

Digital Natives and Political Transformation: The Role of GEN Z in the 2024 Kenyan Uprising and Social Cohesion

Sanjay Balkaran¹⁾, Anthony Kambi Masha²⁾

^{1,2)} Political Transformation / Department of Public Management and Governance, Faculty of Management and Public Administration Science, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

*Corresponding Author
Email: amasha@wsu.ac.za

Abstract

The study explores the role of digital natives, particularly Generation Z, in political transformation, particularly in the context of the 2024 Kenyan uprising. The research employs a qualitative methodology called netnography to understand the nuances of their involvement, particularly in sensitive contexts like human rights abuses and conflict zones. Desktop research consolidates findings from existing studies while highlighting areas that remain unexplored. This objective approach helps frame research questions accurately and comprehensively understand existing literature. The study focuses on online communities and the cultural dynamics of digital spaces, allowing researchers to delve into the motivations and sentiments driving political engagement among GEN Z. Social media analytics is used to create a more comprehensive picture of the political landscape, ensuring the validity and reliability of the research findings. The analysis reveals that the 2024 Kenyan uprising exemplifies Generation Z's capacity to drive significant political reform and social cohesion. Their strategic use of social media mobilized national activism, evidenced by the President's cabinet dismissal, and catalyzed a global wave of digital activism, highlighting their pivotal role in reshaping socio-political paradigms. This methodology provides a solid foundation for understanding the implications of Generation Z's political engagement.

Keywords: GEN Z, digital natives, political turmoil, protests, violence

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Kenyan uprising is a defining moment in the nation's history, largely propelled by the mobilization and activism of Generation Z (GEN Z), the cohort of 'digital natives' born into a world of ubiquitous technology. The introduction of the 2024 Finance Bill, marked by its imposition of heightened taxes on fundamental commodities including bread, sanitary pads, and mobile phones, catalyzed widespread dissatisfaction among Kenyans, highlighting the disconnect between government policy and the economic welfare of its citizens, particularly impacting low-income families. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Kenya experienced a significant civil uprising in 2024 that led to a major political upheaval. Characterized by widespread protests against government corruption, economic inequality, and social injustices, the movement predominantly driven by GEN Z culminated in the Kenyan President sacking his cabinet. GEN Z perceive corruption as depriving them of their potential opportunities and "...has stolen their future". This unprecedented action directly responded to the intense pressure of young activists who utilized social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook and messaging apps like WhatsApp to mobilize and sustain the protests. These digital tools allowed for rapid dissemination of information, coordination of protest activities, and amplification of the youth's voices. The President's acknowledgement of GEN Z's pivotal role in fostering social cohesion underscores the transformative influence of this demographic in the political and social landscape, challenging traditional political paradigms. More importantly, it highlights the potential for new, more inclusive civic engagement and governance models, offering hope for a brighter future.

The issue of addressing insecurity and urban violence is a significant concern for governments globally, and Nairobi, Kenya's capital, is no exception. The city has grappled with increased insecurity from land conflicts, election tensions, and state repression, alongside significant economic challenges such as high unemployment, inflation, and a rising cost of living.

Young people have been leading large-scale protests in Kenya. Iraki (2024) posits that the Finance Bill, proposing numerous tax increments, merely catalyzed the protests rather than the primary cause, “creating the perfect storm for these mass protests”. He argues that the discontent had been simmering since the nation's independence, exacerbated by the inadequate address of significant national challenges. Despite violent crackdowns, the 2024 Kenyan Youth Uprising showcased the power of youth-led movements. GEN Z, increasingly at the forefront of political activism and social change, plays a crucial role in this context (Adzande, Meth, & Commins, 2024).

GEN Z, a cohort born between 1997 and 2012, is vital to shaping the political landscape and fostering social cohesion. Specifically, for this study, the GEN Z cohort includes people born between 1995 and 2012 (Foa & Buchko, 2021). GEN Z, colloquially called “Zoomers,” is the demographic cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha. GEN Z is the largest existing generation, accounting for around a third of the world's population, and it has an outsized impact on culture and the economy (Cobb, Schneider, & Lee, 2022). Kenya's population is estimated at 54 million. GEN Z is the most populous, with 18.3 million inhabitants, representing 33.42%. Millennials are 12 million, representing 22.05%.

Table 1-Kenya Population - GEN Z/Millennials (Adika, 2024)

Total Population	GEN Z	Millennials
54 million	18.3 million	12 million
	33.42%	22.05%

"Digital Natives"

Over the past two decades, Kenya's information and communication technology (ICT) sector has grown significantly, reflecting a profound shift in the country's socio-political and economic landscape. In the mid-1990s, however, the ICT sector faced substantial resistance from the political establishment, with discussions of emerging technologies mainly confined to private circles of tech enthusiasts. The rise of ICTs was seen as a challenge to political authority, particularly in controlling the flow of information. When the Internet was introduced in 1995, the Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (KP&TC), a state monopoly, went as far as publicly denouncing it as illegal, asserting that Internet services amounted to the unauthorized resale of communication services. The civil service even banned Internet usage until 1999. Despite these initial barriers, Kenya has since undergone a remarkable transformation, with ICT innovations reshaping traditional business practices and young, talented individuals driving these changes. These young innovators, now often referred to as Digital Natives, have grown up immersed in technology, leading the wave of digital transformation and contributing to the country's ongoing economic and social development.

The concept of 'digital natives,' initially posited by Prensky (2001), has evolved significantly. While early definitions emphasized innate technological fluency due to early exposure, more recent scholarship highlights the complex interplay between technology, social context, and individual agency. Livingstone (2012) argues that digital literacy is not automatic; it is a learned skill that varies widely among individuals, regardless of their birth year. This perspective is crucial when examining GEN Z, as their ubiquitous access to technology does not guarantee uniform digital competence or critical engagement. Furthermore, Bennett, Maton, and Kervin (2008) suggest that the 'digital native' narrative can be overly simplistic, overlooking the diverse ways young people interact with technology. They advocate for a more nuanced understanding, considering socioeconomic background, educational opportunities, and cultural context. Therefore, while GEN Z's familiarity with digital tools is undeniable, their ability to leverage them for political transformation and social cohesion requires a more critical and context-sensitive analysis than simply labelling them 'digital natives'.

The role of social media in facilitating political engagement among GEN Z is a subject of intense scholarly interest. Research by Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) demonstrates that social media platforms can lower barriers to political participation, particularly for young people, by providing accessible spaces for information sharing and collective action. Specifically, hashtags like #RejectFinanceBill, as observed in the Kenyan uprising (Adika G. , 2024), exemplify how social media can mobilize large-scale political movements. Furthermore, studies by Theocharis (2015) indicate that social media can foster a sense of civic duty and political efficacy among young users, encouraging them to participate in political discourse and action. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of social media-driven activism. As Morozov (2011) cautions that the 'digital activism' narrative can sometimes oversimplify complex political realities, overlooking the structural inequalities and power dynamics that shape political outcomes. Therefore, while social media played a pivotal role in the 2024 Kenyan uprising, a critical analysis of its impact must consider both its empowering potential and its limitations.

The OECD (2022) report's emphasis on the continuous crises faced by GEN Z underscores the urgent need to understand how young people navigate and influence response and recovery efforts. These crises, ranging from economic instability to climate change and political unrest, have shaped GEN Z's worldview and fostered a sense of urgency for social and political change. Research by Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) highlights the importance of fostering youth civic engagement to empower young people to address societal challenges. They argue that providing young people with opportunities to participate in decision-making can enhance their sense of agency and contribute to more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Moreover, studies by Kirshner, Strobel, and Fernandez (2003) demonstrate that youth-led movements can effectively mobilize communities and drive social change, particularly when they leverage digital technologies to amplify their voices. In the 2024 Kenyan uprising context, GEN Z's ability to organize protests and advocate for policy changes exemplifies its capacity to influence political transformation. However, it is essential to recognize their challenges, including limited access to resources, institutional barriers, and potential backlash from authorities. Therefore, this paper explores the opportunities and obstacles that GEN Z encounters in their pursuit of social cohesion and political reform.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a multi-method approach, combining desktop research, anecdotal evidence, social media analysis, and netnography to explore the role of Generation Z in political transformation.

Desktop Research: This involved a systematic review of existing literature, reports, and online resources to comprehensively understand the research context and identify gaps in current knowledge. Rowley (2002) noted that desktop research, also known as secondary research, is crucial for 'synthesizing and evaluating existing information' to inform subsequent research stages. It allowed us to frame our research questions effectively and build upon established theoretical frameworks for digital activism and political engagement.

Anecdotal Evidence: While not a primary method, anecdotal evidence, in the form of observed online discussions and reported experiences, provided initial insights into the lived realities of Generation Z's political participation. However, it is crucial to note that anecdotal evidence is subjective and requires careful contextualization and validation through more rigorous methods (Yin, 2018). Therefore, we treated these observations as preliminary, guiding our more systematic analyses.

Social Media Analysis: This method involved systematically collecting and analyzing data from social media platforms to understand the patterns, trends, and sentiments related to the 2024 Kenyan uprising. As described by Boyd and Crawford (2012), social media analysis enables researchers to 'examine social phenomena at scale' by leveraging the vast amounts of data generated by online interactions. We utilized tools and techniques to track hashtags, analysis content, and map network connections, providing a quantitative and qualitative overview of the digital political landscape.

Netnography: This qualitative research method, pioneered by Kozinets (2010), focuses on understanding the cultural dynamics of online communities. Netnography involves immersing oneself in online environments to observe and interpret participants' behaviors, beliefs, and interactions. This approach was particularly valuable for exploring the nuanced motivations and sentiments driving Generation Z's political engagement in the context of the Kenyan uprising, especially in sensitive areas like human rights abuses and conflict zones. We better understood these digital spaces' cultural meanings and social practices by analyzing online discussions, forums, and social media groups.

GEN Z is known for its extensive use of social media and online organizing. Alternative methodologies, such as desktop and anecdotal research, may be preferable when participants are unavailable or when a comprehensive understanding of the topic can be achieved through existing literature. Desktop research involves analyzing existing literature, while anecdotal research involves collecting and analyzing personal experiences or stories. These methodologies benefit confidential research, particularly in sensitive scenarios such as human rights abuses in conflict zones (Gring-Pemle, 2024). These are common in qualitative studies to gain a deep understanding of complex subjects; for example, researching the impact of online harassment by security forces observed in Kenya (Kurniawan, Putri, & Alianti, 2024) can be achieved through analyzing personal narratives without direct interviews (Gansewig & Walsh, 2024) These methodologies provide a safe and controlled environment for exploring the research question without putting participants at risk or compromising their confidentiality. However, anecdotal research can be subjective, biased, an interpretive approach and prone to errors, as it relies on individual perspectives and experiences (Chambers, 2024) and may rely on other methodologies to ensure validity and reliability. Desktop research is an objective approach to search. It is pivotal in highlighting areas of unexplored knowledge (Wahid et al., 2023) and consolidating findings from quantitative studies (Setaki & van Timmeren, 2022).

Social media analysis offers an innovative approach to observing and interpreting the evolution of risk perceptions as users through their engagements on these platforms, contributing to a digital footprint and significantly shaping fellow netizens' communication, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors. It can rapidly gather feedback and opinions on meeting one or more goals. This approach entails analyzing data from social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram to comprehend online behaviors and attitudes (Qiao, Zhen, & Lin, 2023; Zayet, et al., 2021; Pilař, Stanislavská, Kvasnička, Bouda, & Pitrová, 2021). Netnography methodology involves studying online communities and cultures to gain a deeper understanding of online behaviors and attitudes and a new qualitative approach developed through logical argumentation after analyzing critical differences between social media and immersive technologies (Kozinets, 2023; Wallis, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Behavioral Discourse

Easton (1975) provided a theoretical framework to interpret political behaviors. He argues that the electoral system may not provide a conducive setting for voters to address important issues, pushing them to adopt more direct forms of engagement to satisfy their political needs. This "contact mechanism" of engagement is viewed as more rewarding and effective for addressing specific issues and achieving desired changes, especially in contexts where the electoral system feels alienating or ineffective.

Existing scholarship on anti-authoritarian movements suggests that shared experiences of political repression can motivate historically divided communities to unite against a common oppressor (Beissinger, 2013). However, forming such alliances is often a complex process. Revolutionary groups typically consider the resources, capabilities, and alignment of political objectives with other groups before committing to collaboration (Carvalho, 2022).

In the discourse on democratic engagement, three distinct behavioral patterns have emerged: political apathy, democratic antipathy, and the rise of new democratic citizens. (Foa & Buchko, 2021) examine political apathy, attributing it to a growing disillusionment with the effectiveness of political authorities. Another factor is the cultural preference for older leadership, which hinders the participation and advancement of young candidates in the political hierarchy. Established politicians resist ceding power to younger counterparts, fostering cycles of corruption and reducing public accountability (Gaard, 2024). This cycle further decreases citizen participation and creates opportunities for corrupt leaders to exploit the system, undermining the rule of law. According to Foa & Buchko (2021), this disillusionment manifests in declining formal political participation, such as voting, indicating broader disengagement from traditional democratic processes.

Democratic antipathy, explored by Heywood (2019) and Mutuku, Owuoché, & Jonyo (2023), reflects public dissatisfaction with the tangible outcomes produced by political systems. This form of antipathy is not passive but is expressed through active opposition, characterized by rejecting the status quo and supporting anti-establishment parties that promise radical change and challenge existing democratic norms.

At the same time, a new narrative is emerging among younger people. Stoker, Li, Halupka, & Evans (2017) and Nkansah & Bartha (2023) argue that governments are struggling to meet the rising expectations of younger citizens. This has given rise to the concept of new democratic citizens: young individuals who, despite their dissatisfaction with the outcomes of political governance, seek alternative, non-traditional avenues for political participation. Rather than withdrawing from the political arena, this group intends to influence change through innovative means, embodying a proactive approach to addressing the shortcomings of contemporary democracy.

The assumption that GEN Z is disengaged from political and civic matters is increasingly being challenged. A GeoPoll survey reveals that 63.30% of respondents report high involvement in politics and public affairs. Additionally, 21.57% of participants indicated moderate engagement, while 9.79% remained neutral. Only 4.83% reported minimal involvement, and 2.83% abstained from political engagement altogether. These figures underscore GEN Z's significant interest and active participation in shaping their political and civic environments (Adika, 2024).

Together, these scholars provide a nuanced understanding of democratic engagement, highlighting the interplay between disillusionment, resistance, and innovation. They suggest that the future of democracy may depend on reconciling these diverse behavioral patterns and fostering more inclusive and responsive political systems.

Tribalism

The recent unrest in Kenya among GEN Z can also be attributed to tribalism, as highlighted by Jonyo (2024). Kenya is one of Africa's most ethnically diverse nations, where ethnic distinctions often result in conflict over access to political power and economic benefits. This division is exacerbated by leaders who manipulate ethnic identities for political gain, as seen during the reigns of Jomo Kenyatta and, later, Moi, with the Kikuyus and the Kalenjin communities, respectively. Such strategies have fuelled ongoing ethnic tensions, electoral disputes, and violence, serving the political and economic interests of the elite.

There is a broad belief that GEN Z has diminished regard for these established traditions and cultural practices. The GeoPoll survey indicated the following divided opinions: 27.62% of respondents believe that GEN Z does not highly regard traditions and cultural practices. 27.56% feel that GEN Z values these traditions very much. 22.34% remain neutral. 15.71% believe GEN Z somewhat values traditions and culture.

Table 2-GENZ Cultural Opinions (Adika, 2024)

GEN Z does not highly regard traditions	GEN Z values these traditions very much	Neutral	GEN Z somewhat values traditions and culture
27.62%	27.56%	22.34%	15.71%

Moreover, the government's exclusion of young people from development initiatives has marginalized a significant portion of the citizenry from contributing to governance. This exclusion has led to a lack of advancement opportunities and sustainable livelihoods and has compounded issues of poverty and inadequate education, further limiting formal employment prospects across various sectors. Anderson and McKnight (2015) discuss how groups like *Al-Shabaab* exploit these vulnerabilities, presenting themselves as an alternative to the state's neglect and offering solutions to unemployment through a narrative of victimization. The findings of Mwonzora (2023) and Odongo (2023) validate the observation that there is a growing apathy among the youth towards traditional forms of political engagement.

Concurrently, there is an evident increase in both procedural and structural support for democratic governance. GEN Z exhibits a cosmopolitan disposition, exhibiting less allegiance to their tribal or political affiliations. This characteristic renders them more readily mobilisable (Iraki, 2024). This development suggests a paradigm shift whereby young individuals emerge as new democratic citizens. This shift is characterized by their adoption of innovative participatory forms and mechanisms for social accountability, coupled with enhanced trust in key democratic institutions, notably the Supreme Court. Such a dichotomy underscores a transformative evolution in the engagement of young citizens within the democratic fabric, transitioning from a state of passive observation to one of active participation. Using alternative digital platforms and perspectives, they increasingly demand accountability and foster democratic reform.

GEN Zs focus on meritocracy over political patronage has changed the conversation about leadership and resource allocation. This change promotes a more inclusive and fair representation of all citizens within Kenya's national development framework.

Economic Conditions and Public Sentiment

Significant challenges, including high unemployment rates, inflation, and a rising cost of living, marked Kenya's economic landscape in 2024. The introduction of the Finance Bill, which proposed increased taxes on essential goods, was perceived as a direct assault on the economic stability of ordinary citizens. This bill sought to impose new levies on items such as bread, sanitary pads, and mobile phones, exacerbating the financial burden on low-income households

(Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The public sentiment was overwhelmingly negative, with many viewing the bill as regressive and unjust.

The economic policies of the Ruto administration had already been under scrutiny, with critics arguing that the government was failing to address the needs of the marginalized and economically vulnerable populations. The Finance Bill catalyzed widespread discontent, tapping into the broader frustrations of Kenyans, who felt increasingly alienated from the economic benefits purportedly brought by government policies (Mwangi, 2023). This sentiment was extreme among the youth, who faced high levels of unemployment and limited economic opportunities.

Finance Bill (2024) As Catalyst for Dissent

The Finance Bill 2024, proposed by the Ministry of Finance, Kenya, sparked public outrage due to its controversial provisions, which included a 16% VAT on bread and an Eco Levy on sanitary products, seen as disproportionately affecting women and exacerbating “period poverty” (Kenya Ministry of Finance, 2024). Additionally, the bill introduced a motor vehicle tax and increased fuel levies, raising transportation costs and the price of goods. Critics like (Wamuyu, 2021) argued that these measures lacked sensitivity to the economic realities of ordinary Kenyans and were viewed as punitive and counterproductive, especially given the existing economic hardships.

Public Reaction and Mobilization

The public's reaction to the introduction of the Finance Bill was immediate and strong. Shortly following its announcement, a wave of disapproval swept across social media platforms, with numerous posts criticizing the bill and urging collective action. Notably, hashtags like *#RejectFinanceBill2024* and *#OccupyParliament* became popular, uniting many citizens, civil society groups, and activists in opposition. This movement was notably driven by the youth of Kenya, who adeptly utilized digital tools to coordinate protests and spread information (Mwangi, 2023) Their swift and organized response highlighted the significant impact of digital activism. Online platforms were vital for dialogue, organization, and instant updates, ensuring protestors remained cohesive and well-informed. This online Mobilization effectively translated into real-world action, with thousands participating in peaceful yet determined demonstrations in Nairobi and other significant cities. The protestors' demands were precise: they sought to repeal the bill and to implement more equitable economic policies, as discussed by (Branch & Mampilly, 2015)

Government Stance and Escalation Of Protests

As protests intensified, Ruto's Kenyan government, which was initially dismissive and defiant, became increasingly aggressive, deploying security forces to disperse demonstrators, leading to violent clashes, with allegations of 20 deaths and many more injured (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2024). This heavy-handed approach drew widespread condemnation from human rights organizations and further galvanized public opposition to the bill. The government's use of force was perceived as a violation of democratic principles and exacerbated the sense of betrayal among the youth. The brutality of the security forces highlighted the disconnect between the government and the populace, undermining President Ruto's credibility and his administration's legitimacy (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Withdrawal Of the Finance Bill and Political Implications

In the face of escalating pressure, the administration of President Ruto found itself compelled to re-evaluate its stance on the contentious Finance Bill, culminating in its withdrawal. This decision resulted from widespread public dissent and demonstrations and challenged the

government's initial assertion of the bill's necessity for fulfilling fiscal responsibilities (Ministry of Finance, 2024; Mwangi, 2023). The retraction of the Finance Bill emerged as an emblem of triumph for the protesters, underscoring the efficacy of youth-led activism and the palpable disaffection towards governmental policies among the populace. This pivotal juncture in Kenya's political landscape underscores organized protests' formidable influence in precipitating governmental change (Daily Nation, 2024). From the perspective of the Kenyan government, this *volte-face* signifies a profound recalibration in the dynamics of power, suggesting an ascendant role for civil society and youth activism in the formulation of policy. Furthermore, this political episode casts doubt over the government's capacity to navigate economic adversities without resorting to measures that alienate its constituency. In the aftermath, the government must mend its rapport with the citizenry and pursue a trajectory of participatory and inclusive policy-making (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

Impact Of Gen Z - Governance and Policy

In Kenya, the recent protests have sparked significant changes in governance and policy, particularly with the remarkable overturning of the Finance Bill. Adesina (2021) points out that this is a clear testament to the powerful impact of youth activism on legislative processes. He highlights how GEN Z protesters have effectively showcased the potency of youth-led movements in holding governments accountable and instigating social transformation. Adesina further emphasizes the vital role that digital platforms play in promoting civic engagement and organization, suggesting that these protests serve as a blueprint for future activism across Africa and, possibly, the world.

Githui (2024) and Mwangi (2023) captured the essence of a brewing revolution led by the youth in Kenya and across Africa. He described this generation's vibrant spirit and determination as the dawn of an era marked by transformative change, noting their digital prowess and enthusiasm, positioning them as formidable change-makers. They are steering the continent towards a future characterized by justice, democracy, and equality, underscoring the potential of social media and technology in mobilising, informing, and uniting people. This fosters optimism for youth-led movements to overhaul the political scene. These young activists are a testament to Africa's resilience and diversity and are pivotal in redefining governance and accountability. Their efforts today are foundational to a more participatory and fairer Africa tomorrow. Mwangi argues that supporting these movements is a deep-seated belief in the visionary future that the youth can craft for Africa. This brings us to the issue of who was involved in the mass demonstration in Kenya and how they organized themselves.

Youth Mobilization and Digital Activism

Role of social media in organizing protests

Social media played a pivotal role in rallying support and organizing protests for the Kenyan Finance Bill 2024, proving to be an indispensable tool for activists. Platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook enabled rapid information dissemination and coordination and served as a creative outlet for digital activism. These platforms amplified the youth's voices through hashtags, viral content, and live streams, drawing national and international attention to the cause (Wamuyu, 2021). Notably, the digital realm offered innovative ways to critique government actions and raise awareness, employing memes, short videos, and graphics that resonated with younger audiences. Moreover, the virtual nature of these protests provided a safer alternative for participants, minimizing the risks tied to physical gatherings (Mwangi, 2023; Mason, Zamparo, Marini, & Ameen, 2022; Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel, & Anand, 2021) his blend of communication and creativity underscored the transformative power of digital activism in challenging oppressive policies. Githui (2024) posits that, in contrast to earlier generations,

members of GEN Z possess a proficient command of digital platforms, which they effectively utilise as potent instruments for Mobilization, advocacy, and disseminating information.

Digital and Traditional Activism Strategies

The protests effectively utilized a dual approach, merging online activism with traditional, on-the-ground actions to form a robust and impactful model. This multifaceted strategy significantly amplified their cause's reach and effectiveness. The protesters skillfully adopted tactics, including nonviolent marches and sit-ins, alongside more assertive measures like establishing roadblocks and occupying public spaces. These actions were strategically selected to draw public attention and prompt government response, as highlighted by Branch & Mampilly (2015). A notable tactic was symbolic acts, such as holding vigils or placing mock billboards criticizing the Finance Bill, aiming to make the protest more relatable by showcasing the tangible effects of the proposed tax changes on everyday people. Furthermore, the protesters demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the media landscape, using it to gain coverage and stir empathy towards their movement. By crafting compelling visual and narrative content, they successfully spread their message to a broad audience, as Mwangi (2023) notes, emphasising the critical role of media in modern activism.

TikTok and Twitter (X) Campaigns

Using platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, GEN Z has helped to move activism into the digital age (Trang, McKenna, Cai, & Morrison, 2023). The effective use of TikTok and Twitter in the 2024 Kenyan protests played a pivotal role in amplifying the movement and coordinating actions on the ground. On TikTok, the creation and viral spread of short, engaging videos were instrumental in bringing the implications of the Finance Bill to a broader audience. These videos, often infused with personal stories and testimonials, vividly highlighted the human cost of the proposed taxes. The platform's algorithm, designed to promote content based on user engagement, ensured that these impactful narratives reached viewers within Kenya and internationally, thus broadening the scope of awareness and support for the protests (Wamuyu, 2021). Twitter was critical for real-time coordination and communication among activists and organizers. It disseminated meeting points, shared strategic insights, and provided live updates directly from the protest sites. Furthermore, Twitter Spaces, an audio-based platform feature, enabled organizers to hold real-time discussions and planning sessions, significantly enhancing the organizational efficiency and cohesion of the protest activities. The global trending hashtag *#RejectFinanceBill2024* on Twitter further underscored the international resonance of the Kenyan protests, drawing widespread attention and solidarity worldwide. This strategic use of social media platforms mobilized support and was key in successfully coordinating the protests (Mwangi, 2023).

Pressure for Electoral Reforms

In Kenya, GEN Z has been a formidable force advocating for significant electoral reforms. Their efforts aim to establish a more transparent and inclusive electoral framework. This demographic has highlighted various deficiencies within the existing electoral mechanism, pinpointing issues related to voter registration, the integrity of the voting process, and the equity of electoral results. Utilizing a multifaceted approach that includes protests, social media campaigns, and direct engagement with policymakers, GEN Z has championed reforms aimed at bolstering the autonomy and efficacy of electoral institutions, guaranteeing equitable representation for all citizens, and safeguarding voter rights. Through the Mobilization of young voters and the amplification of their calls for electoral integrity, GEN Z continues to significantly influence the evolution of electoral governance in Kenya. Their endeavours are directed towards

the realization of a democratic framework characterized by fairness, transparency, and accountability.

SDGS and Green Economy

According to the United Nations, the Sustainable Development Goals represent a global imperative, urging nations across the socioeconomic spectrum to engage in efforts to foster prosperity while concurrently safeguarding the environment (Adika, 2024).

GEN Z, as consumers, demonstrate a pronounced concern regarding sustainability and corporate social responsibility policies. This demographic frequently exhibits anti-corporate sentiments and harbors skepticism towards advertising, which complicates their ability to trust the authenticity of eco-friendly marketing initiatives (Segel & Hatami, 2023). Compared to their predecessors, more GEN Z consumers are skeptical of companies that exploit environmental trends for profit (Narayanan, 2022). This skepticism underscores the broader imperative for authentic transformation, aligning with one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals aimed at "ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns."

However, the paradox in the statement lies in the contradiction between GEN Z's digital activity and environmental concerns. GEN Z is highly active digitally, often requiring electronic devices that contribute to environmental harm due to their production, energy consumption, and eventual disposal. GEN Zs represent an estimated \$143 billion in annual spending power (Huberman, 2023). These digital devices contribute to e-waste, carbon emissions, and resource depletion, impacting climate change.

At the same time, GEN Z is a generation deeply concerned about sustainability and corporate responsibility, with many embracing the values of the green economy and showing skepticism toward firms exploiting environmental trends. This creates tension: while GEN Z advocates for sustainability, their digital habits may indirectly support the industries and processes they are critical of. This paradox reflects the broader challenge in achieving "sustainable consumption and production patterns," one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in a world increasingly reliant on digital technologies.

In summary, GEN Z's digital lifestyle, while contributing to environmental degradation, conflicts with its strong desire for sustainability and transparency in corporate actions.

International Solidarity

GEN Z's activism in Kenya has gained international attention and support due to its effective use of social media to raise awareness about local issues and connect with global movements. Their campaigns against corruption, advocacy for social justice, and calls for electoral reforms received backing from international organizations, human rights groups, and activists worldwide. This pressured the Kenyan government to address these concerns in line with global human rights standards and democratic principles.

OBSERVATIONS

The 2024 Kenyan Uprising was a seminal case study that emphasized the crucial role played by youth activists in addressing Kenya's immediate challenges and broader African issues. It demonstrated the effectiveness of peaceful protests in influencing policy decisions nationally and globally, holding the potential to shape the country's future and make progress in pursuing democratic governance.

This analysis highlighted the powerful impact that young people had when they came together to challenge issues, starting with their effective opposition to the Finance Bill 2024. They utilized digital tools and group efforts to stand against it, serving as a quintessential exemplar of the strength of unity in creating paradigm shifts. Their actions emphasized the need for changes and showed how groups working for societal and economic fairness could join forces with young activists to push for improvements. The events related to this protest served as a

strong warning to governments: choosing to suppress these movements instead of introducing real changes might lead to continued and widespread unrest.

Drawing on insights from Adesina (2021), Togun (2024), Nelson, and Sample (2024) this review adopted a cautiously optimistic perspective despite the formidable obstacles. It celebrated the resilience and capacity of democratic systems to drive change, emphasizing the critical role of youth activism in steering Africa towards a brighter, democratically governed future.

FUTURE VISIONARIES

The retraction of the finance bill is unlikely to appease the prevailing discontent, given that economic transformation requires a protracted timeframe. The government must target more attainable objectives in the short term, such as the revision of Vision 2030 with contributions from GEN Z (Iraki, 2024). The incumbent administration ought to draw lessons from Emilio Stanley Mwai Kibaki's tenure as the third President of Kenya, during which tax increments were implemented without inciting public dissent, attributed to transparent communication regarding the allocation of the tax proceeds.

The investigation into the methodologies through which GEN Z will disseminate their knowledge and expertise to subsequent generations (Benítez-Márquez, Sánchez-Teba, Bermúdez-González, & Núñez-Rydman, 2022), their potential as future leaders, the nature of their leadership, and their conceptualization of leadership roles constitute a significant area of inquiry. It is imperative to comprehend the leadership archetype that GEN Z is poised to exemplify. Their view of leadership can predict leadership's future and contribute to the sustainability of organizations and their ability to compete in global markets. (Parker & Igielnik, 2020) research delved into the comparative analysis between GEN Z and preceding cohorts concerning various subjects, such as governmental roles, core values, and political inclinations. As further elucidated by Saracel (2023) this investigation underscores the premise that generational variances in value assessments and outlooks consequentially modify anticipations and perceptions regarding leadership.

Generation Alpha, encompassing individuals born from 2010 to 2024, represents the inaugural cohort to mature entirely within the confines of the 21st century, immersed in sophisticated technological environments from inception. This generation's early exposure to artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and internet technologies positions them as pivotal contributors to forthcoming technological progressions and global trend transformations. Their rearing in a highly interconnected milieu is anticipated to influence their educational inclinations, communicative methodologies, and consumer patterns, signaling a profound shift in the fabric of societal norms (Adika, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2024 Kenyan uprising epitomizes the transformative potential of GEN Z in orchestrating social cohesion and political reform, marking a pivotal shift in the paradigms of social and political activism. The President of Kenya's act of dismissing his cabinet highlighted the profound impact of these young activists by recognizing that their efforts did more to unify the nation than decades of political maneuvering. This activism underscores the formidable ability of youth-led movements to catalyze significant political changes and enhance social unity. Furthermore, it highlights the strategic utilization of social media's expansive reach and accessibility, enabling these movements to mobilize peers across the globe and initiate a wave of digital activism that transcends national boundaries.

REFERENCES

- Adesina, O. (2021). The #EndSARS Protests in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of African Political Economy and Development*, 16(2), 120-135.
- Adika, G. (2024). Social Media and Youth Activism in Kenya. *Journal of African Political Studies*, 12(1), 45-62.
- Adika, N. (2024). Gen Z in Africa: The Myths and Realities of Kenya Gen Z (29 July 2024). GeoPoll.
- Adzande, P., Meth, P., & Commins, S. (2024). Safety and security: Domain report - ACRC Working Paper 2024-07. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, University of Manchester.
- Ameen, N., Tarhini, A., Reppel, A., & Anand, A. (2021). Customer experiences in the age of artificial intelligence. *Computers in human behaviour*, 114, 106548.
- Anderson, M., & McKnight, J. (2015). Understanding Al-Shabaab: Clan, Islam and Insurgency in Kenya. *Journal of East African Studies*.
- Beissinger, M. (2013). The Semblance of Democratic Revolution: Coalitions in Ukraine's Orange Revolution. *American Political Science Review*, 107(3), 574-592.
- Benítez-Márquez, M. D., Sánchez-Teba, E. M., Bermúdez-González, G., & Núñez-Rydman, E. S. (2022). Generation Z within the workforce and in the workplace: A bibliometric analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 736820.
- Bennett, S., Maton, K., & Kervin, L. (2008). The 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 39(5), 775-786.
- Boyd, D., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, Communication and Society*, 15(5), 662-679.
- Branch, D., & Mampilly, Z. (2015). *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change*. London: Zed Books.
- Carvalho, C. (2022). Cooperate to Win: The Influence of the Chilean Student Movement on the 2012 Budget Law. *Social Movement Studies* 21, 1(2), 62-78.
- Chambers, G. (2024). Police Interactions With the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community: Abuse, Audism, and Accessibility. *Humanity & Society*, doi.org/doi:10.1177/01605976241228472
- Checkoway, B., & Gutierrez, L. (2006). *Youth participation and community change*. Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge.
- Cobb, A., Schneider, J., & Lee, K. (2022). Towards Higher-Level Abstractions for Quantum Computing. *Australasian Computer Science Week*, 115-124.
- Daily Nation. (2024). President Ruto Withdraws Controversial Finance Bill Amid Protests. Retrieved from <https://www.dailynation.com/2024/06/30/president-ruto-withdraws-finance-bill>
- Easton, D. (1975). A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5(4), 435-457.
- Foa, G. K., & Buchko, A. A. (2021). Here comes generation Z: millennials as managers. *Business Horizon*, 489-499. doi:doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.013
- Gansewig, A., & Walsh, M. (2024). That is simply one thing that goes with it”: former extremists in school settings and empirical evidence. *Educational Review*, 76, 277–298. doi:doi:10.1080/00131911.2022.2028733
- Githui, F. K. (2024). Impact of Generation Z on the landscape of Kenya Politics. Online: KCA University
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381805292_Impact_of_Generation_Z_to_the_la

- andscape_of_Kenya's_Politics. Retrieved from Githui, F. K. (2024). Impact of Generation Z on the landscape of Kenya Politics. [https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Githui+%282024%29+&btnG=:Githui,+F.+K.+2024\).+Impact+of+Generation+Z+on+the+landscape+of+Kenya+Politics.+https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Githui+%282024%29+&btnG=](https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Githui+%282024%29+&btnG=:Githui,+F.+K.+2024).+Impact+of+Generation+Z+on+the+landscape+of+Kenya+Politics.+https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Githui+%282024%29+&btnG=)
- Gring-Pemble, L. (2024). In Search of an Exigence to Warrant Reform: Public Opinion, Policy Research, and Anecdotal Evidence, in: Grim Fairy Tales. Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. doi:doi:10.5040/9798400659645.ch-006
- Heywood, A. (2019). Politics. In G. Jaju, Extra-terrestrial landings: An ethnographic account of doing ethnography (5 ed., pp. 1-18). Basingstoke: Macmillan International.
- Huberman, E. (2023). The power of Gen Z consumers for brands during the 2021 holiday season. Retrieved from Rollingstone: <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture-council/articles/gen-z-consumers-brands-holiday-season-1259494/>
- Human Rights Watch. (2024). Kenya: Government Must Address Police Brutality in Finance Bill Protests. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/27/kenya-government-must-address-police-brutality>
- Iraki, X. (2024). Kenya unrest: the deep economic roots that brought Gen-Z onto the streets (28 June 2024). Braamfontein, Johannesburg: The Conversation Africa, Inc.
- Kenya Human Rights Commission. (2024). Report on the 2024 Finance Bill Protests. KHRC. Retrieved from Kenya Human Rights Commission - Reports: <https://www.khrc.or.ke/2024/06/30/report-on-finance-bill-protests>
- Kenya Ministry of Finance. (2024). The Finance Bill 2024. Retrieved from Treasury: Kenya Ministry of Finance: <https://www.treasury.go.ke/finance-bill-2024>
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Economic Survey 2023. Retrieved from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics - Economic Survey 2023: <https://www.knbs.or.ke/2023/economic-survey>
- Kirshner, B., Strobel, J., & Fernandez, M. (2003). Critical civic engagement among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 18(6), 595-618.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Los Angeles (US): Sage Publications.
- Kurniawan, M., Putri, Y., & Alianti, G. (2024). Learning Fun English through Pop-Up QR Book: An Audio-Visual Aid for Early Childhood Foreign Language Development. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 5, 7–14. doi:doi:10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.1.788
- Livingstone, S. (2012). Critical reflections on the benefits of ICT in education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(1), 9-24.
- Mason, M. C., Zamparo, G., Marini, A., & Ameen, N. (2022). Glued to your phone? Generation Z's smartphone addiction and online compulsive buying. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 136, 107404.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mutuku, R. K., Owuochi, S. O., & Jonyo, F. O. (2023). The Vicious Relationship between Apathetic Political Behaviour and Citizen Quiescence in Nairobi County. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 114-127.
- Mwangi, W. (2023). Youth and Digital Activism in Kenya: A New Paradigm for Protest. *African Journal of Communication*, 10(1), 45-67.
- Mwonzora, G. (2023). Shifting the Voting Burden to Others’: Abstainers and Turn Outers in Zimbabwean Elections. In M. & Chirongoma, *Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe*, Volume I, [e-book] (pp. 111-128). London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham.

- Nelson, A., & Sample, K. (2024). From the Year of Elections to the Year of Governance (13 September 2024). New York, USA: Project Syndicate.
- Nkansah, G. B., & Bartha, A. (2023). Anti-democratic youth? The influence of youth cohort size and quality of democracy on young people's support for democracy. *Contemporary Politics*, 29(5), 553-575.
- Odongo, N. (2023). Citizen political participation in Kenya: a cross-sectional analysis. *International Review of Public Administration*, 28(4), 432-451.
- OECD. (2022). Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.
- Parker, K., & Igielnik, R. (2020). On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far. Retrieved from Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. United States of America: <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592>
- Pilař, L., Stanislavská, L. K., Kvasnička, R., Bouda, P., & Pitrová, J. (2021). Framework for social media analysis based on hashtag research. *Applied Sciences* . *Applied Sciences* (Switzerland), 11(8). doi:doi.org/10.3390/app11083697
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Qiao, Q., Zhen, Z., & Lin, Y. (2023). Assessment and Simulation of Thermal Environments in Taiyuan Urban Built-up Area, China. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 11, 11, doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2023.126129.
- Rowley, J. (2002). Using case studies in research. *Management Research News*, 25(2), 16-27.
- Saracel, N., Bilgiç, E., Topal, F., Kozak, G. T., Kütükcü, H., & Madi, N. (2023). Yöneticilerin bakış açısı ile z kuşağı çalışanların liderlik beklentileri. *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 15, 970–987. doi:doi: 10.20491/isarder.2023.1630
- Segel, L., & Hatami, H. (2023). Eighty-eight percent of Gen Z doesn't trust eco-friendly claims. Retrieved from McKinsey & Company: https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/email/genz/2022/12/06/2022-12_06b.html
- Setaki, F., & van Timmeren, A. (2022). Disruptive technologies for a circular building industry. *Building and Environment*, 223, doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2022.109394.
- Stoker, G., Li, J., Halupka, M., & Evans, M. (2017). Complacent young citizens or cross-generational solidarity? An analysis of Australian attitudes to democratic politics. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 218-235.
- Theocharis, Y. (2015). Young people, social media and civic engagement: A meta-analysis of empirical evidence. *New media & society*, 17(9), 1402-1412.
- Togun, K. A. (2024). What's Driving Africa's Protests? . New York, USA: Project Syndicate.
- Trang, N. M., McKenna, B., Cai, W., & Morrison, A. M. (2023). I do not want to be perfect: Investigating Gen Z students' personal brands on social media for job seeking. *Information Technology & People*, doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2022-0602.
- Valenzuela, S., Park, N., & Kee, K. F. (2009). Is there social capital in a social network site?: Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, social trust, and civic engagement . *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 14(4), 875-901.
- Wahid, N., Amin, U., Khan, M. A., Siddique, N., & Warraich, N. (2023). Mapping the desktop research in Pakistan: a bibliometric analysis. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*. doi:doi:10.1108/GKMC-07-2022-0159
- Wallis, A. (2023). Netnography. In *Qualitative Research Methodologies for Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy* (2 ed.). Taylor and Francis. doi:doi.org/10.4324/9781003456216-16
- Wamuyu, P. K. (2021). Social Media Use for Political Participation among Youth in Kenya. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 18(3), 241-260. Retrieved from Wamuyu,

- P. K. (2021). Social Media Use for Political Participation among Youth in Kenya. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 18(3), 241-260.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Los Angeles (US): Sage publications.
- Zayet, T. M., Ismail, M. A., Varathan, K. D., Noor, R. M., Chua, H. N., Lee, A., & Singh, S. K. (2021). Investigating transportation research based on social media analysis: a systematic mapping review. *Scientometrics*, 126(8), doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2023.1261291.