

Social Media and the Deconstruction of the Gender-Neutral Engagement in Political Activism of Generation Z Techizens in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how social media has provided a platform for tech savvy Generation Z (Gen Z) youths to engage in the competitive world of Kenya's political activism. It draws from the recent push by Gen Z activists to push for anti-government protests geared towards a reformation of Kenya's political and governance landscape. It draws primarily on the ungendered dimension of these activities via a robust reliance on social media platforms for political mobilisation, organisation, political messaging and gender barrier breaking among the youthful activists. It recognises that Gen Z activism cuts beyond gender barriers and this contributes to a deconstruction of the narrative that Kenyan political activism is male dominated. The paper argues that this has been possible via the faceless and genderless medium of social media platforms that many Gen Z techizens belong to. The paper is guided by the following objectives: to assess the extent to which social media has provided a genderless platform for political activism in Kenya; to analyse how social media has revolutionised the politics of protest in Kenya; and, to evaluate the deconstructive capacity of social media in the portrayal of the gender-neutral nature of political activism in Kenya. For its theoretical framework, the paper is guided by the Framing theory as propounded by Goffman and the Constructivist theory as propounded by Wendt. The paper argues that social media is providing a critical tool towards the deconstruction of existing social constructs in the political realm of explaining Kenyan politics particularly from its gendered connotation. Social media is presenting new avenues for political activism anchored on digital platforms. These platforms have aided in the framing of political narratives that challenge the status quo and resonate with the Gen Z populace in a way that they best understand each other. The paper finds that this will refine the reframing of political messaging towards political communication in a manner that exemplifies the inherent voices of protest of Gen Zs. This will be transformative as it will introduce a new construct as Kenya moves to the upcoming 2027 political contest. The paper recommends a robust rethinking of the socio-political construct emerging from the Gen Zs in terms of the evolutionary realities emerging and how these will shape political expression in this technologically driven space.

Key Words: Construct, Digital platforms, Gender, Political activism, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

Political activism among the young and technologically savvy and versatile youthful generation is becoming an increasingly important development in modern political discourse. In the globalised era, this has largely been due to the usage of social media. This is primarily attributed to the youthful generation popularly referred to as the Generation Z (Gen Z). Almog & Almog (2013) indicate that the term generation refers to a cycle of children born over a period of 15 to 20 years. In recent years, Gen Z have attracted a lot of scholarly attention due to their emerging roles and contribution in contemporary society. Jayatissa (2023) observes that Gen Zs are unique as a generation due to their technological nativism where a lot of their life, interactions and experiences are defined by a presence on digital spaces spurred by the evolutionary technologies of the day. They are rightly the techizens of the current century, a tech savvy generation that has permitted the revolutionary digital power of the modern age to shape their life and experiences. They are particularly apt in their use of technology and social media.

Political activism is one of the areas the tech-savvy youth have taken by storm by harnessing the power of social media. Unlike in years past, Gen Zs have redefined political identity and political mobilization. They have spearheaded a shift from the traditional political mobilization of yester years and consequently this has led to the emergence of a new form and breed of activism. In this new space, it is not easy to demarcate clearly the gender roles emasculated by the male and female gender respectively. For a long time, political activism, particularly in the developing world, has been a male dominated affair. Gen Zs are typically more aware and the bulk of their experiences have been birthed and orchestrated via digital spaces particularly social media. Social media has thus in recent years provided a space where Gen Zs can speak out and express themselves in diverse forms.

Social media, viewed from the vantage point of political identity and political agitation, has provided a platform through which Gen Zs engage with the political issues and political questions of the day (Ingutia, 2025; Khaemba et al, 2025; Mwaura, 2021). Gen Z participation in political activism has become a common phenomenon as they demand a space and an opportunity to be heard. In Kenya, this desire to be heard took the nation by surprise in June 2024 when nationwide protests were called to denounce the acrimonious Finance Bill 2024. Curiously, many observers underrated the capacity of Gen Zs to present a formidable force where prior opposition-led initiatives had failed or faltered. It is right to assume that not many took what promised to be a serious revolt seriously. Attention shifted when Gen Z started talking of a revolutionary approach that was geared to institute regime change at the helm of the Kenyan state.

Consequently, the highly publicized push to overrun critical government institutions like Parliament and the planned State House takeover cemented the Gen Z claims to political significance in Kenya and beyond. Their claim to political relevance and significance was cemented on June 25th, 2024 when they stormed Parliament after breaking through police barricades and ignited a significant political panic. This culminated in the Kenyan President's public proclamation that he was ready to engage with Gen Zs on any digital platform that they were comfortable with. This later saw the President oblige to an online interaction with Gen Z activists via X Spaces and consequently culminated in him sacking his cabinet, save for two Cabinet Secretaries, that many attributed to be a direct result of the Gen Z led anti-government activism and protest.

What has been clear in the Kenyan context is that social media has made it possible to close the gender gap in political protests participation. Compared to the classical modes of political protests, digital protests are considered less confrontational hence drawing in more women participants, particularly the Gen Z. This is in keeping with Dodson (2015), who opines that women shun traditional political protests since they prefer more civil and less hostile forms of engagement. Moreover, limited access to education, economic marginalization and vulnerability to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), among other factors, systematically excluded women from taking an active role in expressing their political voices. However, the landscape is gradually changing and the digital platform has been a convenient safe-space that shelters the protestors from the perils of in-person protests. The recent happenings in Kenya, where political protests have largely been organized on the digital platforms, indicate that this gender gap is fast closing.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Social Media as a Platform for Political Activism in Kenya

The technology and digital savviness of the Gen Z in Kenya mirrors patterns and developments globally, where the young digital natives or techizens have embraced the use of social media as a communication channel. This has also permitted their framing of their political messaging as well as amplification of their voice of protest (Musya, 2025). This is in tandem with research in other jurisdictions. In the United States, McGregor (2020) finds that social media has emerged as a critical component in understanding and framing of public opinion. His study however found that the resort to the use of social media is susceptible to manipulation by opposing actors. This underscores a delicate balancing act where social media can present an opportunity for political activism but at the same time presents negative connotations around its misuse. Once hailed for its facilitation of robust digital activism particularly in states with repressive governments, the worrisome trends surrounding its misuse warrant a deeper reflection.

This is particularly significant at a time when there is talk of the ‘revolutionary’ role that Gen Z led political activism is playing and how it conforms to the ‘tribeless’, ‘leaderless’ and ‘partyless’ tags that modern political movements have embraced. This is akin to other movements studied globally particularly during the Arab Spring Revolts as well as during the Black Lives Matter protests. A study conducted by Lengel & Newsom (2012) among Arab women in North Africa presents a persuasive depiction of how digital activism provides a safe space for women activists in regimes that were considered repressive to all forms of protest save that coming from women. Social media-based activism in Kenya resonates with a Kenyan body politic that has been yearning for issue-based political mobilization as opposed to the ethnic based mobilisation that has been the hallmark of Kenyan politics since the return to multipartyism. Indeed, this introduces a critical shift where Gen Zs shun the parochial labels that have been attributed to the older generation of politicians who forage for political following and mobilisation around the politics of identity anchored on ethnicity as a key factor.

Gen Zs have emerged to fill this void by replacing it with a new identity, anchored on the serious challenges they face and which they blame on the current administration led by President William S. Ruto. Anti-government street protests have been a common occurrence in Kenya in recent years. However, the kind of political activism witnessed from June 2024 has breathed new political life and energy to Kenyan politics. The disruptive power of technology and specifically social media has presented a new tool for political mobilisation. It mirrors findings from other political movements like the umbrella movement in Hong Kong in 2014 which saw University students boycott classes and cement a significant political base in their anti-Beijing protests at the time (Hui, 2015). This underscores the extent that the masses will go when they feel pressed and public anger simmers. In the context of this paper, it is clear that social media has provided a tool for political activism that goes beyond gender as both young men and young women have been involved in these protests. In a study on the impact of social media on social movements and public opinion formation, social networks aided by social media have been found to effectively work towards influencing the public sphere and public discourse (Obaid, 2020). It is thus significant to note that social media thus presents a core tool towards shaping these genderless voices.

Other studies have also delved into the role that social media plays in online activism, pointing to the heavy reliance on social media tools and platforms to agitate, mobilise and amplify voices (Tinuade et al, 2021; Ezuka et al, 2022). Anchored on these findings, the literature thus points to the increasing potential of the use of social media for political activism and engagement among the younger politically conscious Gen Zs. Of critical importance is the extent to which such social-media based activism contributes to tangible governance and policy changes from the part of the government. Social media usage in Kenya is anchored on the deep internet penetration in the country that has placed Gen Zs ahead of the technological path. Social media usage shows a pervasive uptake by the male and female gender and this consequently shows that social media based political activism is genderless.

The message that comes across is that public anger and discontent know no gender barriers. Recent Gen Z protests physically and virtually have shown a significant voice of the female gender. This is unlike past demonstrations which albeit with a representation and participation cutting across the gender divide have not seen the level of gender participation that Gen Zs have registered. Generally, women political participation in Kenya has been quite low. This is particularly true for formal participation through parliament particularly in the pre-2010 constitutional dispensation that introduced the position of one Women Representative for each of the 47 counties. Kenyatta (2023) captures this reality as presented in the following table:

Table 1: Women Representatives in the National Assembly (1963-2007)

Election Year	Elected Women	Appointed Women	Women in Parliament (%)
1963	0	0	0
1969	1	1	1.2
1974	4	2	3.5
1979	4	1	2.9

1983	2	1	1.7
1988	2	0	1.1
1992	6	1	3
1997	4	5	1.4
2002	10	8	7.1
2007	16	6	8.9

Source: Kenyatta (2023)

The data captured shows the number of women in elective and appointive office. The 2013, 2017 and 2022 elections were all conducted under the 2010 constitution, hence there are 47 Women Representative positions that are guaranteed in the constitution and this has pushed the numbers up. Apart from elective offices, there have been several barriers that have stood in the way of women participation in political protest and political activism. These include gender based political violence targeting women; a culture of organized goonism in political activity; cultural stereotypes frowning upon the engagement of women in what is deemed to be a male space; general perception of women as weak and unable to handle the pressure that comes with political engagement among others. Mabona (2024) presents a persuasive case on the numerous odds against women in the political space in Kenya that appear to be designed to lock out women participation in Kenya. The Gen Z protests in 2024 started shifting that narrative.

Social media provides a ‘safe’ space which Gen Z activists have utilized to engage in political activism (McGregor, 2020; Lengel & Newsom, 2012). A number of them have faced threats, abductions, intimidation and even killings in a bid to dissuade them from using the social media platforms for anti-government political activism. Of the initial group of activists killed in the Gen Z protests, the following names featured prominently: Rex Masai; Erickson Mutisya; Kennedy Onyango; Caroline Shiramba and Benson Mbithi. Out of this group, Caroline stands out as a representative of the female gender. Recently, Kenya witnessed the arrest of a tech activist Rose Njeri who was eventually charged with developing a website to consolidate anti-Finance Bill 2025 mobilisation efforts. This high-profile case depicts the rapid involvement of women in Gen Z inspired anti-government political activism.

Social Media and Political Protests in Kenya

Politics of protests entails the active engagement of individuals or groups in efforts to birth political, policy and/or social change (Keith, 2023). The recent upsurge of social media use has greatly transformed the course of political activism in the contemporary world with social media playing a significant role in initiating political dissent and activism in Europe, the Americas and Africa at large. This is exemplified by events such as the 15-M Movement and the Indignados (anti-austerity protests in Spain – 2011/12), Occupy Wall Street (anti-wealth inequalities in New York - 2011), and the Arab Spring (pro-democracy protest across the Arab world and North Africa – early 2010) (Dey & Dey, 2025). With low entry barriers, ease of concealing their identity and user-generated content, social media platforms are increasingly resonating well with the young tech-savvy protestors – the new entrants into the political protests arena – who have hit a tipping point with the establishment. This marks a significant shift from both in-person, political elite-led and mainstream media (television, radio and newspapers) activism that dominated expression of political dissent for a long time.

In Kenya, there has been a notable paradigm shift in the conduct of political protests, with the youth taking the lead, mainly through the social media outlets, underscoring the link between the role of youth and technology in determining political discourse. The proliferation of social media platforms has seen increased participation of like-minded youths in political protests, which stresses the indisputable impact of social media as a powerful tool for enabling political mobilization and engagement. According to Keith (Ibid), accessibility, speed and reach is one of the strengths of social media in political activism. Courtesy of these digital platforms, political protests have gone beyond the limits of geographical borders, harnessing technology, thereby enabling young populations to take an active role in pushing for meaningful social change in Kenya.

Social media outlets such as X, Tik Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook have enabled young Kenyan political activists to sidestep the traditional political gatekeepers, raise awareness on critical matters, share real-time updates and garner national, regional and international support for their course. Ohndyl (2025) agrees that these platforms have resonated well with the younger generation, particularly the Gen-Zs, offering them new avenues to rapidly disseminate information, coordinate activities and amplify protest messages. The use of visual storytelling, memes, and viral challenges captures younger audiences and increases the likelihood of the content going viral. Online activism, therefore, serves as a stepping stone to in-person political participation, indicating a strong correlation between higher social media engagement and increased participation in political protests. This emerging trend underscores the adaptability of activism to address new challenges and amplify the often-marginalized voices in demanding for change. This in the context of Kenya presents a viable framework through which an analysis of political activism can be undertaken.

The fast-spread of social media has enhanced inclusivity in political discourses and framing of agendas on national issues. According to the Media Council of Kenya (2024), planning and execution of public protests in Kenya, remarkably since June 2024, was mainly done through online platforms, with the main proponents being the tech-savvy Gen Zs. The rise in access to digital technologies among Kenya's populace has consequently led to the rise of citizen journalism. This concept means that regular citizens, especially the youth, who quite often are excluded from national dialogue spaces, can now actively take part through telling their own stories through content creation and coordinating mass mobilization where action is deemed necessary. Social media, therefore, has made it possible for these sidelined groups to side-step traditional information gatekeepers who, for a long time, controlled media products. It has offered young Kenyans numerous opportunities to determine what they can consume and disseminate. The implication of this is that it places Gen Zs who are the main users of these platforms for political activism at the centre of determining the form and content of political communication and political messaging to be used in political activism.

Moreover, social media spaces have enhanced real-time broadcast and updates of information related to political protests. This played a critical role in mobilizing youthful activists by providing robust platforms for mobilization, tactical communication, and coordination. Capitalizing on the hashtag movements (#OccupyParliament, #OccupyStatehouse, #RejectFinanceBill, #RutoMustGo, among others) the social media platforms exacerbated real-time sharing of videos, pictures and messages, thereby setting and/or influencing the agenda on national conversations. This digital shift enabled greater inclusivity, allowing young people from diverse backgrounds to participate in the protests without the safety and logistical limitations associated with physical protests. This real-time communication helped sustain a strong bond among protesters and their supporters (Ingutia, 2025; Ibid, 2024).

This raises a curious question of whether this can lead to a sustained momentum that can inform the pace and direction of the political activities as the country heads to the upcoming general elections in 2027. There is an expectation that with the recent Gen Zs desire to participate in the 2027 political decision making as shown by their voter registration campaigns like #Tuko Kadi, more of such vibrant online based activism will continue. On a negative note, social media platforms have become arenas for disinformation, misinformation and hate speech during political protests. Although intended to neutralize the opponents, the counter narratives circulated through the social media platforms were often ridden with provocative and derogatory messages. Consequently, this aggravated tensions that easily escalated into violent confrontations during political protests. Privacy breaches have also been a common occurrence, where personal data, such as mobile phone numbers, of individuals in positions of interest was shared publicly. This made it possible for the aggrieved protestors to ridicule and bully such individuals through barraging them with multiple abusive messages, in utter violation of their privacy (Musya, 2025).

Social Media and Its Deconstructive Capacity to engender Gender Neutrality in Political Activism in Kenya

Political activism in Kenya like in any other place in the world is a reflection of the political dynamics going on at any given time. The current political message is anchored on the unique challenges that the ordinary citizen is going through. Top of the list is the general despair that many Kenyans face in light of the high cost of living, economic hardships, soaring youth unemployment and the general hopelessness in the population (Musya, 2025;

Twinomurizi, 2024). The Gen Z population in Kenya has proven to be a critical mass of young, energetic and determined group of people who are willing and ready to take the fight to the government. It must be remembered that part of what has caused this Gen Z uprising is the general sense of despair occasioned by unfulfilled promises by a government that came to power with a political rhetoric of promising to uplift the youth from economic ruin with an economic vision dubbed the Bottom-Up Transformation Agenda (BETA). This was juxtaposed against a narrative of uplifting the ‘hustler’ in the streets. Upon taking office and the subsequent policies adopted, it was felt that the government grossly negated on its promises.

It can be seen therefore, drawing from the experiences in other parts of the world, when youths feel cut off and disenfranchised economically and politically, there is a tendency to rise up in anger and protest. Studies done from different parts of the world underscore the growing importance of ensuring youth engagement in the political and economic issues of the day (Prima et al, 2023). Youth political participation in the current age has become genderless and carried via digital based social media platforms. The issues faced by the bulk of the citizenry know no gender demarcation. This is thus deconstructing the narrative that men in the society have to take upon themselves the responsibility of contending for their society. Young women are realizing they have to step up into the space of political activism to pronounce their position and entrench themselves in a space to confront the challenges they face and the accompanying status quo.

Public anger has been exacerbated in Kenya following the violent responses that the Kenyan government made in not only confronting the Gen Z youths but also ‘dealing with them’. This has resulted in a spate of abductions, torture and killings of some of the vocal youths. Social media became the space of choice when it became too dangerous to venture out to the streets in protest. However, recent activities carried out by the intelligence and law enforcement communities targeting some of the Gen Z activists have led many to fear for their lives as a number of those who have faced abduction and the reported torture and killings of activists has made many to reckon with the real danger facing many Gen Z activists.

Objectives Of The Study

This study was guided by three objectives:

1. To assess the extent to which social media has provided a genderless platform for political activism in Kenya.
2. To analyse how social media has revolutionised the politics of protest in Kenya.
3. To evaluate the deconstructive capacity of social media in the portrayal of the gender-neutral nature of political activism in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two theories. One of these is the Framing theory as propounded by Goffman and the Constructivist theory as propounded by Wendt. Framing theory is attributed to the work of Erving Goffman among other scholars before him. This study is guided by Goffman’s conceptualization of reality of how the world is perceived through cognition along structures that he regarded as frames (Persson, 2018; D’angelo, 2019). The mental frames that are developed in people’s minds inform the perception of realities around us. Applied to the political context, Framing theory situates social media and its usage as a core component of how young Gen Z activists shape their understanding of reality. It is through the lens of their frames that they convey political messaging to the political class and the government on matters that call for their attention. This framing has been instrumental in how social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram are used to present ideas in a manner that resonates with the daily struggles that these youths like every other citizen face. Their social media political activism is predicated on these frames out of their shared realities.

On the other hand, Constructivism theory as applied to political contexts can be understood from the conceptualization propounded by Alexander Wendt in 1995. It focuses on three salient issues in constructivism:

first, the idea of the social order around being a social construct of our own making; second, the perception of the nature of relations (including political relations) being a byproduct of interactions between state and non-state actors. In this regard, political movements like the Gen Z movement fits into a non-state actor attempting to disengage a state actor. In this context, the focus being the removal of the governing administration of Kenya from power. Third is the assertion that states adopt an identity anchored on interests that reflect the aforementioned interactions between state and non-state actors (Wendt, 1995). In this context the government as a state agency situates its response in an attempt to crack down on the Gen Z led political rhetoric of regime change dubbed #RutoMustGo.

METHODOLOGY

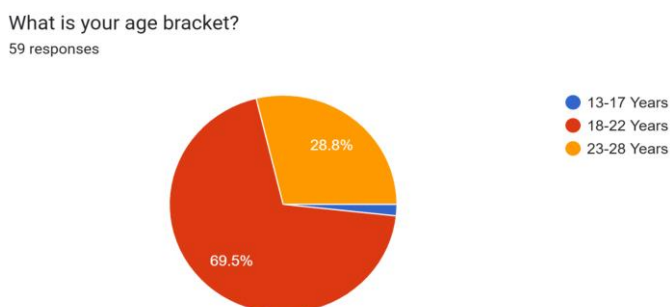
This study adopted an explanatory research design. Explanatory research design is ideal in carrying out studies that seek to explain prevailing patterns of causality where cause and effect analysis is the desired component in a research study (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Asenahabi, 2019). This is particularly pertinent where the need is to address phenomena that fall into how, what, and why questions. In this particular context, the study sought to provide an explanation of two things: first, why social media is becoming an important and preferred tool for political activism among Gen Zs; and secondly, how social media is providing a gender-neutral pattern for Gen Z political activism. This is significant towards explaining the emerging political dynamics in youth led political activism where social media is a critical tool for political mobilization and political communication. This highlights key changes taking place particularly in Kenya’s political context as the state moves towards the upcoming 2027 general election.

The target population for this study was 70 Gen Z youths who indicated to be sufficiently acquainted with Gen Z protests since June 2024. A questionnaire was administered to aid in primary data collection. Secondary data was also collected to supplement the primary data collected. The study thematically analysed content derived from key social media platforms under the trending hashtags covering the Gen Z protests. The study employed probability sampling and specifically snowball sampling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the study target population of 70, questionnaires were administered with 61 responses received. This translates to an 87.14% response rate. Of the 61 responses 50.8% of respondents were male with the remaining 49.2% being female. The bulk of the respondents (41) were aged between 18 to 22 years forming 69.5% of all the respondents. This was followed by 23 to 28 years (17) at 28.8% and 13 to 17 years (1) at 1.7%. Two respondents chose not to indicate their age. This points to an active political awareness and engagement among Gen Zs aged between 18 to 28. This is a critical age group since most of them did not participate in the last two general elections. This indicates a potential group that will most likely participate in the upcoming 2027 general election due to their clarion call dubbed #RutoMustGo. This is indicative of a voter mass that ostensibly blame the current administration in Kenya for their political and governance woes. This is presented as per the figure below:

Figure 1: Respondents Distribution by Age



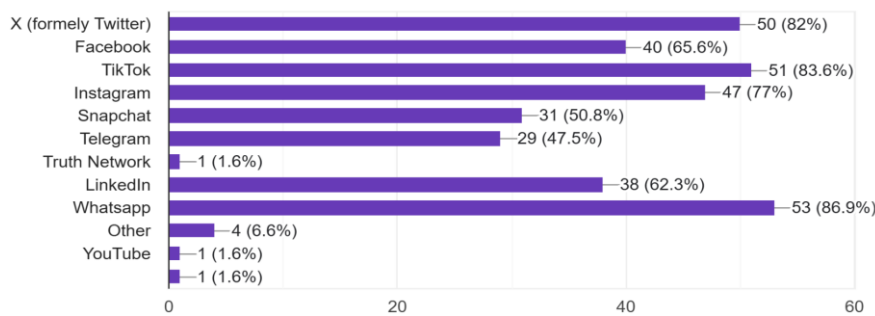
Source: Field data (2025)

Of the 61 respondents, 59 of them translating to 96.7% indicated that they are on social media platforms with only two, translating to 3.3% indicated they are not. A further analysis of the findings shows that WhatsApp, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) are the most common social media platforms among Gen Zs. These are followed by Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Telegram in that order. This is significant in informing the preferred mode that Gen Zs can be reached with political messaging. From a Framing theory and constructivist theory perspective, this is useful in shaping the trajectory of the tools and avenues that political messages can be crafted and conveyed to reach a wider group of youths. This is premised on a Gen Z quest to change the prevailing social and political order that they feel is not responsive to the needs and aspirations of the nation. The findings also pointed to the fact that Gen Zs are also on other social media platforms like Thread, YouTube, Discord and Reddit. This data is presented in the table below:

Figure 2: Prominent Social Media Platforms Among Gen Z Youths in Kenya

Which of the following social media platforms are you on(You can check as many boxes as possible)?

61 responses



Source: Field data (2025)

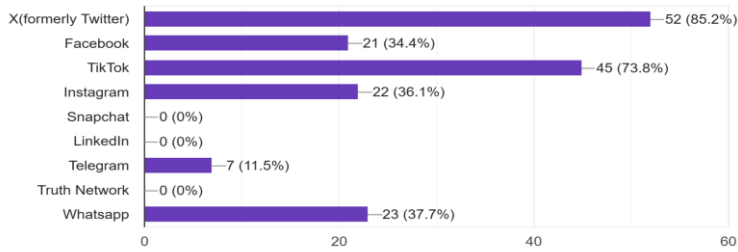
X is the most preferred social media platform for political activism among Gen Zs in Kenya at 54.1% followed by TikTok at 16.4%, Facebook at 11.5% and WhatsApp at 9.8%. Other lesser preferred platforms are LinkedIn at 3.3%, Instagram at 3.3% with Truth Social Network as the least popular at 1.6%. This finding can explain the dominance of online political activism that has been carried out on X spaces from the time of the onset of Gen Z led protests in June 2024. Curiously, this study also sought to find the level of engagement of Gen Zs in anti-government, whether physically or virtually. 52.5% indicated having participated in these protests whereas 47.5% had not participated at all. Of those who had participated, the findings show that 60.8% took part in physical street protests; 11.8% participated virtually while 27.5% had participated in both physical as well as virtual protests. The findings also point to the fact that online protests are only preferred to street protests at 32.8%. This means that the majority of the Gen Zs feel there is more weight in their activism and political agitation when they move to the streets in numbers. This is also viewed as a way of expressing solidarity with other Gen Zs in the anti-government cause hence avoiding the feeling of having betrayed the cause for the bigger good of the nation.

A number of factors were noted as to the non-participation of the latter. These reasons include: fear of being killed possibly attributable to the excessive use of force by the police and the associated police brutality, lack of an interest in the protests out of the frustration that nothing would change in terms of the government and its governance; insecurity of protestors from the police as well as hired pro-government goons; fear of police abductions; restrictions and safety concerns from parents; focus on academic pursuits; and finally, those who are pro-government in their political persuasion. From the foregoing, it is clear that social media platforms have provided a viable platform for political activism in Kenya and consequently this has revolutionised how the politics of protest are conducted in Kenya. This bears substantial impact in how social media provides a tool for the political mobilisation of Gen Zs towards active political engagement. Indeed, the findings further affirm the dominance of X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook as the platforms of choice for this political engagement. This is presented in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Preferred Social Media Platforms for Political Activism Among Gen Zs in Kenya

From your observation and awareness of social media based protest, which social media platforms do Gen Zs use for their political protest (you can check as many boxes as possible)?

61 responses



Source: Field data (2025)

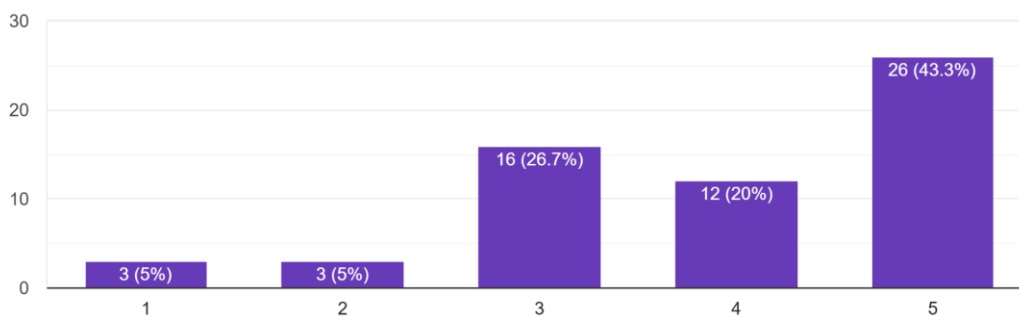
Coming from these findings, it is also clear that there is a high prevalence of the use of pseudo accounts as a way of concealing the true identity of the owners of those social media accounts. 61.7% of the respondents indicated indeed there is a very high prevalence of the resort to use pseudo accounts. This is followed by 31.7% who indicate a low prevalence while 6.7% indicate a low prevalence in their usage. Cumulatively, thus, 93.4% confirm a high usage of these pseudo accounts. This is indicative of the inherent fear that Gen Z activists have for their security particularly with recent reports of a number of these digital activists who have been arrested and others abducted in what has long been suspected to be police led abductions. This has in recent months been confirmed by a former Attorney General of Kenya who also served as a Cabinet Secretary, whose son was abducted by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) and only released at the intervention of the President. This thus adds merit to the fear that Gen Zs have for their security if they come out openly in their digital identity.

In light of the third objective of the study, it was necessary to evaluate the deconstructive capacity of social media in terms of presenting the gender neutrality of political activism. As already pointed out, the high prevalence of the usage of pseudo accounts that do not disclose the real identity of the activists implies the fact that there is an element of gender neutrality. It is difficult to ascertain the gender of online activists and thus political activism indeed becomes genderless. This has scholarly significance since unlike in physical protests where one can demarcate between gender lines among protestors, digital activism on social media platforms is quintessentially genderless. The findings in figure 4 below indeed affirm the difficulty of making gender demarcations in social media activism with 90% of the respondents indicating a medium to high level difficulty in making gender identity from the social media accounts:

Figure 4: Ease of Identification of Gender Identity in Gen Zs Social Media Platforms in Kenya

How easy is it to identify the gender of the owners of these social media accounts?

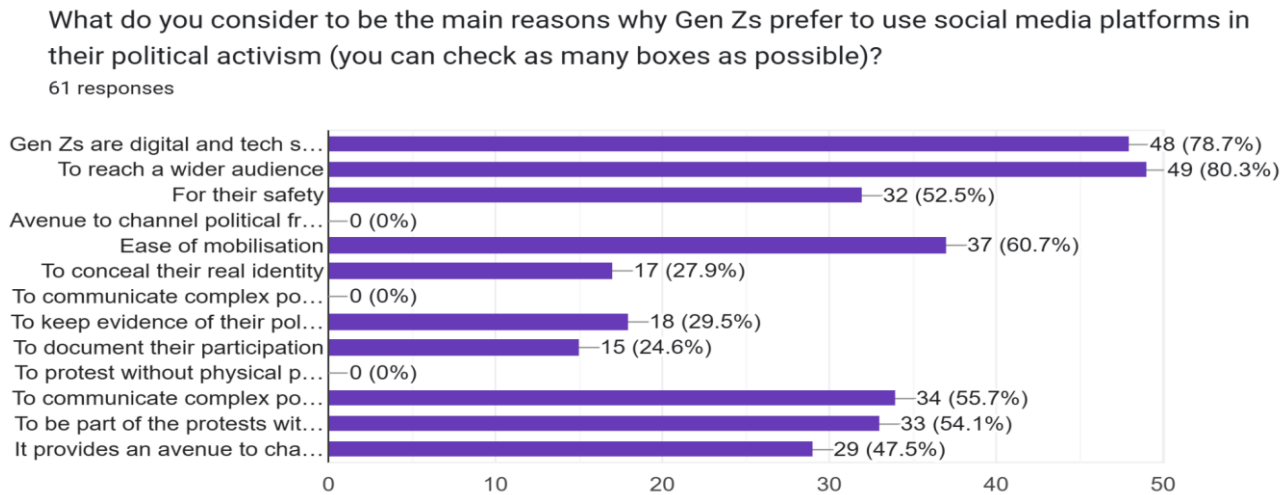
60 responses



Source: Field data (2025)

To further affirm the emerging gender neutrality construct in Kenya’s Gen Zs, protest and political activism, the study sought to find out what the core issues that were leading Gen Zs towards social media activism and protest were. Part of these factors range from the potential of social media to reach a wider audience; the technology savviness of the Gen Zs; ease of mobilising on social media platforms; communicating a complex political message more easily; participating in protests without physical presence as a show of solidarity; and, an avenue to channel political frustrations among others. This is in tandem with findings from the same data showing that 90% of the respondents regard social media as an ideal tool for the framing of anti-government protest messages as compared with 10% of the respondents who disagree. These findings are captured in figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Factors Behind the Use of Social Media for Political Activism



Source: Field data (2025)

To further confirm the emerging construct of an emerging gender neutrality in the political engagements and political activism of Kenyan Gen Zs, the findings show that the most pressing concerns of the protesters have to be issues beyond the interest of a single gender. Respondents pinpointed an array of serious concerns requiring urgent intervention. These include: bad leadership; a high tax burden; high cost of living; political injustices; police brutality; unemployment; economic hardships; killings; abductions of activists; unkept promises given by the administration to the citizenry; dictatorship; a desire to have their voices and protest heard; incompetence of the government; and, government administrative failures. All these have coalesced around the common agenda that the President must relinquish power captured under the collective #RutoMustGo call. All these present genderless concerns and it is plausible that anyone, irrespective of gender who feels the weight of these concerns would rise up in public anger and join the protests. This seems to be defying the agelong political construct that was indicative of the fact that political protest and activism was a male dominated affair. A close scrutiny of videos and photographs referred to for this study indicated that protests, particularly the physical ones, have been attracting both male and female Gen Zs who share in these collective national challenges.

CONCLUSION

This paper captured the reality of how social media is quickly turning into a political tool in the hands of the Gen Z population to engage in political activism in Kenya. This has been translated into a force for political mobilisation, coordination and agitation. It is necessary to observe that this is something that other categories of youths in earlier years have lacked. The Gen Z techizens realised this and they turned it into such a viable asset as has been observed since June 2024. In addition to this, social media has further blurred gender lines between male and female activists. Coupled with the power of social media is the inherent capacity to conduct an identity concealment via the growing use of pseudo accounts that many Gen Zs have resorted to. Social media is therefore presenting new avenues for political activism anchored on digital platforms and this radically shifts how not only politics in Kenya is conducted but also how political activism specifically is undertaken. These platforms have

aided in the framing of political narratives that challenge the status quo and resonate with the Gen Z populace in a way that they best understand each other. This is however to be used with utmost caution due to its higher susceptibility to manipulation, misinformation and disinformation. The paper finds that this will refine the reframing of political messaging towards political communication and changing the prevailing political order in a manner that exemplifies the inherent voices of protest of Gen Zs. This will be transformative as it will introduce a new construct as Kenya moves to the upcoming 2027 political contest where an overwhelming number of Gen Zs are expected to be voting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends a robust rethinking of the socio-political construct emerging from the Gen Zs in terms of the evolutionary realities emerging and how these will shape political expression in this technologically driven space. This has wider implications not only for political stakeholders but also for scholars of Kenyan politics specifically but more generally those who study politics and political movements. It is important for political parties, political strategists and political researchers alike to poignantly observe how politics is getting deconstructed in these times. Old political constructs have to be dismantled and these must allow for a new thinking around how future political protests and political activism will be done. This must however be cautiously done noting that social media based political activism supplements but does not fully replace entirely more traditional approaches towards political activism and political messaging.

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