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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A POLITICAL ACTIVISM TOOL DURING THE JUNE 2024 YOUTHS' PROTESTS IN KENYA

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ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

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OCTOBER, 2025

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DECLARATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CIPESA	Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICJ	International Commission of Jurists
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JKIA	Jomo Kenyatta International Airport
KICTANet	Kenya ICT Action Network
MCK	Media Council of Kenya
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
SIMElab	Social Media Lab
SIPT	Social Information Processing Theory

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media has become a vital tool for political engagement, empowering younger generations to actively participate and influence government policies, leadership and political processes. The Kenyan Gen Z's June 2024 protests against the 2024/2025 Finance Bill demonstrated social media's impact as a political activism tool. During the protests, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok were used to plan demonstrations and encourage participation. The study's objectives were, (a) to examine the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as a political activism tool, (b) to explore the role played by each platform and (c) to assess whether the three platforms caused any political, social and policies changes. The study found a gap in the limited academic research on the social media's impact on the June 2024 youth protests. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as political activism tool during this period. The research was guided by Agenda Setting and Social Information Processing theories. This study contributed to the Agenda-Setting by showing how social media not only shapes public opinion but also spurred offline political action, connecting online debate with tangible results like the Finance Bill 2024's withdrawal. The study enhanced SIP Theory by demonstrating that, even under situations of governmental monitoring and repression, online exchanges fostered solidarity across generations and long-term collective mobilization. The study used qualitative research design and inductive thematic analysis to analyse data. The study found that social media played the role of mobilisation, coordination and sensitization during the protests, also each of the three platforms played distinct roles and that there were political, social and policy changes resulting from the protests. The study recommended further studies on the long-term consequences of digital activism on political confidence, electoral behaviour and governance changes and further studies to ascertain whether Kenya's experience is distinct or is part of trend within the continent of Africa.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The chapter gives an overview of information on the statement of the problem, the objectives, and the purpose of the study, research questions, the justification, significance and the scope. This chapter also discusses limitations, delimitations, and operational definitions of terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

The prevalent use of social media platforms has undeniably changed the landscape of political mobilization and activism. Social media platforms operate on websites that enable the exchange of papers, photos, and videos (containing thoughts, ideas, data and messages) that are mostly virtual in nature (Baruah, 2012). Every social media networking site makes use of various tools to enable users to exchange concepts, content and links. For example, Facebook uses tools such as; share, likes, feeds, your groups, discovery, market place, videos, memories, saved items, reels, explore, massager, fundraiser, events, comments, while X tools consist of tweets, retweets, following, notifications, messages, communities, bookmarks, reply, repost, and likes, WhatsApp tools include: chats, status, favourites, groups and channels and are other social media websites like TikTok. These tools help to create a network of people with shared interests. For example, online political discourse and political participation (Yamamoto et al., 2015). In June 2024, Kenya experienced a wave of digital activism propagated by youths, a generation of people born between 1995 to 2012 falling under Generation Z (will be referred to Gen Z in this study) This study sought to explore the impact of three social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) as political activism tool in June 2024 youth protests, the role played by each platform and to examine whether there were political, social and policy changes that can be linked to the use of these platforms. By empowering Gen Z, these platforms provide a platform for the younger people to not only communicate but also challenge governmental decisions, hence altering the character of political activism in Kenya (Ingutia, 2025). For the purposes of this study, these three platforms will be identified interchangeably as social media, (Facebook, X and TikTok) or platforms. X (formerly Twitter) will be identified as X henceforth.

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1.2.4 Youth and Social Media in Kenya

After the 2022 general elections, Kenyan youths became sceptical when they saw that the government was unable to address economic issues, particularly those pertaining to youth

unemployment. A series of protests to reject the 2024- /2025 Finance Bill broke out on 18th June 2024, organised through social media. These demonstrations revealed that young Kenyans are prepared and eager to voice their concerns on social media, despite the government's effort in advocating for stringent regulatory measures against social media (Martina, 2024).

The protests were termed by most observers as different from other major protests previously experienced in Kenya because of how social media played a crucial role (Schwikowski, 2024). The Gen Zs were the main organisers of the protests. During the protests, hashtags were key to pushing the protests' agenda. Facebook, X and TikTok were crucial during the height of the nationwide demonstrations. Using hashtags like #Rejectfinancebill2024 helped bring people together and raise awareness of nonviolent protests (ICJ Kenya section, 2024). The most contentious provisions of the finance bill were taxation on bread, menstrual hygiene products, motor vehicle and mobile money transfers (CSIS, 2024). As a result, in solidarity with the anti-government demonstrations led by youths, civil society advocates, social media influencers, journalists, doctors, and human rights defenders took to the streets simultaneously in 34 of Kenya's 47 counties.

The use of modern technology by Gen Z during the protest made it distinct from other protests experienced before. Use of artificial intelligence to create images and videos was an essential tool in spreading information, hence encouraging both active and passive participation (Kimwere, 2025). Memes on Facebook, X and TikTok promoted critical thinking, elevated minority voices, and encouraged action through the use of humour, satire, and instantly identifiable imagery (Kang'ethe & Odoyo, 2024).

According to Ndavula (2018), previously, Facebook, X and TikTok were crucial to the 2022 elections, serving as platforms for activism and protests in addition to political mobilization and campaigning. Many of the young people who are using online campaigns claim that this is how they regain control and put problems on the agenda. For instance, during the 2022 election, young people utilised social media to put pressure on presidential candidates on two major concerns that affected their day-to-day lives: the nation's skyrocketing debt and the rising cost of living (The Guardian, 2022).

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1.3 Statement of the Problem

The study of social networks is an essential component of comprehending the potential power of these platforms. The availability and ease of access to multiple digital technologies, along with the flow of information, fuel social media influencers (users) to push hashtags on X, Facebook, and TikTok, thereby achieving widespread dissemination of political ideologies and narratives (Goswami, 2018).

The platforms open up democracies by demanding accountability and adherence to the law and also strengthen ties with international pro-democracy groups and movements (Bossetta et al., 2017). Although social media has been used to start political movements and facilitate quick mobilization, it has also largely been referred to as a double-edged sword (Ward & Wylie, 2014). The platforms simplify the spread of information, especially that on fraud, corruption and abuses by the government and provide news and political information that is not controlled by the state media (Gainous et al, 2017).Social media movements are capable of affecting people's opinions (Wamunyu & Okal, 2022). In this study, three social media platforms were examined to understand their role in bringing together Kenyan youth.

Despite the growing recognition of digital activism, little is known about how social media was used as a political activism tool during these protests, or whether it changed political engagement in Kenya, impacted government decision-making, or empowered youth agency (Ingutia, 2025). Did social media result in concrete political, social, and policy outcomes or did it only act as a platform for communication and mobilization? The problem, therefore, lies in the limited academic research on the ways in which social media influenced the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya, especially with regard to how well it worked to increase civic agency, influence political participation, and foster accountability (MCK, 2024). Without such analysis, the broader implications of digital activism for democratic governance and youth political participation remain unclear. Therefore, this study sought to examine how the youth used Facebook, X and TikTok to stage countrywide protests, which started on June 18th 2024 and whether these capabilities can be harnessed for constructive engagements. The study explored the impact of these platforms in propagating public opinions through social media movement and political activism. The study sought to discover whether Facebook, X and TikTok were capable of bringing any political, social and policy changes in Kenya during and after the June 2024 protests. The study also sought to ascertain whether there were

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political, social and policy changes resulting from the use of these platforms during the protests.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok usage on political activism among Kenyan youths (Gen 'Z') during the protests in June 2024. The focus will be on how online interactions facilitate political activism for political and policy change.

1.5 Research Objectives

i. I. To examine the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as a political activism tool during the 2024 youth protests in Kenya.
ii. To examine the role played by each platform (Facebook, X, TikTok) during the June 2024 youth protests.
iii. To assess whether the use of social media brought changes to policy, political movement, and public perception and whether they supported any democratic process after the June 2024 protests.

1.6 Research Questions

i. What was the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as a political activism tool during the 2024 youths' protests in Kenya?
ii. What role did each social media (Facebook, X, TikTok) play in the June 2024 youth protests?
iii. What changes brought about by the June 2024 Youth protests arose in, politics, policies, public perception and democratic processes?

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1.8 Justification of the Study

Although earlier research has examined how social media affects political activism, political protests like those in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and other Arab nations, as cited by Meral and Meral (2017), there is no research examining the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism in Kenya during the June 2024 youth protests. As Kenya continues to experience political heat triggered by a series of Gen Z protests, social media plays an important role in spurring political, social and policy changes. This study aims to explore the

impact of social media as a political activism tool and its capability to influence socio-political perception and policy change during the June 2024 youth protests.

The study tries to holistically understand how social media has empowered Kenyans, especially youth, in advocating for responsible and accountable leaders. This study will also help identify activities and trends of changes in policies' implementation as a result of criticism from social media. The study probed whether the impact of social media was able to redirect or reshape political narrative during the protests. By better understanding the dynamics of social media and technology in political activism, this study will help organisations and stakeholders capitalise on the social media capabilities and opportunities.

1.9 Significance of the Study

In Africa, traditional political parties have had to embrace new technologies and adjust to the new technological landscapes where people and organizations are now information producers. Political parties have been forced to use social media as a coping and creativity mechanism (Ndavula, 2018).

Social media has eliminated a few of the conventional obstacles that political organizations have when organizing collective action. In traditional political action, the most difficult task is overcoming transaction costs and encouraging people to participate. Social media reduces these transaction costs by offering quick, inexpensive, and effective communication technologies that enable people to join groups with comparatively little effort (Nilasari et al., 2019).

Social media platforms have become more popular, with X, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp being the most widely used social media apps in the nation. According to Simon (2024), Kenya had 22.7 million internet users, 13.05 million social media users and the majority of them use mobile phones to access the internet by 2024. Social media can act both for good and for bad. For example, while the platforms facilitate mobilisation of masses, in the context of digital activism, disinformation and polarisation can seriously impede the process of political organisations whose objectives are to bring about social change (KICTANet & CIPESA, 2022). Therefore, understanding the dynamics and evolution of social media will help enhance legal frameworks that regulate the use of social media, which

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in turn impacts political communication, political freedom, communication technology and how society interacts.

1.10. Assumptions

This study was based on a number of key assumptions. It was predicated on the idea that the hashtags, videos, and social media posts examined were real representations of individuals' experiences rather than the result of orchestrated misinformation. Additionally, it was presumed that most participants had access to social media platforms during the protests, despite instances of government censorship, and that interviewees and focus group participants gave truthful and accurate answers. Additionally, the study made the assumption that the chosen posts and participants were fairly representative of the larger protest-related population. Lastly, it was believed that the frameworks of Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Information Processing Theory were suitable and trustworthy for examining political mobilization and digital activism in the Kenyan setting.

1.11 Scope of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the impact of social media as a political activism tool during the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya. Therefore, the scope of the study will focus on the period between the beginning of the first protests on 18th June 2024, when the National Assembly was preparing to debate the 2024-2025 Finance Bill and towards the end of the protests in June. This period is relevant to the study as it was characterized by significant use of Facebook, X and TikTok to mobilize youths to protests against the plan to pass the 2024 Finance Bill on June 25th 2024, by the parliamentarians.

During this period, the government also initiated new policies on taxation, new payment modes, especially for government services. Among these activities, the proposal and approval of the Finance Bill 2024 were the main triggers of the youth protests. The protests were confrontational, such that the parliament building and members of parliament were attacked on 25th June 2024, causing political tension in the country. According to human rights groups, Kenyan security forces killed at least 65 people during protests (Mohammed, 2024). The period also triggered new political alignments and political formations, like the famous "broad–based government" which involved rival political parties. The study concentrates on the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as a political activism tool during this period. The study examined several documented reports on the role of each platform during these

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protests. The study involved 41 participants grouped into three: 2 communication experts, 15 lay citizens and 24 university students.

1.12 Limitations and Delimitations

This study encountered challenges while conducting interviews and during focus group discussions (FGD) due to the socially and politically oriented questions. The research mitigated this by rephrasing questions and by focusing on the question guide to reduce eliciting emotions and created a neutral and respectful context, using open-ended questions, listening carefully, and maintaining a calm demeanour. The research also ensured consistency and neutrality was observed during the interviews by interjecting to rephrase and redirect the conversation towards the objective of the question. Second, interviews provide less anonymity, which was usually a major concern for many participants. The research mitigated this by using pseudonyms while coding the data. To ensure that selected participants were well conversant with the use of social media and political activism from the experience point of view, a brief interrogative process was conducted prior to interviews and focus group discussions.

1.13 Definitions of Terms

Gen 'Z' – (Generation 'Z') - This refers to a demographic cohort succeeding Millennial and preceding Generation Alpha. They are people born between 1995 and 2010 (Munga, 2024).

Hashtag – it's a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#). It is used in social media communication, especially on X (formerly Twitter). It is used to identify a topic or digital content intended to trend. For example, #RejectFinancebill2024, a content used to push for protests by the Kenyan youth in June 2024 (Estrella-Ramón, 2024).

Political Activism - the action of using vigorous campaigning to promote, impede, direct or intervene in political, social, economic or environmental reform to bring about political or social change (Kanchanawongpaisan & Kulachai, 2023).

Political Campaigns - a group of connected, educative and informative activities, which are intended to communicate a message to achieve a particular aim. These actions target virtual audiences, as well as small and large physical meetings. The delivery mode can be through the mass media, social media and physical gatherings (Ndavula, 2018).

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Political Participation – this refers to a voluntary activity or activities undertaken by the public to influence political decisions. These activities can be executed directly or indirectly (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014).

Social Media – a set of interactive internet-related applications that facilitate the creation and sharing of user-generated content. These applications are installed on gadgets like smartphone and computers (Gong & Yang, 2020).

1.14 Summary

This chapter introduces the research topic and the statement of the problem. The background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the objectives. The chapter also discusses the justification, significance, the assumptions, and the scope of the study and the definition of abbreviated terms.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents previous researchers' work in brief, which includes the summaries of literature in activism, presenting various perspectives of social media in activism. The chapter also presents theoretical framework and the research gap identified.

2.2 General Literature

According to Ndavula (2013), the use of social media in Kenyan political campaign started with the 2007 elections, although political candidates did not make extensive use of the platforms until the 2013 elections. Ndavula adds that networking sites have given politicians a simple and convenient way to disseminate political information.

SIMELab Africa (2022) report indicates that 84.3% of Kenyans have access to and use the internet to meet a variety of purposes. In fact, Kenya ranks among the top in Africa for both social media and internet use (ACF, 2024). Political communication is evolving as a result of social media in Kenya. Facebook, X, blogs, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp are increasingly becoming important for political activism, participation and mobilization (Ndlela, 2022). These platforms benefit society by increasing knowledge and promoting involvement in political and civic issues (Bennett, 2008). The platforms and availability of low-cost cell phones have created alternative public spaces for participatory cultures (Al-Ani, 2017).

Second, by enabling and distributing uncontrolled content to a wide audience, it can be used to promote hate speech, propaganda, fake news, and incite violence. According to Mutahi & Kimari (2017), digital authoritarian takeover modifies and uses cyberspace to strengthen their grip on power; by spreading propaganda, suppressing free political expression, which fosters a climate of fear and conformity, shaping public opinion and facilitating the absorption of authoritarian ideas through propaganda, disinformation and misinformation.

2.2.1 Social Media and Political Activism

Political activism can be defined as the proactive involvement of people/organisations in attempts to affect or implement social, political, or policy change (Ali & Khan, 2023). This can take various forms, such as community organizing, social media campaigns, lobbying, rallies, protests, and demonstrations. In Kenya, these platforms give audience access to on-

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demand content and the ability to share, discuss and participate in political affairs (Kanchanawongpaisan & Kulachai, 2023).

According to Ndavula (2018), analysis of the 2013 election campaigns revealed that only 5.6% of candidates used X throughout their election campaign, compared to 78% who used Facebook. According to Mukhongo (2020), during the 2017 general election, memes and hashtags like GitheriMan, #Canaan, #PeoplesPresident, and #Handshake were used for political campaigns, creating political humour and social commentary in Kenya. After the 2022 general elections, Kenyans, especially the youths, continued engaging one another on social media on issues related to the newly elected government, politics and change of leadership, eliciting scrutiny of the government's dealings and operations

The use of Facebook, X and TikTok in the June 2024 youth uprising in Kenya highlighted a major political shift in Kenya's politics. The significance of the shift is evident in the way Kenyans relayed their grievances affecting their day-to-day lives like social fairness, economic policies, and government accountability. As a result of digital mobilisation, youths were able to question the current quo and hold their leaders accountable (Mwaura, 2024). Digital tools, strategies and tactics have taken activism to a completely new level compared to years back when activism was organized through physical means (Kırık & Çetinkaya, 2021).

Since digital activism has exhibited a level of intelligence and reach that was difficult to comprehend, this study sought to examine the impact of X, Facebook and TikTok during youth protests in June 2024. The study focused on the youth aged between 18 and 25 years (Generation Z) (Munga, 2024). According to Ohndyl (2025), Gen Z makes up about 33% of Kenya's population and 30% of Africa's population or 450 million young people. The study also sought to find out the role played by each of these platforms and whether there were social-political changes that took place after the protests. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, two theories will be critical in answering the questions; these are, Social Information processing theory (SIPT) and agenda setting theory. Agenda setting theory helped in demystifying how social media framed and crafted the information used to mobilise the youths and its impact. SIPT on the other hand helped the study in understanding how the information disseminated was shared, delivered and processed by the youths and the general public and its impact.

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2.2.2 Example from 'The Arab Springs'

According to authors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025), towards the end of 2010 into 2011, a youth-led wave of pro-democratic demonstrations dubbed 'Arab springs' challenged long-standing authoritarian regimes in the Middle East (Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Oman) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). In Tunisia, Bouazizi's story (who set himself ablaze) was repeatedly shared on YouTube, Facebook and X, encouraging others to plan protests and oppose their governments (Samira, 2015). According to Stepanova (2011), the protests were basically the concerted effort of ICT and social media, especially Facebook stories, propagated by the opposition.

On January 25, inspired by Ben Ali's overthrow in Tunisia, Egyptian youths organised similar protests through social media across Egypt (Eipe, 2014). Social media, especially Facebook, X and bloggers, played a vital role in facilitating participatory journalism and mediated mobilisation through the provision of constant connectivity (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). In the study by Coretti and Taki (2013), particular platforms are better suited for particular purposes. Facebook was crucial in the lead-up to the protest campaign against police brutality. X was a more useful tool for activism once protestors are on the ground. Brym et al (2014) argue that digital media played a pivotal role in the Arab Spring by providing the very infrastructure that allowed groups of activists to organize and build strong communication bonds before the main protests.

In early June 2024, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, was overthrown by the student-led protest movement. According to Amran et al. (2025), social media played a critical role in the protests, which compelled Bangladesh's prime minister to resign and flee the country. In essence, Facebook X and YouTube were crucial in mobilising thousands of people on the streets and disseminating the majority of the sensitive stories, which included alerts about upcoming events during the protests (Turzo, 2024).

In 2018–2019, the "Sudan Uprising" in Sudan, youths took to social media to demand President Omar al-Bashir's resignation after decades in office (Guta, 2023). These movements highlight the changing nature of political activism, which is frequently motivated by concerns about social fairness, freedom, and accountability.

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2.3 Empirical Literature

In relation to the youth-led June 2024 protests against the 2024-2025 Finance Bill, Ingutia (2025) discusses how thousands of youth demonstrated in the streets and online. The youths in this case, who identified themselves as Gen Z organized protests, shared information about the consequences of the Finance Bill, and created hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill, #OccupyParliament, #OccupyJKIA, #TokeaTuesday, #Rutomustgo (Njuki et al., 2024), which became popular both locally and internationally on Facebook, X and TikTok. Ingutia goes ahead to demonstrate how these platforms, especially X, became an essential tool for public mobilisation, allowing Gen Z to interact with the government directly, bypassing the traditional media, which are often seen as ineffective or biased.

Omweri and Siambe (2024) argue that the emergence of Gen Z in Kenya's political arena seems to have elicited a more dynamic, varied, and citizen-driven democratic system that promises increased inclusivity and engagement in the policy-making process. In their finding, Omweri and Siambe underscore that through social media movement, the Gen Zs are capable of ushering in a new era of civic involvement by challenging established political norms and processes with an inventive spirit and an unshakable dedication to social justice, which will likely impact how democracy and social justice movements are perceived globally today and in the future.

Omweri and Siambe (2024) continued to assert that Kenya's political, social, and economic landscape has been shaped in part by youth-led lobbying. Youth have spearheaded changes, questioned the current quo and worked for a more just and equal society ever since independence. Their study's findings indicate that digital media have changed the face of social development by giving young people an unmatched chance to participate in civic advocacy, digital activism through advocating their issues, raising awareness of them, and marshalling support, making digital media an indispensable tool for youth advocacy. The social, political, and environmental landscapes of the globe in which Gen Z is growing up are undergoing tremendous transformation. Because of this, the younger generation is getting more involved in activism and politics, using their unique perspective and technology expertise to advance change (Chang & Chang, 2023).

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An analysis of youth in Kenya, Kiambu county, by Macharia and Ong'ong'a (2024), found that social media platforms served as an educational instrument to train and educate young people about political issues and an opportunity to engage with political personalities and their peers, as well as with scholars. Macharia and Ong'ong'a argue that, the fact that these platforms are perceived as a sign of technological sophistication, they are mainly linked to youths. The trend's primary driver is the rise in smartphone use among youth, who have access to a variety of digital platforms that keep them continuously engaged with peers and the outside world and hooked on social media.

2.3.1. The June 2024 Youth Protests in Kenya

During the June 2024 anti-government protests, Facebook, X and TikTok were essential resources for organizing events, distribution of information, motivating participation, planning and execution which was mainly done virtually. The dynamism of millennials and young people from Gen Z has been credited with being the movement's primary supporters. The rallies, which took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays for a month, initially began as a protest against the government's tax hikes (Basillioh & Ido, 2024). Greater inclusion was made possible by this digital shift, which eliminated the logistical and security barriers that come with in-person gatherings and allowed youth from a wide range of geographic and demographic backgrounds to take part in the protests. The protests, hashtags #RejectFinanceBill, #OccupyParliament #RutoMustGo #OccupyStatehouse, #OccupyChurches, #OccupyCBD, #Angukanayo were pushed during prime time with the intention of setting the agenda for national conversation (Ajra, 2024), as supported by the agenda-setting theory's assertions (Asemah et al., 2022). The hashtags spurred a proliferation of information and real-time updates (Media Council of Kenya, 2024).

Studies already conducted on the June 2024 youth protests show the unique roles that Facebook, X, and TikTok played in creative expression, real-time updates, and mobilization (Ingutia, 2025). These studies also connect online activism to political outcomes, such as the withdrawal of the Finance Bill. Despite the value of these contributions, a large portion of the work is descriptive in nature, providing little causal analysis and lacking methodological transparency regarding content sampling, coding, and filtering. The majority of studies concentrate exclusively on the 2024 protests without placing them within Kenya's larger digital political history, and very few look into how platform algorithms or official restrictions influenced exposure. Ingutia goes on to reiterate that young voices are frequently

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highlighted without being verified as representative, and theoretical integration is lacking, with minimal involvement outside of frameworks for agenda-setting and digital activism. This study fills these gaps by offering a methodologically clear, theory-driven explanation of how social media influenced state responses as well as public conversation.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT)

This theory was developed by Joseph Walther in 1992 to describe how individuals build and maintain relationships in a computer-mediated setting and how they learn to know one another online without the need for spoken cues (Asemah et al., 2022). The (SIP) theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) implies that the establishment of interpersonal interactions online may take longer than that of traditional face-to-face encounters (Walther, 2015). SIPT have been applied in a number of fields; for instance, it has become well-known for developing frameworks for comprehending children's violent behaviour. It has been discovered that the SIP model's particular processing elements predict children's social adjustment more accurately than other global constructs like perspective-taking and role-taking.

This theory is applicable to numerous studies on interpersonal and online communication (Fulk et al., 1987). It can be applied in research on topics such as social media and audience relationship building, social media and exclusivism, social media and social isolation, and how companies utilise social media to cultivate relationships with their clients, as well as in the areas of political communication and new media, and social media and business communication (Asemah et al., 2022). According to SIPT, the computer-mediated-communication (CMC) system's ease of use, affordability, and freedom to contact others despite barriers relating to nationality, ethnicity, religion or status are what make it different from traditional and/or other forms of communication. It is also well recognized that this feature gives consumers more autonomy and self-sufficiency (Dubrovsky, Kiesler & Sethna, 1991; Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984; Potsmes & Lea, 1998 as cited in Olaniran et al., 2011)

Social media serves as a catalyst for political activism by amplifying voices, creating a sense of community, and distributing content that is politically charged. People's involvement in the digital world is reflected in how often they use social media, with higher frequency denoting

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more active participation (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2014). Therefore, this theory guides this study in exploring the impact of social media on the June 2024 Youth protest in Kenya, the general processing of the online interaction and dissemination of information.

The strengths of SIPT are that it's a crucial component in future research on online interaction (Paul & Michael, 2019) and that it provides a more optimistic viewpoint for observing and evaluating online interactions (Asemah et al., 2022). The weaknesses of SIPT are that it doesn't sufficiently examine the increased degree of anonymity on the internet and how it can be linked to a lack of accountability, such as when frequent internet users grow accustomed to this lack of accountability (Paul & Michael, 2019). SIPT has significantly contributed to the field of communication research, especially in the areas of relationship management and online communication. The theory will assist the study in comprehending how Gen Zs were able to form opinions about the 2024 Finance Bill (more taxes), in contrast to how they felt the leadership ought to have addressed their grievances (lack of jobs, youth exclusivity). The theory will also aid in the investigation of how the young people were able to form bonds and adjust to the online environment (mobilisation/activism) throughout the demonstrations.

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2.4.2 Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory was developed as a result of Max McCombs and Donald Shaw's study of the 1968 US presidential election (Asemah et al., 2022). The theory posits that the media sets the agenda for the general public. It further asserts that the majority of the images we remember, the majority of the thoughts and concerns and the majority of the subjects of discussions we engage in are shaped by the things we have read, heard or seen in various media (Asemah & Asogwa, 2012). This theory is predicated on two major assumptions, first is that the press and media do not reflect the reality but it shapes and filters it, meaning, audience/readers can decide how much importance to place on an issue based on the amount of information the media provides about it and the prominence it receives, often known as the salience of the news agenda. Second, the public interprets certain issues as the most important because of the media's focus on them, making the topic that is frequently covered by the media easier for people to consider (Abdulkhamidova, 2021).

Agenda setting works through the news media's daily repetition of messaging regarding public issues and its pervasiveness in our day-to-day lives. According to Valenzuela &

McCombs (2019), the news agenda's redundancy allows the public to learn about issues and other news topics with little conscious effort on their part. The media frame the stories they choose to tell, the viewpoint they want the public to adopt, the information they convey, and the ways they support and undermine particular causes. The hot topic that is trending on social media platforms, the attention on trending problems, hashtags, and shares all affect what people debate and shape public opinion - this is another way that social media sets the agenda (Asemah & Asogwa, 2012; Asemah, Edegoh & Nwammuo, 2013 as cited in Ja'afaru & Asemah, (2024). Social media users have unfettered access to communications once linked to the internet via any smart device, such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, smart TVs, smart eyewear, smart speakers with displays, gaming consoles, and many more (Hanlon & Jones, 2023).

Agenda-setting theory can be applied to analyse how political communication in general or political advertising in particular, perpetuates their message to the voters via the media. For instance, voters' decisions and political advertising (Salman et al., 2016). In this study, agenda-setting theory assists in understanding how the Gen Z used social media platforms to significantly influence public opinion by giving a wide range of media consumers' worldwide quick access to digital communication products that include documents, multimedia messages, images, videos, and private information, during and after the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya.

Strengths of (AS) theory

The strength of agenda-setting theory is that it has predictive power because it predicts that if the general public is regularly exposed to the same media, there is a very high likelihood that they will think or feel the same way about issues. It has explanatory power because it explains why most people choose a specific piece of information. The theory has the ability to organise - it aids in organising the previously acquired understanding of media influences (Asemah et al., 2022).

Weaknesses of (AS) theory

Due to the changes in the media environment, theorists are now faced with new challenges and questions about the suitability of that strategy in a situation where mass communication is changing into multi-channel media communication, the internet is expanding, and the new media is being used in social communication (Nowak-Teter, 2018). Du (2008) and Reese

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(1990), as cited in Buyanza-Mwidimu (2024), have identified a number of inquiries concerning the agenda-setting effect. For example, what is the audience-news connection really like? Could it be that the media only helps to support the agenda that the public or audience sets? Perhaps the media is simply responding to the opinions of its audience?

While SIPT will help analyse the youths' online interactions, relations building and management during the June 2024 youth protests, agenda-setting theory will help unravel how the youths managed to create/craft messages which set the tone of the protests and how those messages were framed and delivered to the government, general public and fellow youths across the country and internationally. These elements revolve around the objectives of this study.

2.6 Research Gap Analysis

In the initial decades of the twentieth century, young people around the world engaged in independent activities and showed an increasing inclination for social and political activism. Though frequently in a temporary way, these movements acted as catalysts for political, social, and cultural change by criticizing the political system as it existed at the time (Ali & Khan, 2023).

Social media use has been connected to the growth of political protests in numerous global cities. Political protest in general is obviously nothing new, but it is a new phenomenon that real-time stories of protest behaviour are accessible through social media sites like Facebook and microblogging sites like X and TikTok. Protest planning is made simpler by social media, which provides movement organisers with an efficient means of rapidly sharing information about impending events and political developments (Jost et al., 2018).

The study has provided evidence in the literature review section that social media has played an important role around the world when it comes to political activism in recent years. Examples have been cited, for example, the Arab Springs in the Middle East (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025) and other protests in other countries.

Like many of its neighbours, Kenya's population has changed, with a rising percentage of young people referred to as Gen Z who are tech-savvy, educated, and connected (Munga, 2024). On June 18th 2024, Gen Z spearheaded the first protests across the country over the

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government's proposed tax rise. Using the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill, they mobilised on social media against the Finance Bill 2014 and other excesses. Since social media movement is capable of affecting people's opinions (Wamunyu & Okal, 2022), this study has discovered a gap that these capabilities have been understudied during the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya (Ingutia, 2025), therefore, the research sought to examine the impact of these capabilities, the different roles played by each platform in propagating public opinion through social movement and political activism to bring about political, social, institutional, leadership changes and policy changes on the already existing political, policy and social structures in Kenya.

2.6.1 Gaps in Kenyan Scholarship

According to Puri (2025), social media is capable of influencing decisions, policy change, political change and social change, yet as a result of the June 2024 youth protests, no study has tangibly linked the impact of these particular platforms to any policy, political or social changes. Therefore, the issue lies in the absence of academic research on how social media influenced the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya, specifically with regard to how well it worked to increase civic agency, influence political participation, and foster accountability. This study sought to explore the impact of social media as an activism tool during the June 2024 youth protest in Kenya, and the role played by each of the identified platforms. It's also important to answer critical questions such as the long-term effects of youth-led digital activism challenging political structures, the platform's direct impact on policy or political change, or is it just a mobilising tool? And whether there are substantial evidence of policy and political changes linked to social media movements.

A research by Abboud et al, (2024) suggests that the effects of social media and political participation extend beyond its immediate users. Their study emphasizes how social media's ability to link citizens, civil society, and political players has had a mixed effect on politics rather than revolutionizing it. Therefore, it is crucial to keep exploring how social media changes African politics, particularly in light of the increasing utilization of social media by both individuals and politicians.

2.7 Summary

The chapter gives a comprehensive summary of the current, accessible, academic literature on all aspects of the subject, including all viewpoints. This chapter also discusses in detail the

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analysis of the theoretical framework to be used in the study. Two theories to be used in this study: the Social Information Processing theory and the Agenda-Setting theory. Research gaps have been identified and discussed in this chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological strategy, description of the research procedures, the various stages of the research, which include research design, sample and sampling procedure, research instruments, validity and reliability of the research instruments, data collection processes, data analysis techniques and ethical consideration.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a phenomenological method of qualitative research design. Since the study sought to investigate how individuals perceived and made sense of a phenomenon, the impact of social media on political activism during the June 2024 youth protests, phenomenology provides the most appropriate framework. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), phenomenology focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a particular event. The design allowed this study to uncover deep insight into participants' subjective realities. It emphasises participants' feelings, voices and perspectives, making it an ideal design to study sensitive political issues.

The research used an interview guide with semi-structured questions for focus group discussions (see Appendix A2), unstructured questions for laymen's interviews (see Appendix A1) and semi-structured questions for communication experts' interviews (see Appendix A3). According to Stuckey (2013), a comprehensive one-on-one or face-to-face interviews allow for the collection of subtleties in responses that might otherwise be missed. This means that the interviewer can be present during the interview and gain a deeper understanding of the interviewee and the topic of discussion. The rationale for adopting focus group discussion is that, it can yield rich, in-depth qualitative information. Focus group discussions helps participants build on one other's ideas. Focus group discussion facilitates collection of large volumes of data in a quick and inexpensive manner (Marrelli, 2008). This study employed a traditional focus group discussion design, which provided a sizable number, that is, 5-12 participants, which allowed a broader viewpoint of diverse opinions (Watson et al., 2015).

3.3 Population

The population of the study included young college students (between the ages of 20 – 25 years, falling under the Gen Z age bracket, born between 1995-2012 (Munga, 2024) who

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participated physically or virtually and engaged with social media in the 18th, 19th and 25th June 2024 protests. Other participants were media/communication experts and the general public. Why communication experts? According to Von (2023), first experts might add experimental results on micro processes and the practical decision-making process. Second, experts can combine and evaluate several pieces of information. Thirdly, in a comparable way, expert interviews can provide the information needed to connect the macro and micro levels of research. Media and communication experts represented individuals with experience and the ability to analyse communication messages, information transmission, and their effects. Students represented some of the most active users and consumers of social networking sites. The general public was made up of regular people who witnessed protests and their impact on political, economic and policy changes.

3.4 Target Population

The study selected 12 students from University 1 and 12 students from University 2, both situated in Nakuru County. These students participated in focus group discussions (FGD). The study identified University 1 participants as FGD 1 and University 2 participants as FGD 2. The justification for selecting the Universities in Nakuru is the regional proximity to the study. Second, according to Sesen & Şiker (2019), students are particularly receptive to new technologies as a group, and they use them in many different ways and for a range of purposes. Third, they are among the highest group of consumers who extensively use social media across the world today (Park & Chun, 2025). The study identified two (2) communication experts and 15 laymen through purposive sampling. The laymen comprised both genders. The rationale for selecting communication experts and laymen was that they witnessed the protests and were able to give first-hand experience and impact of the social media messages circulated during the protests (Wanjala, 2025).

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3.5 Sampling Techniques

The study used a purposive sampling technique to sample respondents. The main objective of purposive sampling was to identify individuals (youth protesters, general public and experts) best suited for helping answer the research questions. All participants' questions were drafted to answer the three research questions. This sampling technique helped deliberately select participants who have traits and knowledge pertinent to the study (Tajik et al, 2024). The information offered assisted in answering the research questions. Purposive sampling was

used to group respondents into three bands: university students (University 1 and 2), communication experts and the general public (lay citizens).

3.6 Sample Size

This study targeted 12 students undertaking their studies at University 1 and 12 students from University 2; therefore, the total number of FGD participants was 24 (with 2 FGDs in each university). The study achieved saturation upon conducting two FDGs comprising 6 participants each, in both universities. The study also involved two (2) communication experts who analysed communication trends and the choice to adopt social media. The study selected 15 different lay citizens (5 from street vendors, 5 peasants and 5 informants from large business owners), the recommended number of participants in qualitative research according to Sirwan (2021). The lay citizens, comprised of other age groups outside the Gen Z, formed a broad spectrum of Kenyans who felt the impact of the youth protests in June 2024.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The study's data collection instruments comprised of interviews (semi-structured and unstructured), Focus group Discussion (FGD) and note taking. The justification for using interviews is the fact that having one-on-one discussions with participants enables a thorough examination of their viewpoints, experiences, and beliefs (Stuckey, 2013). The rationale for using focus group discussions is that they are effective in gathering participants' views, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes on the role of social media in activism. As a qualitative method, focus group discussions are detailed and frequently reveal unexpected insights into people's perceptions of a problem (Marrelli, 2008).

3.8 Validity

Validity can be defined as the degree to which the processed data accurately depicts a phenomenon under investigation (Andersson et al., 2024). The study conducted both content and concept validity. The two main concerns of content validity are, first, to check whether the content of the items and the instrument truly assesses the study's constructs. Second, assesses whether the degree to which an instrument accurately measures a theoretical construct that it is intended to evaluate has used concept validity. As a result, this study made sure that the research instruments were created in line with how the research variables is conceptualized.

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3.9 Reliability

This study employed reputable qualitative research techniques, such as interviews and literature reviews, to generate trustworthy results (Anderson, Boateng & Abos, 2024). In qualitative research, reliability might be seen as the reliability of the processes involved and the information generated. It relates to the extent to which the results of the study or measurement may be repeated in different settings and yield comparable outcomes (Stiles 1993; Bryman 2001 as cited in Roberts & Priest, 2006). To generate reliable results, methodological triangulation was employed, especially in data collection. Field notes and audio recording were used as a point of reference for validity purposes. Due to the subjective nature of purposive sampling technique, the study adopted Von's technique of mitigating biases which states that, a) Consider how the interview scenario is relational and reveal one's positionality, b) interviews should be triangulated and compared to other data sources (experts, lay citizens and students) and c) placing quotations in the context of the entire empirical corpus in a systematic manner (Von, 2022). To achieve this, the study cross-checked data against each participant's comments and against existing literature.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

The study collected data from communication experts through semi-structured interviews. An interview guide containing questions pertinent to the research objective was given to the participant to examine before the question session started. The researcher interviewed the participant following the guide as well as noting other relevant issues arising from the questions. Data from lay citizens (street vendors, farmers and informants from large businesses) was collected through unstructured interviews. Upon making formal identification, researcher verbally highlighted the purpose of the study whereby the participants willingly chose to participate upon conceptualization of the questions being asked, which revolved around the three research objectives. Data from university students (youth) was collected through semi-structured FGD. The FGDs had a guide containing topics of discussion within the research's objective (Bachtiar et al., 2024). The secondary material for this research related to activism consisted of existing trends on Facebook, X and TikTok. These materials were identified according to the likes, tweets/retweets, posts and comments containing messages on activism, mobilisation and participation in the June 2024 youth protests. Data collection consistency, quality and efficacy were enhanced by using an audio recording device and note taking to record all of the respondents' opinions. Each of the key

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informants (communication experts) took 30 minutes, 10 minutes for common citizens (peasants, street vendors and large firm owners), FGD 1 and 2 (Participants 1-24) took approximately two hours (Yayeh, 2021) each. Focus group discussions were conducted within University 1 and University 2 on 23rd and 25th August 2025, consecutively. Interviews for Participant 25-39 (lay citizen) were conducted on 26th - 28th August 2025. Interviews for Participant 40 and 41 (experts) were conducted on 29th August 2025 and 1st September 2025, consecutively. The entire process of data collection took approximately 10 days. The study identified 6 posts of media content from Facebook, X, TikTok, which trended during the June 2024 youth protests and their impacts were downloaded, which assisted in answering research questions 1 and 2. The rationale for selecting 6 social media posts is that they provided sufficient variation to capture diverse perspectives, while remaining feasible for the systemic coding and thematic analysis. Some scholars agree that there is no specific number for such a sample.

> There is no single rule about how large a sample should be in qualitative research, and the appropriate sample size will depend on the research question, the nature of the data and the scope of the analysis. However, a general guide, studies using thematic analysis typically involve between 5 and 30 participants, with smaller samples being more typical in in-depth qualitative work, such as case studies. (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.32).

> In qualitative research, the sample size is typically small and the goal is not to generalise to a larger population but to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience. In general, qualitative researchers use samples of 5 to 30 participants, although in some cases, smaller or larger samples may be appropriate depending on the purpose of the study. (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.146)

Therefore, the 6 social media posts are justifiable on the basis of qualitative research principles, where depth and richness of data are prioritized over sheer volume.

3.11 Data Analysis Plan

The study adopted inductive thematic analysis methods to analyse the data with the help of data analysis software called MAXQDA. The goal of this adaptable, inductive approach to qualitative research is to find, examine and present patterns, also known as themes in data (Naeem et al., 2023). Thematic analysis is a useful research technique that uses qualitative

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data to understand people's beliefs, opinions, knowledge, experiences and values (McLeod, 2024). In this study, the research explored the impact of social media as employed by the youths, and thematic analysis assisted in identifying themes related to mobilisation, activism and different roles of the platforms. Focused questions were asked to elicit information on what the respondent thought about the social media's role in political activism. An audio recording was done throughout all the interviews. The audio was analysed using MAXQDA software, then subjected to the same software for coding. During the interviews, field notes were taken. The content of notes was manually compared side-by-side to identify themes and sub-themes. The analysis also involved transcription of the audio recordings during the discussion and transcribing them using the software. The researcher started coding potential themes and sub-themes in terms of recurring concepts and relationships, then examined the themes in relation to research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using the software in order to reduce biases. In order to capture both theory-driven and data-driven findings, hybrid thematic analysis, which follows Braun and Clarke's six-step approach (protocol), works well for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006)(see Appendix I). Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Information Processing Theory serve as deductive guides for the initial codes, which emphasize components like issue salience, mobilization messaging, and online solidarity. In order to depict the distinct dynamics of the June 2024 youth protests, new topics that arise directly from the data, like state censorship, innovative protest strategies, or digital humour, are included inductively. This dual method, which ensures the analysis remains theoretically grounded while also revealing context-specific patterns, provided a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how social media influenced political activity in Kenya.

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3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are moral codes that should be adhered to when conducting research. They remind researchers of their obligations to the participants of the study and are therefore legally binding, which means they must be adhered to regardless of the study's specific conditions (Cacciattolo, 2015). This was made possible by obtaining legal documents like the institution's introductory letter (see Appendix E) and NACOSTI approval letter (see Appendix F). In order to carry out this research, a consent was required from the management of University 1 and University 2. To obtain informed consent, the researcher gave out a consent form (see Appendix G) containing the goals and the purpose of the study, the benefits and risks, and information about how assurance of personal details is protected. Upon verification, participants voluntarily signed to participate in the research without being

compelled or coerced. The informants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study. The participants also received a comprehensive introduction and briefing to make sure they understood the benefits and all the procedures involved in the study.

The researcher also emphasised to the participants to carefully read the content of the consent form before signing. Participants' personal details were coded to hide identity. Data collected is kept securely and confidentially in the researcher's encrypted computer. All paper documents containing participants' personal details are being kept in a safe cabinet. To avoid plagiarism, all secondary sources were appropriately cited.

3.13 Summary

This chapter presents the study's methodological approaches. The chapter also highlights the study locations, research methodology, research techniques, data requirements, types, sources, population, sampling process, and data collection. Validity and reliability have been explained in the chapter, along with the fact that theme analysis would be used to analyse the data.

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CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the impact of social media as a political activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protests. The chapter begins with a description of the data analysed, followed by the analysis and lastly the interpretation of the data.

Description of the Data Analysed

The study's participants were 24 students from two private universities in Nakuru County. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years, 14 males and 10 females, most of whom are identified as young unemployed students (identified as Gen Z in this study). Other participants include 2 male communication experts aged 47 and 50 years, both of whom have attained post-graduate levels. The third category was the laymen (farmers, vendors, firm owners). The group comprised of 9 males and 6 females, aged between 32-55 years. Their level of education varied from secondary to tertiary schools. Social media dataset included hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill2024, #OcuppyStatehouse, #RutoMustGo and #OccupyParliament. The respondents are identified in sequential manner (Participant 1 to Participant 41)

Participant 1 to Participant 12: FGD 1 (from University 1)

Participant 13 to Participant 24: FGD 2 (From University 2)

Participant 25 to Participant 39 (comprise of the lay citizen)

Participant 40 and Participant 41 (communication experts)

4.2. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The findings are based on 2 in-depth interviews with communication experts, two Focus Group Discussion with 24 university students, interviews with 15 laymen – Kenyan citizens and analysis of 6 social media posts from X, TikTok and Facebook that trended during the protest period. The analyses are organized around nine themes emerging from the responses of the participants (Figure 4.1.10. Summary of Research Themes). The themes are: society mobilisation, dissemination of information, platform and media use, influence on perception, grievances delivery to leadership, outcome and impact, governance response, (political, social and policy) change and the future of social media. The study summarised similar responses from different participants into one finding, as well as quoting the most outstanding comment.

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Figure 4.2.1 Summary of Research Themes

No.	Themes	Sub-themes	Respondents views	Research Question
1	Society & Mobilization	Youth unity & solidarity Cross-generational participation Inclusivity (elderly, disabled, diaspora), Courage & empowerment	Social media was Gen Z's "natural space" for communication; older, more educated citizens also engaged; protests were amplified globally by the diaspora; and marginalized voices hence inclusivity.	1 & 2
2	Platforms & Media Use	TikTok – viral videos, satire, Livestream, Facebook – posters, groups, event planning X (Twitter) – hashtags, real-time updates and Traditional media amplification	Facebook was crucial for mobilization and updates, TikTok for virality, X for quick distribution and hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill, and mainstream TV and radio eventually boosted online narratives.	1&2
3	Information Dissemination	Real-time updates Posters & memes Hashtags & trends Translation into local dialects Citizen journalism	In order to unite their voices, protesters translated the Finance Bill into local languages, live-streamed activities, and used hashtags. The censoring of traditional media was circumvented by citizen journalism.	1&2
4	Influence on Perceptions	Shaping public opinion, Emotional engagement (anger, solidarity), Exposure of corruption &	Misinformation remained but had less of an impact; humour and memes fostered solidarity; platforms	1&3

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		brutality, Misinformation/propaganda risks	magnified footage of police brutality, igniting rage against the regime.	
5	Grievance Delivery to Leadership	Direct tagging of leaders Pressure for dialogue Visibility forced acknowledgment	Respondents agreed that complaints reached to the top, as evidenced by the Finance Bill's withdrawal, the President and Members of Parliament's forced response, and several cabinet dismissals.	1&3
6	Government Response	Repression (killings, abductions, internet shutdowns), Superficial dialogue & promises, Surveillance & censorship attempts	The state employed network interruptions, intimidation, and violent crackdowns while attempting limited participation (e.g., the President addressing youngsters on X).	1&3
7	Limitations of Social Media Activism	Not all grievances were addressed Temporary victories vs. systemic change. Risk of co-option or repression. Distraction from productive work	Some respondents cited instability, fear, and the government ignoring demands, while others stated that "nothing changed" politically or economically.	1&3
8	Future of Social Media in Politics	Permanent tool of democracy Civic education & political awareness. Resistance to electoral malpractice Risks of manipulation/misinformation	Respondents described Social media as "the new movement," and it is anticipated to influence elections, civic participation, and accountability, although there are still credibility	1&3

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			concerns.	
9	Outcomes & Impact	**Political:** Finance Bill withdrawn; cabinet reshuffles; new political consciousness **Social:** Youth unity, voter registration digital activism recognized **Economic:** Fear among investors, disruption of businesses, and exposure to the cost-of-living crisis.	The Finance Bill's withdrawal was one of the obvious short-term legislative outcomes of youth activism; yet, respondents reported little systemic change, with social empowerment being the long-term impact.	1&3

Source: Research, 2025

The study breaks down the themes and sub-themes in the following manner.

Society and Mobilization

Facebook, X and TikTok provided a fast, cheap and widely accessible tool for youth organization. Participant 40 and 41 indicated that for Gen Z participants, social media was their natural communication platform, which facilitated the dissemination of information regarding protest dates, logistics, and safety. Participant 3, stated that *"social media was our quickest and cheapest means of sharing information and communicating. It enabled us to effectively mobilize without the constraints associated with traditional organizing."* all participants in FGD 1 and 2 agreed that social media gave them a platform to air grievances. One said, "*Social media gave everyone a voice, even those afraid of police violence. It was safer and inclusive*" (Participant 12)

Most laymen participants agreed that Facebook, X, and TikTok were the main sources of information about the planned protests. They characterized these platforms as effective means of organization and coordination. *"These forums increased our (Kenyans') awareness, helped them see governance issues, and foster leadership accountability."* (Participant 27).

Dissemination of Information

All participants in FGD 1 and 2 overwhelmingly agreed that social media was extremely effective in the real-time dissemination of information. TikTok was particularly important for

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viral videos and Live-streaming, while X was praised for hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill2024, which served as a unifying symbol of resistance. Facebook offered forums for deeper conversations and community updates. Participants 40 and 41 pointed out that content like protest posters, live-streams of police confrontations, and translated summaries of the Finance Bill helped the general public understand complicated subjects, *"These platforms were used to interpret and simplify the Finance bill, even translating it into local dialects, so that everyone could understand why it mattered. This democratization of information ensured that both rural and urban youths felt included in the struggle"* (Participant 40 and 41).

Influence on Perception and Solidarity

The majority of participants described how social media influenced opinions by fostering emotional oneness in addition to providing information. Witnessing live video of police violence and innovative protest materials strengthened resolve and solidarity. Participant 40, emphasized that the media amplified youth and senior citizens' empathy, anger, and collective bravery. For some respondents, however, the influence was more collective than individual. Participant 25 remarked that, "although I was not personally convinced by either Facebook, TikTok, or *X, I acknowledged the platforms' widespread influence on public dialogue and leadership accountability."* This demonstrated that, despite differences in individual persuasion, the platforms influenced common narratives as asserted by agenda-setting theory (Asemah et al., 2022).

Delivery of Grievances to Leadership

Most respondents concurred that social media effectively conveyed complaints to Kenya's leadership. Participants 30 and 33 indicated that the financial bill's online amplification made it impossible for the government to disregard the opinions of its citizens. "*Leaders were coerced into making remarks in public, participating online, and occasionally making compromises"* (Participant 33). Participants 5, 40 and 41 noted that, for the first time through his X account, the president spoke with Gen Z directly. "*Leaders made the first-ever commitment to listen to young people. This demonstrated how social media can pressure government participation on those platforms where youth are most engaged"* (Participant 41).

Government Responses

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Participants 2- 8 and 13 – 23 agreed that the government's oppressive tactics, which include censorship, intimidation, arrests, kidnappings, and occasionally the murder of protestors, are unacceptable. A comment from Participant 40 states, *"Despite all the government disruptions, the repression often backfired, strengthening youth determination, the dual dynamic of empowerment and resistance revealed the contested space of digital activism in Kenya."* Participant 26 and Participant 31 observed that despite complaints being openly voiced online, the administration ignored them while acknowledging them.

The Future Impact of Social Media in Politics

During FGDs 1 and 2, most participants concurred that social media will continue to be a key component of youth political engagement, able to inform, inspire, and bring citizens from all walks of life together. However, Participant 41 warned of challenges such as misinformation, state repression and the need for responsible use. *"Social Media is very helpful tool for democracy and political participation. It cannot be ignored or banned because it is now central to how young people demand accountability"* (Participant 40). Crucially, according to participant 41, social media is a viable channel for future youth political participation and responsibility in Kenya.

Limitations of Social Media Activism

Most participants in FGD 1 and 2 noted that there was disinformation, misinformation and propaganda although less effective than in previous movements. Fifteen of the participants from both FGDs thought that some of the false information came from government sources.

Participants 40 and 41 noted that, although social media was a transformational force during the June 2024 protests, Gen Zs did not achieve all their objectives because they lacked formal power. *"State control and youth digital activism are at conflict, with the government trying to limit social media's political influence through stricter regulations, censorship, and surveillance in response to the platform's growing influence on political mobilization"* (Participant 41).

Platforms and Media Use

In light of the study's second objective, the following is the analysis of the participants' responses. First, all respondents agreed that social media was the backbone of mobilization during these protests. Participants 1-12 and participants 13-20 from FGD 2 pointed out that

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Facebook, X, and TikTok were selected as the ideal platforms for Gen Z activism due to their affordability, speed, and accessibility. *"Social media was the quickest and cheapest way of communication and information sharing"* (Participant 7, 8, 9, 14, 18, 20). The Participant went on to say that some young people coordinated online rather than physically because they were afraid of police brutality. Most participants across FGD 1 and FGD 2 concurred that X was utilized mostly for hashtags and real-time updates, translating and clarifying the Finance Bill's text, converting difficult legislative language into easily understood words, and extensively sharing analysis. Additionally, protesters used X as a forum to share images and videos of arrests, police brutality, and street confrontations, which raised awareness and compassion both inside and outside of Kenya. *"Beyond organization, X fostered political pressure via viral hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill2024 and #RutoMustGo, amplifying the momentum to resist the finance bill and demand government accountability* (Participant 40). All respondents at the FGD 1 unanimously agreed that information about the protests' dates, locations, safety advice, and even a translation of the Finance Bill into regional dialects spread quickly via X accounts. Most participants in FGD 1 and FGD 2 indicated that, Facebook was mostly used for group discussions and posters, while TikTok was used for live-streams and short videos. In order to create a larger narrative of grievance and unity, young people used Facebook to share personal narratives, images, and videos that showed economic hardship, police brutality, and political incompetence. Facebook also shared whatever was being discussed on X and TikTok. "*The information on Facebook was mostly to our parents and older people* "Participant 3 and participant 19 – FGD 1 and 2. *"For example, hashtags like, #RejectFinanceBill2024, #OccupyParliamnet2024, #ROADTOSTAHOUSE trending on X were also duplicated on Facebook to education, inform wide audiences during the protests* (Participant 10 – FGD 1)

Most respondents at the FGD 2 acknowledged that TikTok was used for viral Livestream videos and short videos that criticized public officials. According to respondents, social media, made sure that youth complaints reached national leadership. *"Viral videos reached millions within hours, putting pressure on political class by scaling of dissatisfaction. Youth who are heavy TikTok users, became central in shaping the narrative. TikTok allowed protesters to share unfiltered footage, showing peaceful marches, art and creative protests signs through the posters"* (Participant 15 and 18 – FGD 2).

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Participant 21 – FGD 2 stated that, *"conversation on TikTok platform built trust with audiences who may have wanted first-hand perspectives instead of official government statements. These videos were also shared beyond Kenya and drew international attention. After the protests sounds were utilized as memes, skits and humour videos to mock the government officials or policies."* Because of them, the Gen Z movement was innovative and challenging to suppress. Viral hashtags, live streaming of protests, and posts targeting politicians compelled the government to acknowledge the issue. Indeed, respondents pointed to specific results from online pressure, including the Finance Bill's withdrawal and cabinet dismissal. Participant 34 expressed that the protests were historic because *"for the first time, the President communicated with Gen Z directly through his X account"* This was interpreted as evidence that, despite delayed or incomplete responses, leadership could no longer ignore digital voices.

Socially, it spanned generational divides and brought young people from different ethnicities together. However, in terms of the economy, certain players (Participant 26-29) noticed interruptions, investor anxiety, and decreased production. (Participant 40), summarized this duality by stating that *"social media reshaped the political landscape by empowering youth, but at the same time caused political instability and destruction"*

Outcome and Impact: Political, Social and Policy changes

Political Changes

Respondents generally acknowledged that Facebook, X, and TikTok played a significant role in shaping Kenya's political climate during the protests in June 2024. Participant 40 said, *"Facebook, X, and TikTok emerged as digital battlegrounds where grievances were amplified and directed at national leadership."* The Finance Bill's withdrawal was cited by a number of respondents as the most obvious political victory linked to online activism. For instance, Participant 40 said, *"The President was forced to drop the Finance Bill because the pressure online was too much to ignore."* In addition to the bill, participants noted how social media increased accountability, caused cabinet reshuffles, and instilled fear among MPs. Participant 4 pointed out that Gen Z has already distributed a list of parliamentary members, which they will begin to engage individually via social media. In order to interact with the public, politicians were compelled to respond publicly on social media and, in some instances adopted Facebook, X and TikTok as a new communication technique. Participant 17 – FGD 2, observed that for the first time, *"the President directly communicated with Gen Z on X,*

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something they had never done before." This was interpreted as a historic shift in the relationship between citizens and leadership.

Social Changes

Participant 40 explained that Facebook, X, and TikTok were credited for creating a fresh sense of unity among young Kenyans and enabling Gen Z to freely and creatively voice their complaints, making them key players in the nation's democratic discourse. Most Respondents FGD 1 and FGD 2 described the three platforms as spaces of unity and shared struggle, where hashtags, satire, memes, and short videos built a collective identity.

Most participants in the lay citizen group highlighted how the Gen Z demonstrations transcended age and social backgrounds. Despite being less tech-savvy, older adults acknowledged the value of social media in drawing their attention to complaints. This generational bridge demonstrated how social media can democratize the dissemination of information. *"Social media created unity among youths, but it also made ordinary Kenyans realize that their voices matter"* (Participant 6 – FGD 1). At the same time, Participants 25-39 noted social costs. Most of them mentioned that social media-driven protests caused economic instability, disrupted the normal running of businesses, leading to economic losses and exposed participants to police brutality. Participant 40 said, *"However, there were accountability gaps, for example human rights groups documented widespread force and abductions during and after the protests; investigations and court actions are still unfolding."* He also added that "*Social media ignited movements that broke through traditional ethnic/patronage lines, uniting young Kenya's around shared anti-corruption and cost-of-living grievances, an effect which was visible both on the streets and online forums. Social media was a force multiplier, record-setting X spaces, TikTok explainers and crowd-sourced graphics and legal-aid coordination professionalised the protests."*

Policy Changes

Policy impacts were a recurring theme across respondents' narratives. Majority of participants across the groups repeatedly cited social media activism as the reason behind the Finance Bill's failure. *"Platforms increased opposition by converting online dissent into offline mobilization that the president and parliament were unable to ignore."* Participant 40. Some participants from FGD 1 and FGD 2 also mentioned that parliamentarians become warier of future legislation proposals because they are aware of the potential backlash fuelled

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by hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill. "*In addition to the bill, social media pressure was linked to policy debates on taxation, cost of living, and youth unemployment"* (Participant 40)

The majority of respondents did not see the protests as merely being against a single bill but as a wider awakening that brought governance concerns to the attention of the country. *"These platforms forced leaders to reconsider their decisions and made MPs think twice before bringing new bills to parliament"* (Participant 5). However,the majority of participants from the lay citizen also emphasised strategies like censorship, internet outages, and violent crackdowns, opposition from the administration, as limitations of social media in promoting policy change. Participant 5 noted that the government also proposed austerity measures, such as limiting unnecessary travel, cutting the number of government advisers by half, dissolving dozens of State Corporations, and merging and eliminating several departments with redundant or overlapping functions in order to cut down on wasteful spending. Despite differences in view regarding the extent of change attained, nearly all respondents said social media was essential to Kenya's democratic future. *"The Gen Zs framed platforms as spaces of empowerment, accountability, and political participation, particularly for marginalized voices such as youth, women, and the unemployed. Social media was described as the new civic arena where grievances are aired, leadership is challenged, and national debates are shaped"* (Participant 40). Participant 5 captured this vision aptly: "*Social media is the new movement—it cannot be banned because it has become the voice of the people.* However, most respondents also highlighted government resistance. "*Tactics such as censorship, internet disruptions, and violent crackdowns revealed the limits of social media in driving policy change, this underscored the tension between youth digital activism and state control, raising doubts about whether online movements can fully translate into long-term reforms*" (Participant 40). Overall, participants concurred that social media is a driver of both short-term changes like the Finance Bill's withdrawal and cabinet reorganisations as well as longer-term shifts in political participation. *Even though some people's hopes were tempered by the government's harsh response, the demonstrations marked a major shift in which social media became a vehicle for civic awakening and political responsibility in addition to mobilization*" (Participant 41).

Analysis of social media (X, TikTok and Facebook) posts

In order to achieve the study's objectives, a total of 6 posts were extracted from X, TikTok and Facebook platforms. The posts were analyse thematically using MAXQDA software

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application. During the analysis, hashtag activism, mobilization, inclusivity, linguistic communication, political awareness, celebrity influence, motivation, storytelling, state repression, sacrifice, collective mourning, humour, policy opposition, solidarity, community building, symbolism, hope, Gen Z identity, defiance and collective grief were identified as the themes. The study assigned titles (*italic*) to the posts, preferably from the textual part of the post. Next to the title is the interpretation or translation of the posts' texts. Text, images, and actions in the video clips were subjected to analysis.

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Sampled X posts



Poster content:

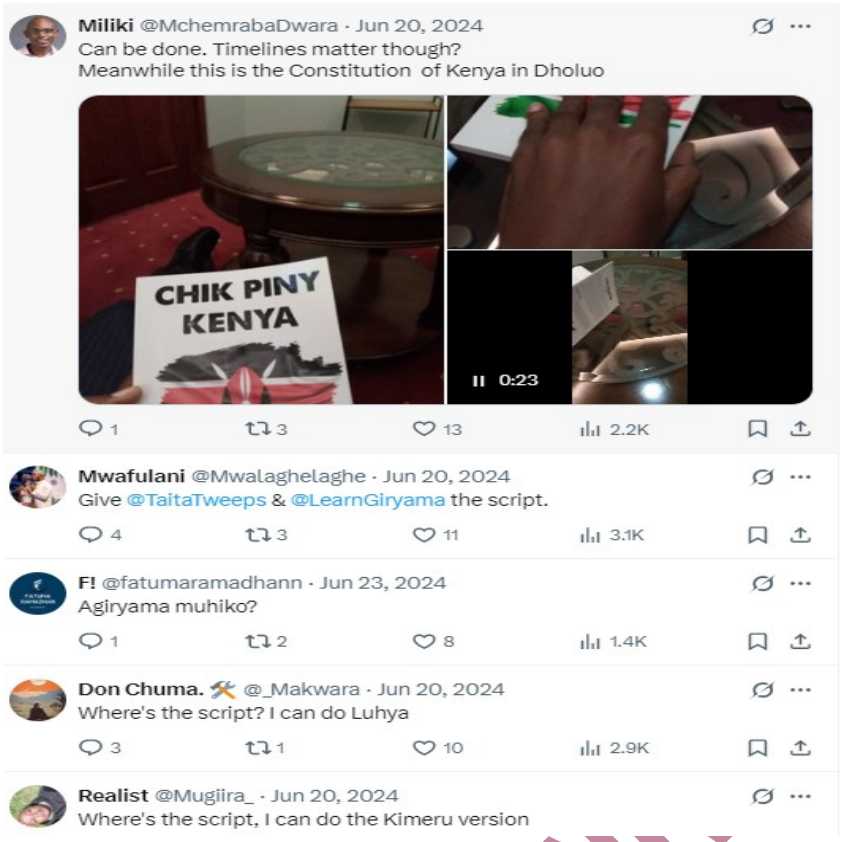
Protest call; Occupy parliament reloaded. Framing/Justification; Citizens, Rise against over-taxation by Zakayo! Framing the government as exploitative. Logistics: Dress code, colourful and defiant, Items to carry: Placards, handkerchief, bottle of water. Time and Place; every single street in Nairobi at 12.00 pm. Symbolism; Image of a defiant protester with raised fist. Legal/constitutional reference. Interpretation: The image blends digital activism (hashtags) with physical mobilization (poster instructions). The framing is resistance against taxation, linking the Finance Bill to oppressive governance. The design uses visual symbols (fist, red lettering) to intensify the protest mood. The legal justification strengthens legitimacy, framing protest not as chaos but as constitutional rights. The image represents a powerful blend of online activism and offline mobilisation where social media hashtags raise awareness and organise group action (Jackson et al., 2020; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011).

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This post portrays Gen Z's central role in the June 2024 Kenyan protests, framing them as fearless and determined to challenge state authority. The call to "Occupy JKIA signals a strategic change toward targeting symbolic national places like airports, which disrupt normalcy and demand visibility. "The fear is gone" refers to a cultural and psychological shift in which youth reject intimidation and assert control over public areas. The cross-platform sharing (TikTok → X) demonstrated the networked aspect of digital protest mobilisation, which allows protest messages to spread quickly among audiences and increase participation (Tufekci, 2017; Kaun & Treré, 2020). Therefore, this post reflects a movement transition from online mobilization to physical, decentralized, and coordinated direct action consolidating youth identity as a primary force behind Kenyan political activity (Mare, 2023; Oosterom, 2021).

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Poster content

Book Cover titled "CHIK PINY KENYA" (Constitution of Kenya in Dholuo). National emblem-symbolic Kenyan colours, shot of someone holding and flipping through the book. Codes and theme: civic literacy and constitution awareness. Decentralised and inclusive. Individuals offer to translate the Constitution into their local dialect (Dholuo, Luhya, Kimeru, Giriama). By making the Constitution available in local dialect, this post takes protests from the streets into the sphere of information creation, enabling ordinary citizens to comprehend their rights. It serves as an example of the democratization of knowledge at the grassroots level, moving from elite or legal domains to common language. The responses reflect the decentralized nature of the June 2024 protests by demonstrating a collective ownership of the struggle and the willingness of individuals to offer their linguistic talents. This image stresses civic empowerment and the ideological framing of the protest movement (Kaun & Treré, 2020).

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Sampled TikTok posts

Post 8: A message to them… they should check themselves. A letter from Jaramogi and Kenyatta



https://www.TikTok.com/@esssy_kinyua/video/7382510729087192326?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc

This is a TikTok video with the overly text:" A message from them…. Wajiangalie!! (Swahili for "they should look at themselves"). "Barua toka Jaramogi na Kenyatta" (Letters from Jaramogi and Kenyatta – historical political figures in Kenya). Suggests a symbolic, almost historical-political message aimed at current leaders. Caption reference: Kenya tuko sawa song – linking protests to music and cultural expression. TikTok combines historical context, cultural symbols, and political struggle. The mention of Jaramogi and Kenyatta moves the protests' narrative from a transient youth gripe to a sustained fight for justice and accountability in Kenya. In 2024, young protesters involved more than simply street marches; they also involved recovering historical narratives through digital channels, as seen by the use of music and personal voice (Brown, 2024).

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https://www.tiktok.com/@nyagizke/video/7383263210163457285?q=Rotu%2C%20Uhunye%2C%20Baba%20na%20Atwoli%20meme&t=1758617033730.

Post Content

Young man in uniform-like shirt – representing youth involvement and possible parody of authority. Social media meme compilation. The topic is a protest against the Finance Bill. The meme video frame with text overlays, satire and humour framing Ruto, Baba, Uhunye na Atwoli – names of Kenyan Political figures (president, opposition leader, former prudent, union leader. Slogan referencing over-taxation and biblical satire (Zakayo- Zacchaeus, nickname for Ruto). This meme demonstrates the importance of humour and ridicule in young people's anti-Finance Bill activism. This one extends the blame beyond a single political faction by directly criticizing leaders (Mukhongo, 2020).

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Sampled Facebook post



Post Content

Protest's attire: several young men wearing black T-shirts with the slogan "Occupy Parliament Nairobi. Raised fist, peace/victory signs- strong symbols of resistance and solidarity. Vuvuzelas (protest' instruments, symbolic of voice, noise and resistance). Message; "Don't relent, don't tire, don't stop." (Encouragement, persistence). Critique of leadership framed as "totalitarian dictatorship." Call to action: "The only way to keep yourself safe is to remove the dictatorship." Framing: Strong anti-government rhetoric, presenting current leadership as oppressive. The Facebook post suggests a nationwide spread by showing grassroots mobilization bringing the Nairobi protests into semi-urban or rural locations. Similar to online hashtags, the T-shirts bearing the slogan "Occupy Parliament Nairobi" serve as protest branding, a means of visualizing solidarity. The protest is given moral force by the text's existential framing of the conflict ("not safe under dictatorship"). The local protest activity is linked to national political demands through the use of hashtags (#RutoMustGo) (Brown, 2024).

In summary, the analysis of the extracted post shows how Gen Z spearheaded the protests in June 2024 in Kenya, moving from online mobilization to the actual occupation of symbolic locations such as Parliament and JKIA. Youth were portrayed in posts and memes as bold, challenging taxation policies and governmental power through satire, historical allusions, and

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cultural symbols. Posters and protest clothing converted online conversation into coordinated offline action, while digital platforms (Facebook, TikTok, X) allowed for decentralized, networked mobilization. Civic literacy initiatives that prioritized grassroots empowerment and democratized information included translating the Constitution into regional dialects. All things considered, the posts demonstrate a fusion of comedy, historical recollection, constitutional framing, and visual protest branding that turned a virtual movement into a national movement for responsibility and justice.

These posts support the assertion of the Agenda-Setting Theory of framing important concerns as urgent and galvanised mass protest, influencing public attention on topics including the Finance Bill, excessive taxes, and constitutional rights. According to social information processing theory, youths were able to go from digital discourse to coordinated offline action because of the trust, solidarity, and shared identity that were developed through online interactions such as memes, translated constitutions, and cross-platform sharing. When taken as a whole, these theories demonstrate how Gen Z transformed online agenda-building into coordinated, dispersed demonstrations that affirmed their political agency.

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4.3. Key Findings

In relation to the first research question, the findings show that social media influenced political consciousness among Gen Z as well as older populations. A well-coordinated communication and dissemination created solidarity, hence the delivery of grievances, gathering sympathy locally and internationally and bridging the cross-generational gap. By exposing police violence, amplifying grievances, and challenging official narratives, platforms fostered a sense of urgency and togetherness among the populace. This is in keeping with the Social Information Processing Theory, which holds that social-political ties can be strengthened through online contacts on par with in-person mobilization. The general concession is that these platforms offered quick, inexpensive, and inclusive platforms for protest coordination for mobilization and a sensitization tool which is in line with the literature on digital activism.

In answering the second research question, the results show that Facebook was mainly used to communicate with the older generations and create individual and community discussion platforms. X was mainly used to trend hashtags and real-time updates for mobilisation and coordination purposes, and TikTok was mainly used to deliver viral videos on real-time

updates of what was happening on the ground and creative memes containing humour and satire. Youth participants indicated that social media made it possible to translate complicated policy topics (like the Finance Bill) into easily understood language and reach a national audience.

For research question 3, the findings indicate that participants highlighted tangible political impacts, such as cabinet reshuffle, the Finance Bill's withdrawal and heightened parliamentary responsiveness. Opinions varied, too, with some respondents seeing the protests as a political awakening that reshaped citizen-state relations and others seeing little long-term change. In environments that tilt toward authoritarianism, this disparity highlights the potential and constraints of digital activism.

The study found that the state's reaction was characterized by minor concessions as well as censorship, surveillance, and repression. Kenyan digital environments are contentious, as seen by attempts to stifle dissent and interfere with internet connectivity. Findings from other African contexts, where governments oscillate between digital participation and digital authoritarianism, are consistent with the conflict between repression and empowerment.

Participants were optimistic about social media's future role, viewing it to be the "new movement" and a permanent component of political engagement. However, issues with governmental control, manipulation, and disinformation still exist. The results indicate that digital literacy, legal frameworks, and young people's capacity to translate online energy into offline political structures will all be critical to the longevity of social media activism.

Theoretically, the results are in line with Agenda-Setting Theory since social media platforms influenced public opinion by highlighting important topics like government accountability, police brutality, and the Finance Bill. Platforms shaped how people understood political events and shaped what subjects became key to national discourse through trending hashtags, viral content, and real-time updates. Similarly, the findings reflect social information processing theory, which showed how online interactions built solidarity, facilitated collective actions similar to in-person mobilisation and fostered cross-generational relationships. By allowing participants to create a shared sense of urgency, shared grievances, and mobilised protests, social media served as a space where collective identity could be strengthened and sustained, and political consciousness was driven.

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4.4. Summary

This chapter presented the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data which was collected. Key findings are also discussed in detail.

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CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the study's summary, conclusion, and suggestions with emphasis on the researcher's results. The chapter accomplishes this in accordance with the researcher's goals, objectives, and study purpose.

5.2. Discussion of the Key Findings

The study set out to examine the role of social media in the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya. The findings reveal a multi-layered relationship between digital platforms, political participation, and governance.

5.2.1. Theoretical Aspect

This study was guided by two theories: Agenda-setting theory and Social Information Processing theory. The study summarises the two theories in the following manner. According to Agenda Setting Theory, the media sets and frames the public's agenda, hence providing subjects for discussion (Asemah et al., 2022). In this study, Facebook, X and TikTok framed the agenda of the day. These platforms elevated the 2024 finance bill to the top of the public agenda, forcing thousands of Gen Z into the streets beginning June 18, 19 and culminating in storming into the parliament building on June 25. The hashtags # OccupyParliament and #RejectFinanceBill2024 focused on the protesters' issues. In addition to bringing attention to the law, the viral posts shaped attribute salience (issues that mattered) by framing it as punitive taxation, elite impunity, and later police brutality.

Explanatory threads, bill translations, infographics and live videos reinforced those frames. Because of online pressure, decentralised Gen Z networks have allowed quick calls to action, crowd-sourced logistics, and magnified testimonials from the ground. The problem remained at the top of the public and media agendas day after day. The agenda persisted beyond a single vote, as evidenced by ongoing mobilization and narratives about youth precocity and governance that persisted even after the bill was withdrawn.

Social information processing theory asserts that people can form solid interpersonal impressions online by adapting to reduce nonverbal cues over time (Asemah, et al., 2022). In Kenya, protesters used text, emoji, hashtags (#RejectFinanceBill2024, #OccupyParliament, #RutoMustGo), and created and crafted videos to effectively communicate feelings, authority, and purpose in order to foster cooperation and trust without in-person interaction. SIPT emphasises that repeated exchange let relationships converge towards face-to-face

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quality. Persistent X Spaces and TikTok lives produced ongoing, synchronous touch points where roles were defined, identities acknowledged, and strengthening the bonds between groups through recurrent CMC interactions.

SIPT explains how Kenya's Gen Z-led protests quickly developed identity, trust, and coordination through social media in cue-lean online environments, then replicated that unity on a large scale offline. The movement's amplification dynamics (influencers, Lives, viral clips) influenced both mobilisation and narrative power. The lack of in-person interaction was made up for by emotional cues embedded in memes, live-streams, and personal accounts, which fostered a sense of community that cut across class and geography. This "digital togetherness" not only mobilized youths locally but also attracted solidarity from the diaspora and global audiences.

When both theories are combined, the protests demonstrate how social media platforms allowed for social processing that promoted empathy, trust, and mobilization while also setting the national agenda. Agenda-setting dynamics made the Finance Bill the inevitable topic of political discourse, while SIP procedures united fragmented internet exchanges into a cohesive campaign. The protests marked a change in Kenyan politics, as youth can now utilize social media to influence the agenda and to develop collective power through digitally mediated relationships, despite government pushback—including censorship, intimidation, and repression—exposing the limitations of digital activism.

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5.2.3 Findings According to the Research Objectives

Objective one: Examining the impact of Facebook, X and TikTok as a political activism tool during the June 2024 youth protests.

The findings revealed that Facebook, X, and TikTok played a key role in organizing and coordinating the youth protests in June 2024. These platforms were the most convenient, cost-effective, and secure way for many Gen Z participants to plan group activities. Using hashtags like #OccupyParliament and #RejectFinanceBill2024, protesters were able to organize themselves around common grievances, gather sympathizers, and disseminate logistical details such as meeting locations, safety advice, and protest dates.

Participants consistently emphasised the power of social media in democratizing information. While X offered real-time information and acted as a centre for hashtag activism, TikTok became the preferred platform for Livestream and viral videos. Similarly, Facebook established forums for more in-depth conversations, cross-generational dialogues, and wider community mobilization.

These platforms also had a significant emotional influence. Protest songs, memes, satirical content, and live footage of police confrontations promoted solidarity and increased political awareness. Social media, according to some respondents, is a "voice for the voiceless," allowing underrepresented groups to engage without fear of abuse by law enforcement. Others, however, continued to doubt the long-term viability of online activism, pointing out that although social media compelled politicians to react, structural problems like unemployment that were deeply ingrained remained largely ignored.

Overall, the results under this objective demonstrate that social media served as a political platform where complaints were shared, solidarity was fostered, and pressure was applied on the government to take action. However, obstacles including state repression, misinformation, and disinformation were recognized as major constraints.

Objective two: Examining the role played by each platform during the protests

Each platform made a distinct contribution to the protests. X was the most popular platform for teal-time political activism. Viral hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill2024 and #RutoMustGo unified protesters and drew international attention. X was also instrumental in breaking down complex legislative content and translating the Finance Bill into simpler words in local dialects for the general people to understand. Images and videos of police violence circulated on X put pressure on Political leaders to address the matter publicly.

Facebook played a complementary role, especially for interacting with parents, community leaders, and senior citizens. It was mostly utilized for group discussions, community updates, and poster sharing. By copying the popular hashtags and content from TikTok and X, Facebook helped to bridge the generational divide and reach a larger audience.

TikTok became the centre of activism's creative hub. Protesters used it to share artistic protest materials, Livestream marches, and make fun of government leaders using skits, memes, and

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humour. In addition to inspiring local action, viral videos garnered international attention and bolstered global unity. TikTok content increased trust by offering unfiltered first-hand accounts in contrast to official government narratives.

Collectively, the three platforms served as complementary infrastructures for protest: Facebook promoted cross-generational discourse, TikTok increased artistic expression and worldwide visibility, and X generated political pressure. Social media became the foundation of youth-led mobilization in Kenya as a result of the convergence of different platforms.

Objective Three: Assess whether the use of social media brought changes to policy, political movement and public perception and whether they supported the democratic process after the June 2024 protests.

The findings indicate that social media activism had a tangible impact on political, social and policy. According to respondents, the most significant political success of the protests was the eventual withdrawal of the Finance Bill, which was largely attributed to online mobilisation. Cabinet reshuffles, increased accountability among MPs, and improved response from political leaders were among the other impacts that were highlighted. Notably, the President used his X account to speak directly to Gen Z for the first time, indicating a change in the relationship between the public and the leadership.

Socially, the protests generated a sense of solidarity and shared identity among the youth. These platforms transcended socio-economic, ethnic, and regional boundaries, enabling Gen Zs to express their complaints about corruption, the high cost of living, and poor government. Even senior citizens agreed that social media was essential for spreading complaints and influencing public opinion. Nonetheless, several participants cited the problems such as investor concern, economic disruptions, and violent governmental reactions as a result of the protests.

In terms of policy change, the Finance Bill's withdrawal was frequently cited as evidence that digital activism could have an impact on governance. Additionally, respondents pointed out that lawmakers are now more hesitant to introduce contentious bills because they fear online backlash. The limitations of social media in achieving long-lasting structural reforms,

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however, were brought to light by official countermeasures, including censorship, arrests, internet shutdowns, and surveillance.

Overall, participants concurred that social media promoted democratic participation by elevating underrepresented views, compelling leaders to dialogue, and influencing national discussions. However, hope for long-term policy change was dampened by institutional resistance and official repression.

5.3. Conclusions

The study has demonstrated that social media platforms played a transformative role in the June 2024 youth protests in Kenya. They laid the ground for mobilisation, information sharing, creative expressions and cross-generational engagement. Each platform uniquely contributed to the success of the protest. X enabled real-time activism and global visibility, TikTok amplified creativity and authenticity, while Facebook facilitated in-depth dialogue and community outreach. Together, they became powerful infrastructures of youth-led activism that not only pressured political leaders to respond but also fostered solidarity among citizen across social, ethnic and religious divides.

Beyond mobilization, social media activism produced tangible outcomes in governance and political accountability. The withdrawal of the Finance Bill 2024, the cabinet reshuffle and the increase in responsiveness of the political leaders were largely attributed to the power of online movements. At the same time, the findings revealed persistent challenges, which include misinformation, repression and limitations of online activism in achieving structural reforms. Overall, the protests underscored that while social media is a powerful democratic tool for amplifying voices and shaping public discourse, its long-term effectiveness depends on overcoming state resistance and ensuring that digital activism translates into sustainable political and policy change.

The study contributes to the knowledge by demonstrating how social media became a defining tool in forming Kenya's June 2024 youth protests—a significant turning point in the country's political and digital history. By demonstrating how X, TikTok, and Facebook uniquely facilitated mobilization, creative expression, and intergenerational engagement, the study underscores the power of digital platforms as infrastructures for democratic involvement. Importantly, it demonstrates how online activism can result in real political

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outcomes, like the Finance Bill's withdrawal and improved government responsiveness, while simultaneously exposing the persistent conflicts of state repression, disinformation, and the fight for long-lasting structural change. These observations are essential to comprehending how government, citizen-state participation, and digital activism are changing in Kenya.

5.4 Recommendations

From these conclusions, several recommendations were made for stakeholders.

For Government and Policymakers

The government should embrace online activism instead of suppressing it. Social media has established itself as a valid democratic platform. Resolving online complaints in a constructive manner helps ease tensions and promote inclusive governance. Additionally, policymakers need to understand that in the digital age, accountability and openness are necessities. Both government and policymakers can adopt social media and co-opt Gen Z to advance development agendas.

For Youth and Civil Society

Gen Z and related groups can maintain their momentum by integrating digital activism into larger civic institutions like advocacy networks, policy forums, and community organizations. To reduce the dangers of false information and manipulation, they should also place a high priority on fact-checking and digital literacy.

For Political Leaders and Parties

Leaders must actively engage with citizens on social media, especially young people. Political players should create ongoing internet interaction platforms to foster trust and policy co-creation instead of waiting for protests.

For Media and Influencers

Traditional media should continue amplifying digital grievances to both domestic and international audiences. Given their huge fan bases, celebrities and influencers have to use their platforms sensibly to promote civic education rather than disseminate sensational or false information.

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5.5. Suggestion for Future Research

Scholars should explore the long-term political consequences of digital activism, such as how it affects election behaviour, political confidence, and governance changes. Whether Kenya's experience is distinct or a part of a larger continental trend could be clarified by additional comparative research with other African nations.

While this study relied on Agenda Setting Theory and Social Information Processing Theories to explain how social media shaped awareness and mobilization, future research could benefit from using Framing Theory. This would provide more understanding of how public sentiments and views of legitimacy were influenced by protest narratives, memes, and viral videos, which may have affected not just the topics people chose to focus on but also how they understood them. Furthermore, theories like the Networked Public Sphere may shed light on how internet platforms allowed for decentralized coordination while thwarting government censorship.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Research Questionnaire; for Lay citizen

Hello, I am a student at St. Paul's university currently undertaking research to investigate the impact of three (3) social media platforms (Facebook, X and TikTok) as political activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protests in Kenya. You have been selected to participate in this research, and I am requesting your assistance in providing responses to the attached questionnaire. All the information collected will be kept secure and confidential and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. Thank you for your participation.

Part A: Demographic Information (check [✓] in the brackets)

1. **What is your gender?**
   Male
   Female
2. **Indicate your age range**
   Under 18 ( )
   18-35 ( )
   Over 35 ( )
3. **Do you reside in Nakuru?**
   Yes ( )
   No ( )
4. **What is your current occupation status?**
   Unemployed ( )
   Formally employed ( )
   Self-employed ( )
   Not willing to say ( )
5. **What is your highest education qualification?**
   Secondary school certificate ( )
   College diploma ( )
   Undergraduate degree ( )
   Postgraduate degree ( )
   Would rather not say ( )

Part B

1. **How did you know that the Gen Z's are planning for a protests during the passing of the 2024-2025 finance bill on 18th June 2024?** ……

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……..

2. **How did Facebook, X and TikTok influence your perception during the June 2024 gen Z protests?** …….

   ……..

   ……

3. **Do you think the platforms (Facebook, X and TikTok) delivered the Gen Z's grievances to the Kenya leadership during the June 2024 protests?** ……..

   ……

4. **Did the use of social media to air youth's grievances bring any political, social or economic changes? If yes, state the changes?** .....

   ……..

5. **What can you say about how the government responded to social media influence during the June 2024 Gen Z protests?** …….

   ……..

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Appendix A2: Interview guide for college students

Hello, I am a student at St. Paul's university currently undertaking research to investigate the impact of three (3) social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) as political activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protests in Kenya. You have been selected to participate in this research, and I am requesting your assistance in providing responses to the attached questionnaire. All the information collected will be kept secure and confidential and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. Thank you for participating in this study.

PART A: Demographic Information

1. **What is your gender identity?**
   Male ( )
   Female ( )
2. **Indicate your age range**
   Under 18 ( )
   18-35 ( )
   Over 35 ( )
3. **Do you reside in Nakuru?**
   Yes ( )
   No ( )
4. **What is your current occupation status?**
   Student ( )
   Student and employed ( )
   Not willing to say ( )
5. **What is your current study level?**
   Diploma ( )
   Undergraduate degree ( )
   Postgraduate degree ( )
   Would rather not say ( )

Part B

1. **Why do you think the Gen Zs chose social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) to mobilize themselves in the June 2024 protests?** ……
   …….
2. **How effective were these platforms in disseminating information during the June 2024 youth protests** …….
   ……..

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3. **How did Facebook, X and TikTok influence public perception during the June 2024 Gen Z protests?** ……
……..
4. **How did each platform (Facebook, X and TikTok) disseminate information and what kind of information, during the June 2024 Gen Z protests?** ……....
……..
5. **Do you think the platforms delivered the Gen Z's grievances to the Kenya leadership during the June 2024 protests**? ……
……
6. **Did the use of social media to air youth's grievances bring any political, social or economic changes? If yes, state the changes?** ……
……
7. **What can you say about how the government responded to social media influence during the June 2024 Gen Z protests?** ……
……..
8. **What is the future of social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) in promoting democracy and political participation?**……
……..

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Appendix A3: Interview Schedule for communication expert

Hello, I am a student at St. Paul's university currently undertaking research to investigate the impact of three (3) social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) as political activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protests in Kenya. You have been selected to participate in this research, and I am requesting your assistance in providing responses to the attached questionnaire. All the information collected will be kept secure and confidential and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. Thank you for participating in this study.

1. **How would you relate the June 2024 youth protests with 2022 general election?**
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
2. **According to your observation, which was the most dominant social media platform and why, during the June 2024 youth protects.**
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
3. **How would you describe the impact of social media usage by youth in the June 2024 youth protests?**
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
4. **How would you examine and explain the nature of messages on the selected social media platforms?**
   .....
   .....
   .....
5. **What were the roles played by each social media (Facebook, X, TikTok) during the June 2024 Youth protests?** ……..…….

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……

6. **According to your observation, are there any substantial changes either in policies or political after the June 2024 youth protests?**

……

……

……

7. **According to you, what is the future of use of social media (Facebook, X and TikTok) in political activism?**

……

……

……

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Appendix G: Participant consent form

Project title: Impact of social media as activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protests in Kenya

Lead researcher: John Kimutai Sawe

Introduction

You are invited to participate in this research study conducted by John Kimutai Sawe who is a student at St. Paul's University Kenya. Choosing whether to take part or not in this research is entirely your choice. There will be no impact on (you, your studies/employment) if you decide not to participate in the research. The information below explains what is involved in the research, what will be asked to perform and any potential benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts. Any questions you may have about the research process are welcome. After you have been adequately* informed about the study, you will be requested to either agree or decline to participate. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, you will also be asked to sign this form to further confirm that.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of social media usage on political activism among Kenyan youths with a case study of Gen Z protests in June 2024. The focus will be on how online interactions facilitate political activism. The study focuses on the period between the beginning of June 2024, when the National Assembly was preparing to debate the 2024-2025 Finance Bill, and towards the end of the protests. This period was characterised by a significant use of social media to mobilise youths for protests against, and there were quite a number of changes politically and socially. The research will carry out interviews and conduct focus group discussions to collect data for analysis. Therefore, you may participate in this study if you are between the age of 18 years and above or you are a college student, peasant/large business entrepreneur and communication expert. Due to the unfortunate incidents where participants have falsely claimed to be eligible, we will require you to verify your eligibility. If you are unwilling or unable to do so, you will not be included in the study. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to attend interviews/focus group discussion sessions at St. Paul's University and Mt. Kenya University on (25th May 2025) and on (27th May 2025) consecutively. The visit will take approximately 2 hours each.

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During the FDGs, you will be required to participate in discussions as guided by the moderator.

Benefits and Risks

As a participant in this study, you will not have any benefits, but the research will benefit from your input. There are no identified risks for participating in this research yet.

Incentives and reimbursement

To appreciate you for your time, you will be reimbursed any funds used as either bus fare or airtime token used.

Information protection

The study will observe privacy by making sure your participation in this research is known only to researcher and the supervisory team. The information that you provide will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisory team from St. Paul's university will have access to this information. All your identifying information (such as your name and contacts) will be securely stored separately from other information. The research team will use codes to identify your personal details. All electronic documents will be securely saved on the researchers' encrypted computer during the study in a secure file format. All paper records will be kept safe in a closed filing cabinet. We will not disclose any information concerning your involvement unless it's mandated by law or our professional obligations. Information you submit for this study may be publicly disseminated for future purposes with your consent.

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If you decide to stop participating

There will be no impact on (you, your studies/employment) if you decide not to participate in the research (you, your studies/your employment) if you decide not to participate in the research. However, you have up to three (3) weeks after taking part in the survey to determine whether you want your data deleted. We won't be able to remove it after that because it will have already been published.

Questions and contacts

If you have any question, regarding the entire research process, your participation or ethical issue, contact, John Sawe or St. Paul's University.

Signature

I ……have read and understood the study information and sheet provided.

I understand that taking part in the study will include being interviewed and audio recorded.

I have been given adequate time to consider my decision and I agree to participate in the study.

I understand my personal details such as name, family background and employment details will not be revealed to people outside this project.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs by my name will not be used.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to participate.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to delegate the copyright I hold to the material related to this project to John Sawe

Signature of the participant: …… Date ……..

Researcher's Signature: ……Date ……

Appendix E: Introduction Letter

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Private Bag 00217 LIMURU, KENYA
Email: office@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
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(0) 736 - 424440

BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

15th August, 2025

National Commission for Science and Technology,
P.O. BOX 30623-00100,
Nairobi.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RECOMMENDATION FOR JOHN KIMUTAI SAWE – MACSNKR348524 TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter confirms the above-named person is a student in the Master of Arts in Communication Studies (MACS) Program at St. Paul's University.

After completion of the course work, the student is engaged in major research work leading to a Thesis/Dissertation writing. The student's selected topic is:

"Impact of social media as political activism tool during the June 2024 youths' protest in Kenya."

The SPU-Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal and granted the ERB approval number 528, for the period between 15th August 2025–15th August, 2026 (1 year).

Kindly grant this student the required permit. For further information, please contact the undersigned through postgraduatestudies@spu.ac.ke

Yours Faithfully,

DIRECTOR BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES
ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY
15 AUG 2025
P.O. PRIVATE BAG - 00217 LIMURU

Dr. John Muhoho
Director Board of Postgraduate Studies

Appendix F: NACOSTI Licence

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **811701**

Date of Issue: **21/August/2025**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Mr.. John Kimutai Sawe of St. Pauls University, Kenya, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nakuru on the topic: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS POLITICAL ACTIVISM TOOL DURING THE JUNE 2024 YOUTHS' PROTESTS IN KENYA for the period ending : 21/August/2026.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/25/4178753**

811701

Applicant Identification Number

Ag. Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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See overleaf for conditions

Appendix I: Study's Initial Codes

Initial codes according to Braun and Clarke thematic analysis protocol

No	Theme	Sub-theme	Initial code/Coded Extract
1	Choice of Social media	*Accessibility & Familiarity*	"Fast and cheap way to mobilize," "Youth spend most of their time online," Natural space for communication", Mobile-based coordination".
		Safety & Inclusion	"Safe space to avoid police brutality," "Inclusive – elderly and disabled can join, "Participation without physical presence"
2	Information Dissemination	*Real-Time Communication*	"Real-time updates and Livestream's," "Immediate sharing of schedules and logistics," "Hashtags for instant trends".
		Global & Local Reach	"Wide reach – local and global audience," "Diaspora solidarity," "Protest messages amplified beyond Kenya".
3	Public Perception & Awareness	*Shaping Opinions*	"Built unity and collective identity," "Amplified anger over Finance Bill," "Satire and memes framing leaders," "Protest narrative framed positively"
		Emotional Engagement	"Solidarity through shared videos," "Emotional connection via protest footage," "Cultural symbols and music linking to struggle"
4	Grievance Delivery & Government Engagement	*Amplification of Youth Voices*	"Government forced to listen," "Leaders tagged and pressure online," "President engaged directly on X," "Dialogue with Gen Z representatives"
		Policy- Level Attention	"Finance Bill debated and dropped," "increased public pressure on MPs," "Youth demand publicly acknowledged"
5	Political, Social & Economic Impact	*Tangible Changes*	"Finance Bill withdrawn," "Cabinet reshuffle," "Increased youth voter registration," " MPs caution in the future legislation"
		Social Transformation	"New political consciousness," "Citizen empowerment to speak out," "Cross-generational engagement"
6	Government Response	*Repression & Control*	"Police brutality, abductions," "Media censorship," "Internet shutdown attempts," "Dismissive and violent response"
		Limited Concessions	"Superficial government response," "Symbolic promises without full reform," "Partial dialogue."
7	Future of Social Media in Activism	Democratic Potential	"Seen as the new political movement," "Tool for civic education," "Direct citizen-leader engagement," "Nationwide mobilization potential
		Risk & Challenges	"Misinformation/manipulation risk," "Government surveillance and monitoring," "Need for responsible use."

Activate Wi