one interviewee observed:

> *"When I post a meme or a short video, I get more reactions. People laugh but also think about the message."* (Interviewee 3)

This observation aligns with Mutsvairo and Harris (2020), who note that digital visuals in African political communication act both as cultural expressions and as tools for mobilisation. Memes and videos combine humour, emotion, and symbolism, making complex political ideas easy to understand and share within peer networks. These forms of content bypass traditional media gatekeepers and spread quickly, supporting the early stages of message adoption as described in tenets of Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT), which states that early adopters, such as activists and influencers, introduced creative multimedia content that quickly spread across networks. As more users adapted and shared memes, protest videos, and symbolic hashtags, these innovations moved from niche spaces into the national consciousness, accelerating participation and sustaining protest momentum. In this process, creative visuals introduced by early

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adopters, such as activists and influencers, are shared and adapted by wider audiences, increasing both visibility and impact.

The frequent use of hashtags, including *#RejectFinanceBill2024, #LindaKatiba, and #OccupyParliament*, served as digital rallying points and searchable markers for coordinated action. This reflects the view presented by Bruns and Highfield (2016) that views hashtags as tools for collective framing and networked visibility. The repeated use of these hashtags elevated certain political issues to prominence, influencing what audiences paid attention to in the digital spaces, which fits well with the Agenda-Setting Theory. When used in the context of the Gen-Z protests, hashtags aggregate dispersed voices, forming online communities united by shared concerns, while visual memes added emotional weight through humour, satire, and metaphor, which encouraged participation. Such emotionally charged, visually rich content particularly resonated with youth audiences, supporting findings by Jewitt (2009) and Papacharissi (2015) on the power of semiotic and affective resources in driving political engagement.

Dialogic Engagement and Opinion Shaping

Nearly half of participants (47.7%) engaged in political conversations on social media, while 33.3 per cent reported that these interactions shaped their views on the protests. This highlights social media's role as an interactive space where people can exchange perspectives, debate public issues, and build civic awareness. A key feature of this communication was the use of emotional appeals grounded in personal and community experiences. As one focus group participant explained:

> *"I shared a video of my mother buying unga for 250 shillings. That touched people because it's real life."* (Interviewee 4)

Such personal stories turn broad political and economic issues into tangible, relatable experiences. This fosters emotional solidarity, allowing audiences to connect more deeply with the realities behind political struggles. In line with the tenets of AST, which explains how social media prioritises and frames protest issues, while DIT captures how innovative tactics, like hashtags, memes, and live streams, spread through digital networks, enabling Gen-Z to transform online engagement into offline political action. These narratives draw public attention to specific problems, such as rising food costs, by repeatedly highlighting them in ways that resonate with people's lived experiences. This sustained focus helps place such issues higher on the public and political agenda.

From a Diffusion of Innovation perspective, emotionally charged stories act as persuasive content that spreads quickly through social networks, especially when shared by trusted peers. As more individuals adopt and share these narratives, they encourage wider engagement and participation. The process blends cognitive and emotional influence, making messages both memorable and compelling, and creating spaces where empathy, anger, and hope become drivers of political identity and collective action.

Online Mobilisation and Advocacy

The findings reveal that social media was central to shaping political participation, structuring discourse, and sustaining solidarity during the protests. Between 40–43 per cent of respondents reported using social media to connect with organisers, express political feedback, or motivate themselves and others to join protest actions. These patterns suggest peer-led, decentralised mobilisation strategies rather than reliance on traditional hierarchical leadership. Moreover, 57.1 per cent of respondents stated that social media enabled them to express solidarity with the protest movement. Acts of digital solidarity included adopting protest-themed profile pictures, sharing symbolic hashtags such as #RejectFinanceBill2024, and liking or reposting protest messages.

Respondents also emphasised the role of social media personalities in shaping political conversations. As one participant observed, *"When an influencer speaks out, the message spreads faster. Their voice matters"* (Interviewee 6). This underscores how influencers function as opinion

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leaders in the diffusion process, accelerating the adoption of political messages within their networks. However, some participants expressed concerns over elite capture, where influencers shift narratives in alignment with political interests, as reflected in the caution: *"Some influencers are bought by politicians. You can tell when their content shifts"* (Interviewee 10). These patterns align with Nothias and Mboti's (2021) findings on the vulnerability of influencers to strategic manipulation. These findings align with the Agenda-Setting Theory with regard to influencers playing a dual role of shaping which issues gain public attention and influencing their interpretation. In addition, their reach and credibility facilitate the rapid spread of protest-related information across peer networks, conforming to the tenets of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory**.** Taken together, these dynamics show that social media served not merely as a communication tool but as a strategic arena for Gen-Z protests, enabling real-time information sharing, hashtag activism, visual content dissemination, and the formation of digitally networked, community-oriented protest cultures in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusion: The communication strategies used by Gen-Z in the run-up to and during the protests revealed that political actors and youth activists strategically used social media to disseminate political messages through influencers, hashtags, emotional narratives, and visual storytelling. Moreover, the study found that the youth gravitate toward content that meets their informational and identity-related needs. To achieve this, Gen-Z increasingly uses relatable language, memes, and user-generated content to appear more accessible. The data indicated that youth-led political discourse used decentralised, peer-to-peer tactics that bypass mainstream gatekeepers. The findings of this study illuminate the profound impact of social media

political communication strategies on the political attitudes and behaviours of Kenyan youth. The evidence suggests that digital platforms have not only broadened access to political information but have also transformed how young people engage with politics, moving beyond passive consumption to active participation and content creation.

Recommendations: Prioritise visual and culturally relevant content: Political actors and civic educators should focus on creating visually rich, relatable, and culturally contextualised content to effectively engage youth audiences. Furthermore, strengthen digital civic education: Integrating digital literacy and critical media skills into youth education programs can help young people navigate political content critically, distinguishing between factual information and emotional or sensational narratives. Promote offline-online synergies: Activists and policymakers should leverage the spill-over effect of digital engagement by linking online campaigns with offline political participation to foster sustained civic involvement. Support youth-led digital initiatives: Encourage and fund grassroots, youth-led digital movements that emphasise inclusivity, accountability, and democratic values, providing platforms for authentic youth voices. Impact of misinformation and countermeasures: There is a need to examine the prevalence and impact of misinformation in youth political discourse and the effectiveness of fact-checking or media literacy interventions. Future study should also focus on the role of emerging platforms; research should explore how newer platforms (e.g., TikTok, Clubhouse) shape political communication styles, mobilisation, and youth participation. Lastly, future studies on gender and intersectionality in digital politics should focus on analysing how gender, class, ethnicity, and other identity factors intersect with digital political engagement among youth.

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