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## YOUTH ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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### Abstract

*Youth activism has historically played a transformative role in shaping political, social, and cultural change across societies. In the contemporary era, the rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms has significantly altered the landscape of civic engagement, enabling young people to organize, mobilize, and advocate for social change in unprecedented ways. This study examines the dynamics of youth activism in the digital age and explores how digital platforms have reshaped strategies of mobilization, participation, and influence in modern social movements. Drawing on an extensive review of scholarly literature and selected global case studies, the article analyzes the intersection between youth agency, digital communication technologies, and social transformation. Particular attention is given to how social media platforms facilitate networked activism, hashtag campaigns, and the formation of transnational solidarity movements. The study also highlights prominent youth-led movements that have gained international visibility through digital activism, including movements addressing racial justice, climate change, and governance reforms. While digital technologies have expanded opportunities for youth participation in public discourse, the study also identifies several challenges, including digital surveillance, misinformation, online harassment, and the phenomenon of “slacktivism,” where online engagement does not necessarily translate into sustained offline action. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that digital spaces continue to serve as powerful tools for amplifying youth voices, fostering civic consciousness, and influencing policy debates. The article concludes that youth activism in the digital age represents a critical force for democratic engagement and social change, particularly when supported by inclusive digital policies, digital literacy initiatives, and institutional frameworks that encourage meaningful youth participation in governance and development processes.*

**Keywords:** Youth Activism; Digital Media; Social Movements; Civic Engagement; Social Change.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Youth activism has long served as a catalyst for social, political, and cultural transformation across societies. Historically, young people have played significant roles in major movements advocating for civil rights, political reform, environmental protection, and social justice. From student-led movements during the civil rights era to contemporary global campaigns advocating climate action and democratic accountability, youth activism continues to shape public discourse and influence policy decisions (Checkoway, 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2011). The increasing accessibility of digital technologies has further expanded the capacity of young people to organize, communicate, and mobilize collective action beyond traditional geographical and institutional boundaries.

In the contemporary digital era, the emergence of social media platforms and online communication tools has significantly transformed the nature of civic engagement. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok have become essential tools through which youth activists disseminate information, coordinate protests, build networks, and amplify advocacy campaigns. These platforms allow young individuals to participate in public discourse, share experiences, and mobilize support for social causes in ways that were previously limited by traditional media structures (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). The concept of “networked activism” has therefore emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary youth movements, where digital communication enables decentralized and highly adaptive forms of collective action.

The digital transformation of activism has also contributed to the rise of hashtag movements and online advocacy campaigns that transcend national boundaries. Notable examples include the global racial justice movement that gained prominence through online platforms, climate justice campaigns driven largely by youth activists, and various pro-democracy movements that rely heavily on digital communication for organization and mobilization. These movements demonstrate the capacity of digital technologies to facilitate rapid information dissemination and collective mobilization on a global scale (Castells, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

Despite these opportunities, the digitalization of activism also presents several challenges. Governments and powerful institutions increasingly employ digital surveillance, censorship, and online propaganda to control or suppress dissenting voices. In addition, the proliferation of misinformation and the phenomenon of “slacktivism” where individuals engage in minimal online activism without sustained commitment raise questions about the long-term effectiveness of digital activism in achieving structural social change (Morozov, 2011; Gladwell, 2010). Furthermore, inequalities in internet access and digital literacy continue to shape who can effectively participate in digital activism, thereby reproducing certain social and economic disparities in political participation (Norris, 2001).

Nevertheless, youth remain at the forefront of digital activism, leveraging technological tools to challenge existing power structures and advocate for social transformation. The integration of digital communication technologies into activism has enabled young people to construct new forms of political participation that combine online engagement with offline mobilization. Through these mechanisms, youth activism in the digital age has become a

significant driver of social awareness, policy advocacy, and democratic engagement across diverse contexts.

Given the growing importance of youth-led digital movements in shaping contemporary social and political landscapes, there is a need for deeper scholarly examination of how digital platforms influence youth activism and its potential to drive meaningful social change. This article therefore seeks to analyze the evolving relationship between youth activism and digital technologies, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges associated with digital-era social movements. By examining existing literature and selected case studies, the study contributes to broader academic discussions within the fields of sociology, political science, media studies, and development studies regarding the role of youth as agents of social transformation in the digital age.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The emergence of digital technologies and social media platforms has significantly transformed the nature of civic engagement and social mobilization among young people. While youth activism has historically contributed to major social and political transformations, the digital age has introduced new opportunities as well as complex challenges that shape how young people participate in social movements. Digital platforms now serve as critical spaces for political expression, collective identity formation, and the dissemination of information. However, despite the apparent expansion of participatory opportunities, the effectiveness and sustainability of digital activism remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tufekci, 2017).

One major concern relates to the phenomenon of “slacktivism,” a form of online engagement characterized by minimal effort activities such as liking, sharing, or retweeting content without deeper involvement in activism or tangible social action. Critics argue that such superficial participation may create an illusion of political engagement while failing to generate substantial political or institutional change (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011). As a result, questions arise regarding whether digital activism truly strengthens democratic participation or merely substitutes meaningful political action with symbolic gestures.

Another challenge concerns the increasing use of digital surveillance and online censorship by governments and powerful institutions. In many contexts, state authorities monitor social media platforms and online networks to identify, control, or suppress dissenting voices. Such practices may discourage youth participation in digital activism due to fears of surveillance, legal repercussions, or political repression (Castells, 2015). Additionally, algorithmic control of information flows on digital platforms can influence which narratives gain visibility, thereby shaping public opinion and the trajectory of social movements (Fuchs, 2017).

Furthermore, the digital divide remains a persistent issue affecting youth participation in online activism. Inequalities in access to internet infrastructure, digital devices, and technological literacy continue to limit the ability of many young people—particularly those in developing regions—to participate effectively in digital civic engagement (Norris, 2001; van Dijk, 2020). These disparities may reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities in political participation and representation.

Despite the increasing visibility of youth-led digital movements across the globe, there is still limited comprehensive analysis of how digital platforms shape the strategies, effectiveness, and long-

term impacts of youth activism. Much of the existing research focuses on isolated case studies of specific movements rather than providing a broader analytical understanding of the structural dynamics linking youth activism, digital communication technologies, and social change.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the need to critically examine the evolving relationship between youth activism and digital technologies, with particular attention to the opportunities, limitations, and societal implications of digital-era activism. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing the role of young people as agents of social transformation and for developing policies and institutional frameworks that support meaningful youth participation in democratic processes.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of youth activism in promoting social change within the context of the digital age. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the ways in which digital technologies and social media platforms facilitate youth activism and civic engagement.
2. To examine the role of youth-led digital movements in influencing social, political, and cultural change.
3. To identify the opportunities created by digital platforms for youth participation in social movements.
4. To explore the challenges and limitations associated with digital activism among young people.
5. To assess the broader implications of youth digital activism for democratic participation and policy development.

### 1.4 Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do digital platforms influence the nature and strategies of youth activism?
2. What role do youth-led digital movements play in shaping social and political change?
3. What opportunities do digital technologies provide for youth participation in civic engagement?
4. What challenges and barriers affect the effectiveness of digital youth activism?
5. How can digital activism contribute to sustainable social transformation in contemporary societies?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on youth political participation and digital activism by providing a comprehensive analysis of how digital technologies shape contemporary social movements. As digital communication increasingly becomes central to civic engagement, understanding the dynamics of youth activism in digital spaces is essential for scholars in the fields of sociology, political science, communication studies, and development studies (Loader et al., 2014).

Second, the study provides insights that are valuable for policymakers and governance institutions seeking to promote inclusive democratic participation. Young people represent a substantial proportion of the global population, and their engagement in civic processes is critical for the sustainability of democratic systems. By examining how digital platforms enable youth participation, the study offers recommendations for policies that support youth empowerment and digital civic engagement (Checkoway, 2011).

Third, the study highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with digital activism, thereby informing strategies for civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and educational institutions that seek to engage young people in social change initiatives. Understanding the mechanisms through which youth mobilize online can enhance the effectiveness of advocacy campaigns and promote more inclusive participation in social movements.

Finally, the research contributes to broader debates about the role of digital technologies in shaping contemporary societies. As digital media continue to influence political communication, public opinion, and social mobilization, analyzing youth activism within this context provides valuable insights into the future of civic engagement and democratic participation in the digital age.

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

A clear understanding of the key concepts used in this study is necessary in order to situate the discussion within the broader academic discourse on activism, digital communication, and social transformation. The major concepts central to this study include youth, activism, digital activism, and social change.

### 2.1 Youth

The concept of youth is often defined differently across disciplines, cultures, and policy frameworks. Generally, youth refers to a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood characterized by significant social, psychological, and economic development. According to the United Nations, youth are typically defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, although some national and regional contexts extend the definition to include individuals up to 35 years of age. Youth are widely recognized as an important demographic group with significant potential to influence social and political transformation (Checkoway, 2011).

Scholars argue that youth represent a critical force for innovation, social change, and democratic participation because they often possess the creativity, energy, and willingness to challenge established norms and structures (Loader et al., 2014). In many societies, young people have historically been at the forefront of major social movements, advocating for reforms related to civil rights, democracy, environmental protection, and social justice. In the digital age, youth have become particularly influential due to their familiarity with emerging technologies and their active participation in online communication networks.

### 2.2 Activism

Activism refers to deliberate actions taken by individuals or groups to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change. Traditionally, activism has involved activities such as protests, demonstrations, strikes, petitions, and advocacy campaigns aimed at influencing public policy or social norms (Tarrow, 2011). Social movements often rely on activism as

a means of mobilizing collective action and raising awareness about societal issues.

Activism can occur in various forms, including political activism, environmental activism, human rights advocacy, and community-based activism. These activities often involve organized efforts by individuals or groups seeking to challenge existing power structures or promote alternative social arrangements (Castells, 2015). In contemporary society, activism has increasingly shifted from purely physical forms of mobilization to hybrid forms that combine offline engagement with digital communication strategies.

### 2.3 Digital Activism

Digital activism refers to the use of digital technologies, including the internet, social media platforms, mobile communication tools, and online networks, to promote social or political causes. It encompasses a wide range of activities such as online campaigns, hashtag movements, digital petitions, and virtual protests aimed at influencing public opinion or policy outcomes (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

The growth of digital activism has been closely linked to the expansion of social media platforms that enable rapid communication and information sharing among large audiences. Through these platforms, activists can mobilize supporters, coordinate protests, and disseminate alternative narratives that challenge dominant media narratives (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Digital activism is often characterized by its decentralized and networked structure. Unlike traditional social movements that rely on hierarchical leadership structures, digital activism frequently operates through loosely connected networks of participants who collaborate through online platforms. This form of activism has been described as networked or connective action, where individuals engage in collective action through personalized forms of communication facilitated by digital media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

### 2.4 Social Change

Social change refers to significant alterations in social structures, cultural norms, institutions, or patterns of social relationships within a society over time. These changes may occur gradually or rapidly and can be influenced by various factors including technological innovation, economic transformation, political reform, and social movements (Giddens, Sutton, & Duneier, 2018).

Social movements and activism have historically played crucial roles in driving social change by challenging established power structures and advocating for new forms of social organization. In the digital age, the mechanisms through which social change occurs are increasingly influenced by digital communication technologies that enable rapid dissemination of information and collective mobilization across geographical boundaries (Castells, 2015).

Digital platforms provide spaces where individuals can express grievances, organize campaigns, and build solidarity networks that contribute to broader processes of social transformation. However, the extent to which digital activism leads to sustained structural change remains a topic of scholarly debate, as some critics argue that online engagement may not always translate into long-term institutional reforms (Morozov, 2011).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide the analytical foundation for understanding the relationship between youth activism, digital communication technologies, and social change. This study draws on several complementary theories that explain how social movements emerge, mobilize resources, and influence societal transformation.

### 3.1 Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource Mobilization Theory emerged in the 1970s as a major framework for analyzing social movements. The theory argues that the success of social movements depends largely on their ability to acquire and effectively utilize resources such as funding, leadership, communication networks, and organizational capacity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

According to this perspective, activism is not merely a spontaneous reaction to social grievances but rather a strategic process involving the mobilization of available resources to achieve collective goals. Digital technologies have significantly enhanced the capacity of youth activists to mobilize resources by enabling rapid communication, fundraising, and network-building through online platforms (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

For example, social media platforms allow activists to disseminate information widely, recruit supporters, and coordinate collective action without the need for traditional organizational structures. This has reduced many of the logistical barriers that historically limited the ability of grassroots movements to mobilize effectively.

### 3.2 Political Opportunity Theory

Political Opportunity Theory emphasizes the importance of political environments and institutional structures in shaping the emergence and success of social movements. The theory suggests that social movements are more likely to develop and succeed when political systems provide opportunities for participation or when existing institutions show signs of vulnerability (Tarrow, 2011).

In the context of youth activism, digital technologies can expand political opportunities by providing alternative spaces for political expression and mobilization. Online platforms allow activists to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as state-controlled media or political elites, thereby increasing the visibility of social movements and enabling broader participation in public discourse (Castells, 2015).

### 3.3 Networked Public Sphere Theory

The concept of the networked public sphere, developed within digital media studies, describes how digital communication technologies create new spaces for public debate and civic engagement. In this environment, individuals can participate in political discussions, share information, and influence public opinion through decentralized communication networks (Benkler, 2006).

Digital platforms enable youth activists to challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalized voices, and create alternative channels of communication that support social movements. These digital spaces facilitate the formation of online communities and solidarity networks that can mobilize collective action across national boundaries.

### 3.4 Connective Action Theory

Connective Action Theory provides a contemporary explanation for the rise of digitally enabled social movements. The theory argues that digital media allow individuals to participate in

collective action through personalized communication and loosely connected networks rather than through formal organizational structures (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Unlike traditional collective action models that rely on centralized leadership and formal membership, connective action is characterized by flexible and decentralized participation. Individuals can contribute to social movements by sharing information, expressing support, or engaging in advocacy through digital platforms.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for understanding youth activism in the digital age because young people often engage in political participation through online networks rather than traditional political institutions.

## 4. Literature Review

The literature on youth activism and social change has expanded significantly in recent decades, particularly with the rise of digital technologies that have transformed patterns of civic engagement and political participation. Scholars across sociology, political science, media studies, and communication studies have examined how young people engage with social movements and how digital platforms have reshaped the dynamics of activism. This section reviews key scholarly contributions related to the historical evolution of youth activism, the emergence of digital activism, the relationship between youth and political participation, the role of social media in protest movements, and the structural challenges that influence digital activism.

### 4.1 Historical Evolution of Youth Activism

Youth activism has long been a powerful force in shaping social and political change across societies. Historically, young people have been central participants in movements advocating for civil rights, democratic reforms, educational transformation, and social justice. Scholars note that youth movements gained significant global visibility during the twentieth century, particularly during the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and student protests in Europe and Asia (Tarrow, 2011).

Youth activism is often driven by the desire to challenge existing power structures and advocate for progressive change. According to Checkoway (2011), young people possess unique capacities for social mobilization because they are often more open to innovation and less constrained by traditional political structures. Their involvement in activism reflects both their aspirations for societal transformation and their responses to perceived social injustices.

In many societies, universities and educational institutions have historically served as key centers for youth activism. Student movements have often functioned as platforms for political awareness and collective mobilization. For example, student-led protests during the 1960s in various parts of the world played significant roles in shaping debates about democracy, civil rights, and social equality (Castells, 2015). These historical experiences demonstrate that youth activism has consistently served as an important catalyst for broader societal transformations.

### 4.2 Emergence of Digital Activism

The development of the internet and digital communication technologies has profoundly transformed the nature of activism. The concept of digital activism refers to the use of online platforms and digital tools to organize, mobilize, and advocate for social or political change. Scholars argue that digital technologies have

significantly lowered the barriers to participation in activism by enabling individuals to communicate, coordinate actions, and share information rapidly and widely (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Digital activism is often characterized by its decentralized structure, rapid dissemination of information, and ability to mobilize large numbers of participants across geographical boundaries. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2013), digital communication networks facilitate a form of collective action known as connective action, in which individuals engage in activism through personalized forms of communication rather than through formal organizational structures.

The emergence of social media platforms has further strengthened digital activism by providing accessible spaces for public discourse and political expression. Online platforms allow activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and communicate directly with global audiences. As a result, digital activism has become a prominent feature of contemporary social movements.

### 4.3 Youth and Political Participation in the Digital Age

Political participation among young people has traditionally been measured through activities such as voting, party membership, and participation in formal political institutions. However, many scholars argue that youth participation in traditional political processes has declined in several democratic societies, leading to concerns about political disengagement among younger generations (Loader et al., 2014).

Despite this perceived decline in conventional forms of participation, research indicates that young people remain highly engaged in alternative forms of political expression, particularly through digital platforms. Online spaces provide opportunities for youth to engage in discussions about political issues, organize advocacy campaigns, and express their views on matters affecting their communities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Digital technologies therefore enable new forms of civic engagement that complement or sometimes replace traditional modes of participation. Through blogs, online forums, and social media platforms, young people can share information, mobilize supporters, and influence public discourse. This transformation has led scholars to describe contemporary youth participation as a form of **networked citizenship**, where individuals engage in political life through digitally mediated communication networks (Castells, 2015).

### 4.4 Social Media and Protest Movements

Social media platforms have played a crucial role in facilitating contemporary protest movements around the world. These platforms provide tools for activists to coordinate demonstrations, disseminate information, and mobilize support for social causes. Scholars have documented numerous instances where digital communication has contributed to the rapid spread of protest movements and increased public awareness of social injustices (Tufekci, 2017).

For instance, online platforms have been used to organize large-scale demonstrations, share real-time information during protests, and document instances of state repression. Social media also enables activists to frame narratives about social issues and challenge official accounts presented by governments or traditional media organizations.

Research has shown that the integration of digital communication into activism has enhanced the ability of social movements to

mobilize supporters and sustain momentum over time. However, scholars also caution that digital activism alone may not be sufficient to achieve lasting institutional change without complementary offline strategies (Gladwell, 2010).

#### 4.5 Digital Divide and Inequality

While digital technologies have expanded opportunities for civic engagement, they have also introduced new forms of inequality related to access to digital resources. The concept of the digital divide refers to disparities in access to internet infrastructure, digital devices, and technological skills across different populations (Norris, 2001).

These inequalities can significantly influence the ability of young people to participate in digital activism. Youth in urban areas with reliable internet access and advanced technological infrastructure are more likely to engage in online activism than those in rural or economically disadvantaged regions. Additionally, variations in digital literacy can affect how effectively individuals use digital platforms for advocacy and political communication (van Dijk, 2020).

The persistence of the digital divide raises important questions about the inclusiveness of digital activism and whether it truly represents the voices of all segments of society. Addressing these inequalities is therefore essential for ensuring that digital civic engagement remains accessible and representative.

#### 4.6 Gaps in Existing Literature

Although a substantial body of research has examined digital activism and youth participation in social movements, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, many studies focus primarily on high-profile movements in Western contexts, leaving limited attention to youth activism in developing regions where socio-political dynamics may differ significantly.

Second, existing research often examines individual case studies of specific social movements without providing broader comparative analyses that explore the structural factors influencing digital activism across different societies. Such comparative approaches are necessary for understanding how cultural, political, and economic contexts shape youth participation in digital activism.

Third, the long-term impacts of digital activism on policy change and institutional reform remain underexplored. While digital platforms have clearly facilitated mobilization and awareness-raising, there is still limited empirical evidence regarding the extent to which digital activism leads to sustained social transformation.

Addressing these gaps is important for advancing scholarly understanding of youth activism in the digital age. This study therefore seeks to contribute to the literature by examining the relationship between digital technologies and youth activism within a broader analytical framework that considers both the opportunities and challenges associated with digital civic engagement.

## 5. Methodology

The methodology section outlines the research design, data sources, data collection techniques, analytical procedures, and ethical considerations adopted in this study. Since this article seeks to examine the relationship between youth activism and social change in the digital age, the study adopts a qualitative research approach supported by an extensive review of relevant scholarly literature and selected case studies of youth-led digital movements.

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies influence youth activism and the broader processes of social transformation.

### 5.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design based primarily on systematic literature review and conceptual analysis. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining social phenomena that involve complex interactions between individuals, institutions, and technological systems. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research allows researchers to explore social behaviors, experiences, and meanings within their broader social contexts.

The research design integrates insights from existing academic literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies related to youth activism, digital communication, and social movements. By synthesizing these diverse sources, the study aims to develop a comprehensive analytical framework that explains how digital technologies influence youth participation in social change initiatives.

### 5.2 Data Sources

The study relies primarily on secondary data sources, which include peer-reviewed academic articles, scholarly books, policy reports, and reputable institutional publications. These sources provide empirical evidence and theoretical insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of youth activism in the digital era.

Academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus-indexed journals, and other open-access repositories were consulted in identifying relevant literature. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to key themes such as digital activism, social media and political participation, youth engagement in social movements, and the impact of digital technologies on democratic processes.

In addition to scholarly literature, reports and publications from international organizations such as the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the World Bank were examined to provide contextual information on youth participation and digital inclusion across different regions of the world.

### 5.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study involved a systematic search and selection of relevant literature based on predetermined criteria. Key search terms included “youth activism,” “digital activism,” “social media and political participation,” “online social movements,” and “digital civic engagement.”

The literature selection process focused on sources published within the past two decades in order to capture recent developments in digital activism and youth engagement. However, foundational theoretical works on social movements and activism were also included to provide historical and conceptual context.

Case studies of notable youth-led digital movements were also examined in order to illustrate how digital technologies facilitate mobilization and advocacy. These case studies provide empirical examples that demonstrate the practical application of theoretical concepts discussed in the study.

### 5.4 Data Analysis Methods

The study utilizes thematic analysis as its primary analytical method. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and

interpreting recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis allows researchers to organize complex information into meaningful categories that facilitate deeper understanding of social phenomena.

In this study, the literature and case study materials were analyzed to identify key themes related to youth activism in the digital age. These themes include digital mobilization, networked activism, political participation, challenges of digital engagement, and the impact of online movements on social change.

The analysis also involved comparing findings from different scholarly sources in order to identify areas of consensus, debate, and gaps in existing research. This approach enables the study to provide a balanced and comprehensive interpretation of the relationship between digital technologies and youth activism.

### 5.5 Ethical Considerations

Although this research relies primarily on secondary data, ethical considerations remain important in ensuring academic integrity and responsible scholarship. All sources used in the study are properly acknowledged through in-text citations and referenced in accordance with APA referencing style.

The study also ensures that information derived from digital platforms or case studies is presented responsibly and without misrepresentation. Where examples of social movements are discussed, care is taken to rely on verified scholarly sources and credible reports rather than unverified online content.

Furthermore, the research adheres to principles of transparency and academic rigor by clearly documenting the sources of information and the analytical procedures used in the study. This approach enhances the reliability and credibility of the research findings.

## 6. Youth Activism in the Digital Age

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed the ways in which social movements emerge, mobilize, and sustain momentum. Youth, often considered the most technologically literate segment of society, have become central actors in these transformations. The digital age has enabled young people to participate in activism through online networks, social media platforms, and digital communication tools that facilitate rapid dissemination of information and collective mobilization across geographic boundaries. Scholars increasingly argue that digital technologies have reshaped the structure of activism by enabling decentralized, network-based forms of engagement that empower individuals and communities to challenge social and political injustices (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2015).

Digital platforms provide spaces where young people can articulate grievances, organize campaigns, and mobilize support for various social causes. Unlike traditional activism that often required formal organizational structures, digital activism allows individuals to participate in collective action through flexible and loosely connected networks. These digital environments have therefore created new opportunities for civic engagement while also redefining the relationship between activism, communication, and social change.

### 6.1 Digital Platforms and Political Mobilization

Digital platforms have become critical tools for political mobilization and civic engagement among young people. Social

media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok enable activists to disseminate information, coordinate protests, and raise awareness about social issues in real time. These platforms allow users to reach large audiences quickly, thereby enhancing the visibility and impact of social movements (Loader et al., 2014).

One of the key advantages of digital platforms is their ability to facilitate horizontal communication among participants. Traditional media systems often relied on centralized control over information flows, which limited the ability of activists to communicate directly with the public. In contrast, digital platforms allow activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and engage directly with audiences through user-generated content and interactive communication (Castells, 2015).

Furthermore, digital platforms enable rapid mobilization during moments of political crisis or social unrest. Activists can organize demonstrations, coordinate logistics, and share updates with participants in real time. This capacity for rapid mobilization has been evident in numerous social movements around the world, where online communication has played a crucial role in organizing large-scale protests and advocacy campaigns (Tufekci, 2017).

However, while digital platforms offer significant opportunities for mobilization, they also present challenges. The algorithms that govern content visibility on social media platforms can influence which issues gain public attention, potentially shaping the trajectory of social movements. Additionally, the spread of misinformation and propaganda can undermine the credibility of activism and complicate efforts to build public support for social causes (Fuchs, 2017).

### 6.2 Hashtag Activism and Online Campaigns

One of the most distinctive features of digital activism is the emergence of hashtag activism, where social media users employ hashtags to organize conversations, mobilize supporters, and raise awareness about social issues. Hashtags serve as digital markers that connect individual posts to broader campaigns, allowing users to easily locate and participate in discussions related to specific causes (Yang, 2016).

Hashtag activism has become an effective tool for amplifying marginalized voices and drawing global attention to social injustices. Through the use of hashtags, activists can create viral campaigns that generate widespread public engagement and media coverage. These campaigns often transcend national boundaries, enabling individuals from different regions to express solidarity with social movements and contribute to global advocacy efforts (Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020).

The success of hashtag campaigns often depends on the ability of activists to frame issues in ways that resonate with broader audiences. Effective digital campaigns typically combine emotional storytelling, visual media, and strategic messaging to attract attention and encourage participation. As a result, hashtag activism has become an important mechanism for shaping public discourse and influencing societal attitudes toward various social issues.

### 6.3 Digital Communities and Collective Identity

Digital activism is also closely associated with the formation of online communities that foster collective identity and solidarity among participants. These digital communities provide spaces

where individuals can share experiences, exchange information, and develop a shared understanding of social issues. The formation of collective identity is a crucial component of social movements because it strengthens participants' sense of belonging and commitment to a common cause (Castells, 2015).

Online platforms enable activists to connect with like-minded individuals across geographical boundaries, thereby expanding the reach of social movements. Through discussion forums, social media groups, and online networks, youth activists can collaborate on advocacy campaigns, share resources, and coordinate collective action. These digital communities often function as support networks that sustain activism over time by fostering mutual encouragement and solidarity among participants.

Moreover, digital communities can facilitate the emergence of transnational movements that address global issues such as climate change, human rights, and social justice. By connecting activists from different regions, digital platforms enable the exchange of ideas and strategies that strengthen the effectiveness of social movements.

#### **6.4 Role of Influencers and Citizen Journalism**

Another important dimension of youth activism in the digital age is the growing influence of social media influencers and citizen journalists. Influencers—individuals with large online followings—often play significant roles in raising awareness about social issues and mobilizing public support for activism campaigns. Their ability to reach wide audiences enables them to shape public opinion and amplify the messages of social movements (Abidin, 2018).

Citizen journalism has also become an important component of digital activism. Through smartphones and social media platforms, ordinary individuals can document events, share real-time information, and provide alternative perspectives on social issues. This form of grassroots reporting has become particularly significant in contexts where traditional media outlets may be restricted or influenced by political interests (Allan, 2013).

Citizen journalists often play crucial roles during protests and social movements by documenting events and sharing information with global audiences. Their contributions help to increase transparency and accountability by exposing instances of injustice or abuse of power. However, the rise of citizen journalism also raises questions about the accuracy and verification of information shared online, highlighting the need for responsible digital communication practices.

## **7. Case Studies of Youth Digital Activism**

The growing influence of digital technologies in contemporary activism can be better understood through empirical examples of youth-led movements that have utilized online platforms to mobilize support and advocate for social change. Across different regions of the world, young activists have leveraged digital communication tools to organize campaigns, raise awareness, and challenge social and political injustices. This section examines selected case studies of digital activism to illustrate how youth engagement in online spaces contributes to broader processes of social transformation.

### **7.1 The #EndSARS Movement in Nigeria**

One of the most prominent examples of youth-led digital activism in recent years is the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria. The movement emerged as a response to widespread allegations of police brutality and human rights abuses by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force established to combat violent crime. Over time, numerous reports and testimonies from citizens—particularly young Nigerians—highlighted cases of harassment, extortion, unlawful detention, and extrajudicial violence associated with the unit (Amnesty International, 2020).

The #EndSARS movement gained momentum in October 2020 when young Nigerians began using social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to share personal experiences and document incidents of police brutality. The hashtag #EndSARS quickly went viral, attracting global attention and mobilizing widespread participation both online and offline. Through digital platforms, activists coordinated nationwide protests, organized fundraising efforts, and disseminated real-time updates about events occurring during demonstrations (Iwilade, 2021).

Digital activism played a crucial role in sustaining the movement. Online networks enabled protesters to mobilize resources, coordinate logistics, and communicate with supporters across the country and abroad. The movement also benefited from international solidarity as activists from different parts of the world amplified the campaign through social media. Despite facing government restrictions, including temporary attempts to regulate online communication and financial flows associated with the protests, the movement demonstrated the significant potential of digital platforms to empower youth activism and influence national conversations about governance and accountability (Obadare, 2021).

### **7.2 Global Youth Climate Activism**

Another significant example of youth activism in the digital age is the global climate justice movement led by young environmental activists. The movement gained international visibility through the efforts of Greta Thunberg, a Swedish activist who initiated the “school strike for climate” movement in 2018. Her activism inspired millions of young people around the world to participate in climate strikes and advocacy campaigns demanding stronger action from governments to address climate change.

Through social media platforms, climate activists have organized large-scale demonstrations and coordinated international campaigns such as the Fridays for Future movement. Digital communication tools have allowed activists to share scientific information about climate change, mobilize supporters, and pressure policymakers to adopt more sustainable environmental policies (Fisher, 2019).

The climate movement illustrates how digital activism can facilitate the emergence of transnational social movements. Young activists from different countries collaborate through online networks, exchange strategies, and build solidarity across cultural and political boundaries. These digital interactions strengthen the global reach of climate activism and highlight the role of youth as influential actors in shaping environmental governance.

### **7.3 The Black Lives Matter Movement**

The Black Lives Matter movement represents another influential example of digital activism driven largely by youth participation. The movement originated in the United States following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the 2013 shooting of Trayvon

Martin. The phrase “Black Lives Matter” quickly evolved into a powerful slogan used by activists advocating for racial justice and police accountability (Taylor, 2016).

Social media played a central role in the expansion of the movement by enabling activists to document incidents of police violence and share them widely with global audiences. Hashtags associated with the movement facilitated widespread online discussions and mobilized public support for protests and advocacy campaigns. During major protests following incidents of police violence, digital platforms were used to coordinate demonstrations, share information about protest locations, and provide real-time updates to participants (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018).

The movement illustrates how digital activism can reshape public discourse and bring attention to systemic inequalities. By leveraging social media platforms, activists were able to challenge dominant narratives and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. The global spread of the movement further demonstrates the capacity of digital networks to facilitate solidarity across national boundaries.

#### **7.4 Youth-Led Pro-Democracy Movements**

In many parts of the world, youth activists have utilized digital platforms to advocate for democratic reforms and political accountability. In countries where traditional media may be restricted or heavily regulated, digital communication tools provide alternative channels for political expression and mobilization. Online platforms allow activists to organize protests, share information about political developments, and engage in public debates about governance and human rights (Tufekci, 2017).

Digital activism has played a significant role in several pro-democracy movements across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In these contexts, youth activists often rely on encrypted messaging applications and social media platforms to coordinate demonstrations and disseminate information about government policies or human rights concerns. These digital networks enable activists to circumvent censorship and maintain communication even in politically restrictive environments.

However, pro-democracy movements also face significant challenges, including government surveillance, internet shutdowns, and legal restrictions on online expression. Despite these obstacles, youth activists continue to utilize digital tools creatively to advocate for political reform and democratic governance. Their efforts demonstrate the resilience and adaptability of youth activism in the digital age.

## **8. Impacts of Youth Digital Activism**

Youth digital activism has increasingly demonstrated its capacity to influence social, political, and cultural landscapes. By leveraging online platforms, young people are able to raise awareness, mobilize supporters, challenge traditional power structures, and contribute to social transformation. While the effectiveness of digital activism is sometimes contested, empirical evidence suggests that youth engagement in online civic spaces has meaningful implications for public discourse, policy advocacy, and democratic participation.

### **8.1 Influence on Public Policy**

Youth activism in the digital age has shown the potential to influence policy debates and decisions at both national and international levels. Digital platforms allow young activists to draw attention to social grievances, organize collective action, and

communicate demands directly to policymakers. For example, the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria forced national conversations on police reform, ultimately leading the government to announce the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (Amnesty International, 2020; Iwilade, 2021). Similarly, global climate activism campaigns, such as Fridays for Future, have pressured governments and international institutions to adopt more ambitious environmental policies and commitments (Fisher, 2019).

By providing a visible space for advocacy and mobilization, digital activism strengthens the leverage of youth in influencing policy priorities. Policymakers increasingly recognize that ignoring digitally mobilized youth movements can lead to reputational risks, public backlash, or international criticism. Digital activism, therefore, functions not only as a tool of awareness but also as a mechanism for holding institutions accountable.

### **8.2 Social Awareness and Agenda Setting**

One of the most significant contributions of youth digital activism is its role in shaping public awareness and setting societal agendas. Online platforms amplify voices that might otherwise be marginalized, allowing young activists to highlight social injustices, systemic inequalities, and human rights violations (Castells, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

Hashtag activism, viral campaigns, and social media storytelling serve as mechanisms for educating the public, influencing social discourse, and challenging dominant narratives. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement utilized social media to document incidents of racial violence and foster widespread discussions on structural racism (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018). By framing issues in accessible and emotionally resonant ways, youth digital activists are able to engage both local and global audiences in meaningful dialogue.

### **8.3 Cultural and Societal Transformation**

Youth digital activism contributes to broader cultural and societal transformation by challenging traditional norms and promoting progressive social values. Online spaces enable youth to advocate for equality, inclusion, gender justice, environmental sustainability, and other social causes, influencing both cultural perceptions and everyday practices (Loader et al., 2014).

Digital campaigns often catalyze offline behavior change, such as increased participation in civic initiatives, volunteerism, or advocacy projects. By normalizing digital engagement as a form of civic responsibility, youth activism fosters a culture of participatory citizenship and social accountability. Furthermore, transnational digital activism has facilitated the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, enabling young people to learn from global movements and adapt strategies to their local contexts (Yang, 2016).

### **8.4 Democratic Participation**

Youth digital activism has significant implications for democratic engagement. In many contexts, traditional forms of political participation among youth, such as voting or party membership, have declined. Digital platforms provide alternative avenues for meaningful engagement, allowing young people to express political opinions, organize campaigns, and participate in public debates (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Digital activism strengthens the democratic process by expanding the inclusivity of civic participation. Individuals who might face barriers to conventional political participation—such as women,

marginalized groups, or youth in restrictive political environments—can use online platforms to influence decision-making and advocate for reform. By fostering civic consciousness and encouraging collective action, youth digital activism contributes to the development of more participatory and accountable governance systems (Castells, 2015; Checkoway, 2011).

### 8.5 Challenges in Translating Online Engagement to Offline Change

Despite these positive impacts, it is important to recognize that digital activism does not automatically lead to tangible societal transformation. Scholars highlight the phenomenon of “slacktivism,” where online engagement—such as liking, sharing, or tweeting—does not necessarily translate into sustained offline action (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011).

Additionally, the influence of algorithms, digital censorship, online harassment, and surveillance can limit the effectiveness of digital activism (Fuchs, 2017). Structural inequalities in internet access and digital literacy further constrain the capacity of some youth populations to engage meaningfully in digital activism (van Dijk, 2020). Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the impact of youth digital engagement on social, political, and cultural change.

## 9. Discussion

The findings from the literature review, theoretical frameworks, and case studies collectively illustrate the transformative potential of youth activism in the digital age. This discussion synthesizes the insights gained from previous sections, emphasizing how digital technologies have reshaped youth engagement, the mechanisms through which social change occurs, and the persistent challenges that limit the effectiveness of digital activism.

### 9.1 Digital Technologies as Catalysts for Youth Engagement

Digital technologies have fundamentally altered the landscape of youth activism by providing platforms that enhance communication, coordination, and visibility. The networked structure of social media enables youth to engage in connective action, where participation does not require formal organizational membership but rather relies on decentralized and personalized engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

The case studies of #EndSARS, global climate activism, and Black Lives Matter illustrate that digital platforms allow young people to circumvent traditional gatekeepers such as mainstream media or political institutions. By enabling rapid dissemination of information, digital technologies facilitate the mobilization of large numbers of participants in a short period of time (Castells, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

Furthermore, these platforms empower youth to shape narratives and frame issues in ways that resonate with both local and global audiences. For example, the strategic use of hashtags (#EndSARS, #FridaysForFuture, #BlackLivesMatter) enables youth activists to create cohesive campaigns that connect individuals across geographic boundaries and amplify marginalized voices (Yang, 2016; Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020).

### 9.2 Mechanisms of Social Change

Youth digital activism contributes to social change through multiple mechanisms, including agenda-setting, public awareness, cultural transformation, and policy influence. Online platforms

allow young people to highlight social injustices, document events, and challenge existing power structures. This aligns with the principles of Resource Mobilization Theory, which emphasizes the importance of mobilizing resources—information, networks, and digital tools—for collective action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Moreover, digital activism fosters collective identity by connecting youth with shared interests and social goals. Online communities provide spaces for collaboration, learning, and mutual reinforcement, thereby sustaining movements over time (Castells, 2015). The sense of belonging generated through digital networks strengthens commitment to social causes and encourages continued participation in both online and offline activities.

The ability of digital activism to influence public policy is evident in the outcomes of movements such as #EndSARS and Fridays for Future. While the extent of tangible change may vary, these movements demonstrate that digital engagement can exert pressure on governments, prompt institutional responses, and contribute to policy debates (Amnesty International, 2020; Fisher, 2019).

### 9.3 Challenges and Limitations

Despite the opportunities afforded by digital technologies, several challenges limit the effectiveness of youth digital activism. Slacktivism remains a concern, as low-effort online engagement may create the perception of participation without meaningful offline action (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011).

Digital inequalities also hinder full participation. Access to reliable internet, digital literacy, and technological resources are not uniformly distributed, particularly in developing regions (van Dijk, 2020). This digital divide restricts the ability of certain youth populations to contribute to or benefit from digital activism.

Additionally, online surveillance, algorithmic manipulation, and censorship pose threats to the integrity of digital activism. Governments and private platforms may limit visibility of activist content or monitor participants, creating risks for youth engagement (Fuchs, 2017). These structural constraints underscore the need for supportive policy frameworks and digital literacy initiatives to enhance the effectiveness and safety of youth activism online.

### 9.4 Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings from this study have several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms the applicability of Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Theory, and Connective Action Theory to contemporary youth digital activism. These frameworks collectively explain how resources, political environments, and digital networks interact to facilitate collective action and social change (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tarrow, 2011; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Practically, the study suggests that policymakers, civil society organizations, and educational institutions should recognize the potential of digital platforms to engage youth in meaningful civic participation. Efforts to bridge the digital divide, promote responsible online communication, and safeguard the rights of digital activists are essential for maximizing the positive impact of youth digital activism (Checkoway, 2011; Loader et al., 2014).

In conclusion, youth digital activism represents a powerful force for social change, combining the energy, creativity, and technological literacy of young people with the connectivity and reach of digital platforms. While challenges remain, the evidence

indicates that youth engagement in online spaces can contribute to meaningful societal transformation when supported by appropriate resources, policies, and participatory structures.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 10.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the transformative role of youth activism in the digital age, highlighting the ways in which digital technologies have reshaped patterns of civic engagement, political mobilization, and social change. The findings demonstrate that youth are not merely passive consumers of technology but active agents who leverage digital platforms to challenge social injustices, raise awareness, and influence public policy.

Through a combination of literature review, theoretical analysis, and case studies, the study reveals several key insights:

1. **Digital technologies as enablers** – Social media and online platforms provide youth with accessible, low-barrier tools for activism, allowing decentralized participation and rapid mobilization of supporters (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2015).
2. **Mechanisms of social change** – Youth digital activism influences social awareness, cultural norms, and public policy by amplifying marginalized voices, shaping public discourse, and coordinating collective action across geographic boundaries (Tufekci, 2017; Yang, 2016).
3. **Challenges and limitations** – Despite the potential of digital activism, factors such as slacktivism, the digital divide, censorship, algorithmic bias, and online surveillance can constrain the effectiveness of youth-led movements (Gladwell, 2010; Fuchs, 2017; van Dijk, 2020).
4. **Empirical validation** – Case studies, including the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, global climate activism, and the Black Lives Matter movement, illustrate how youth leverage digital tools to organize campaigns, mobilize supporters, and sustain activism over time, demonstrating the practical significance of theoretical frameworks like Resource Mobilization Theory and Connective Action Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Overall, the study confirms that youth digital activism is a significant driver of social change in contemporary societies. While challenges remain, the combination of technological literacy, creativity, and social consciousness among youth presents opportunities for sustained civic engagement and meaningful societal transformation.

### 10.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of youth digital activism and maximize its contribution to social change:

1. **Promote digital literacy** – Governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations should implement programs to enhance digital literacy among youth, equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate online platforms responsibly, critically assess information, and engage in effective activism.

2. **Bridge the digital divide** – Policymakers must prioritize infrastructure development and affordable access to digital technologies, particularly in marginalized and rural communities, to ensure equitable participation in online civic engagement (van Dijk, 2020).
3. **Strengthen online safety and legal protections** – Governments and digital platforms should establish policies that safeguard youth activists from online harassment, surveillance, and censorship, ensuring a safe environment for digital civic engagement.
4. **Encourage multi-platform engagement** – Activists should combine online and offline strategies to ensure that digital engagement translates into tangible outcomes, such as policy reform, public awareness, and social change (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011).
5. **Foster international collaboration** – Youth movements should leverage global networks to share strategies, resources, and best practices, strengthening the transnational impact of digital activism and promoting cross-cultural solidarity.
6. **Integrate activism into formal education** – Incorporating civic engagement, social responsibility, and digital activism into educational curricula can foster a culture of participatory citizenship and encourage sustained involvement in social change initiatives (Checkoway, 2011; Loader et al., 2014).

In conclusion, youth digital activism represents a transformative force capable of driving social change, enhancing civic participation, and promoting accountability in contemporary societies. By addressing the challenges identified in this study and implementing the recommendations outlined, policymakers, educators, and activists can harness the potential of youth activism in the digital age to build more inclusive, just, and participatory societies.

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