



Role of Historical Political Cultures, State-Society Dynamics and Technological Infrastructure in Shaping Digital Activism

Kusum Thapa¹, Ananta Aryal^{*2}, Chakra Pani Joshi³, Ramesh Khanal⁴

¹MPhil/PhD Scholar, Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University

²MPhil/PhD Scholar, Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University

³MPhil/PhD Scholar, Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University

⁴MPhil/PhD Scholar, Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University

Article Info

Received: 21 Nov. 2025

Reviewed: 10 May 2026

Revised Received: 15 May 2026

Accepted: 22 June 2026

Corresponding Author

Ananta Aryal

aryalfour@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/nsj.v2i1.97190>

Abstract

This study explores digital activism among Generation Z in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Madagascar. This paper discusses historical political cultures, relations between the state and society, and the existing digital infrastructure to understand what drives Generation Z to engage in politically driven digital activism in the global South. The comparative-historical method is used to trace historically and institutionally grounded reasons for the emergence of digitally mediated protest movements. To understand the process of mobilization and politicization of youths in the digital space, the study employed Manuel Castells's concept of networked social movements, the approach of Tilly and Skocpol to the comparative analysis of historical events, and ideas from generational sociologists. This study argued that digital activism cannot be viewed solely through the lens of digital infrastructure and technology. Instead, the historical political cultures and the relationship between state and society are key drivers of the mobilization. By analyzing the literature on the topic and data from archives, protest reports, and digital protest activities on social media, this study shows that these platforms serve as political public spheres for protest. At the same time, social media becomes a tool of surveillance, censorship, and repression of dissidents. Horizontal organizing, skepticism towards institutional organizations, emotional and visual mobilization, and globalized digital solidarity are key aspects of Generation Z activism across all five cases under study. In addition, despite the high disruptive potential of digitally enabled activism, there remains a difficulty in generating structural transformations. Although some protests managed to oust leaders or secure policy concessions, significant structural changes are scarce. Thus, it is concluded that Generation Z activism in the global south context represents a new phase in the development of organizing and participation.

Keywords

comparative historical analysis; digital activism; Generation Z; social movements; state–society relations

Introduction

In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, technology has redefined political participation in the developing economies (Castells, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). The rise of Generation Z activism should not be analyzed only in terms of technological possibilities but placed in the context of politically constituted societies and state-society dynamics. Building on Manuel Castells's (2012) sociological theoretical perspective on networked social movements, this research employs a comparative-historical method of analysis to demonstrate how members of Generation Z use digital media to construct collective identities and contest dominant power dynamics. According to Castells (2012), today's social movements are produced by the 'masses of self-communication,' in which individuals engage in collective identity-making and contest power through digital means. In this regard, this theory proves particularly useful for examining Generation Z digital activism.

Digital activism, however, is not isolated from history. For this reason, the present paper adopts Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA) to address the ahistoricism tendencies prevalent in the study of digital activism (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). CHA enables analysis of how institutional legacies and political culture shape the form contemporary activism takes among youth populations (Skocpol, 1979; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). By identifying key events that culminate in present-day outcomes, CHA sheds light on how prior instances of reform, failed democratization, and authoritarian entrenchment have set the terms for generational mobilization against political disenfranchisement.

From the perspective of sociology and generations, Generation Z is understood as a distinct political generation due to a subjectivity shaped within a digitally mediated environment, exposure to economic precariousness, and a general distrust of established institutions (Mannheim, 1952; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). According to scholars, today's youth movements rely on less institutionalized means of mobilization, as Bennett and Segerberg (2013) refer to them, "connective action." It involves rapid mobilization through digital networks and emotions generated by memes, live streams, and visual narratives, as well as the building of transnational solidarity around protest actions.

Youth from developing nations have been especially affected by weak democracies and authoritarian states. In addition to an increase in their capabilities for mobilization, there has been an observed trend of growing surveillance and repression by the state towards youth activists. Tufekci (2017) identifies this phenomenon as a paradox of networked activism.

There have been attempts by governments in the Global South to regulate, disrupt, or even challenge digital activism via internet blackouts, disinformation campaigns, and legal coercion (Freedom House, 2023). All of these factors have led to a continuous contest for control over digital citizenship and civic engagement between young activists and their governments.

This research highlights how historical political cultures, interactions between state-society relationships, and technological surroundings interact to influence the nature, methods, and implications of Generation Z digital activism, through the application of Castells' framework of networked social movements, as well as Skocpol's comparative historical analysis and generational sociology.

Background

Social movements led by youth have traditionally been pivotal during times of political disruption in the Global South (Bayat, 2010). Within the past few decades, the Generation Z generation has become a revolutionary agent of change, challenging political regimes that seek to suppress them, democratic regressions, and the dispossession of youth by governments that are exploitative of them. The current generation of youth activists, however, marks a drastic shift from previous generations. While former generations of youth activists have relied on conventional organizational means to engage in political activism, Generation Z activists are products of a world shaped by digital technology and have formed associations through online platforms where political discussion takes place (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Despite their distinctive histories, the five nations under consideration: Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Madagascar are characterized by structural features that allow for youth-led digital activism. Such features include elite control over democratically elected institutions, the consolidation of authoritarian rule, economic vulnerability, and weak civic engagement. In Nepal, there has been extensive democratic exhaustion following the People's Movement, due to broken promises. Bangladesh has seen an authoritarian regime consolidate itself by sealing off all channels of expression through institution-building. The Aragalaya protests in Sri Lanka in 2022 were triggered by an economic disaster. Madagascar is yet to overcome the historical inadequacy of its governmental institutions, while the persistent stifling of democratic engagement in Myanmar can be attributed to military dictatorship. (Tufekci, 2017; Skocpol, 1979).

The digital infrastructure itself is constitutive of the mobilization process among young people. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and

YouTube can be considered alternative public spheres where young activists can plan protests, develop counter-narratives, and reveal government oppression (Castells, 2012). Smartphones play a key role here because, in addition to helping activists organize, they serve as witnesses and symbols of protest against authorities. On the other hand, digital space is also a contested domain because governments tend to filter content, block internet connections, and use surveillance measures (Freedom House, 2023).

From a sociological point of view, such movements are associated with the shift in the dynamics between the state and society. Generation Z does not trust intermediary institutions and would rather adopt more horizontal, informal approaches to organization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Modern political activism is centered not on reforms but on the themes of dignity, responsibility, and social justice. To fully comprehend the phenomenon under consideration, one should take a historical, institutional, and generational perspective.

Statement of the Problem

Although there is considerable research on Generation Z digital activism in the Global South, much of the existing literature suffers from an extreme form of technological determinism, focusing disproportionately on platform affordances or relying on case study frameworks without adequately considering the historical and institutional bases of youth activism (Morozov, 2011; Tufekci, 2017). While some studies have examined the historical legacies of politics, state–society relationships, and digital infrastructures of youth activism in different contexts, limited research has explored how these variables, when coupled together, contribute to Generation Z activism under authoritarian rule and democratic backsliding (Callahan, 2003; Chambers et al., 2024; Imtiyaz, 2025). This study is therefore guided by two central research questions: (1) What historical, institutional, and socio-political conditions have contributed to the rise of Generation Z digital activism in Global South contexts? and (2) How do interactions between historical political cultures, state–society relations, and technological infrastructures influence the forms, strategies, and effectiveness of Generation Z digital mobilization?

The objective of this research is to analyze the ways in which political culture and state society relationships have influenced the emergence of Generation Z digital activism within fragile democratic states and authoritarian regimes in the Global South, using Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA). More specifically, the study examine how the use of technology has increased participation, built identity, mobilized groups, and resisted surveillance and oppression; analyze the history of activism in five different nations to understand how activism has evolved digitally in each context and conduct

a comparative analysis of the impact of state structures and political histories on Generation Z digital activism.

Significance of the Study

The current study makes several significant contributions to the existing literature on digital activism, comparative politics, and generational sociology. First, the research presented here contributes to the field of digital activism research by exploring neglected cases in the Global South, rejecting techno-determinism, and highlighting the crucial roles of political culture and state-society relations in understanding online protests. Second, it makes an important contribution to the existing literature in comparative politics and historical sociology by introducing a unique methodology that demonstrates that CHA is a suitable framework for studying modern social movements in the digital age. Third, it makes a unique contribution to South-South and postcolonial research by identifying common historical legacies (such as colonialism), economic precarity, and digital repression, while uncovering distinct youth mobilization strategies and contesting Eurocentrism in theoretical paradigms (Connell, 2007). At last, theoretically speaking, this paper offers new perspectives by combining Castells' approach to networked social movements with the concepts of generational sociology and CHA. Furthermore, it is relevant from a practical perspective because it provides useful guidance on defending online civic space, promoting youth political engagement, and safeguarding democracy against an authoritarian resurgence.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates its argument with Theda Skocpol's Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA) from her book *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) and Manuel Castells' concept of social movements in the network society (2012). This will be complemented by generational sociology to examine Generation Z's use of digital activism in the Global South. In Skocpol's analysis, she uses a macro-causal perspective to contextualize activist movements, focusing on how the legacies of authoritarianism, failed democratization, structural statehood, and international pressures shape the state-society relationship to influence youth activism in the present. Castells' framework is useful because it conceptualizes contemporary activism as networks of outrage and hope, enabled by digital platforms for horizontal coordination, identity formation, and emotionality, and as hybrid online-offline movements (Castells, 2012).

The sociology of generations, based on theories by Mannheim (1952) and newer theories developed by Edmunds and Turner (2002), emphasizes Generation Z's unique characteristics like nativity to technology, distrust in institutions, and vulnerability

to economic hardships; as factors that make connective action more useful than collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This theoretical chain begins with historical political cultures and state systems (through CHA) before moving on to contemporary state-society relations and technological settings that influence network-based mobilization (through Castells) and determine how Generation Z acts, strategizes, and organizes, resulting in different types of digital activism in five case studies. This historical and dual-core theory views digital activism as an embedded practice shaped by structures and technology.

Research Methodology

This research follows an epistemology of critical interpretation, in which political realities are socially and historically constructed and cannot be viewed as objective or unchanging entities. Social structure, including states, classes, and international inequality, is seen as a product of history that influences human action through power systems within those structures. In epistemology, the philosophy embraces both an interpretative and a reflexive concept of knowledge creation, meaning negotiation processes that occur through human interaction. It attempts to unveil the mechanisms of domination inherent within the structures. This has much in common with the philosophy of critical social science (Habermas, 1971; Calhoun, 1995).

In this regard, CHA is highly suitable for this research as it entails analyzing the role played by structural factors and institutional legacies in the evolution of new kinds of youth activism among Gen Z. It involves unraveling the causal chain that links the structural factors and the phenomenon under investigation in the respective national setting (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

Research Framework: Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA)

In line with Skocpol (1979) and Mahoney & Rueschemeyer (2003), CHA offers a useful framework to analyze the path-dependent historical processes underlying the present-day political consequences. CHA is applied in three principal analytical dimensions: (a) *structural conditions*, where one explores the state, class, and transnational contexts shaping political opportunity structures; (b) *temporal sequences*, where one investigates the process whereby earlier institutions create self-reinforcing mechanisms and path dependencies and possible critical junctures, and (c) *macro-causal explanation*, where institutional combinations are associated with systemic changes.

Using the above framework to understand Generation Z protest enables the study to focus on reactive sequences, i.e., sequences of events in which earlier reforms create contradictions that lead to counter-mobilization. This way, the disappointment in democracy during the 2000s and 2010s in the Global South becomes part of the

historical backdrop to Generation Z protest movements.

Research Design

This study applied the comparative multiple-case design in combination with the CHA approach to examine the impact of historical and institutional legacies on digital-era activism. Five countries have been purposefully chosen as part of the Global South settings for analysis. The common feature of these five cases lies in their distinctive frameworks, such as the prominence of youth in protests, reliance on digital technology for organizing protests, observable political impact, and the availability of academic literature. The use of Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) logic (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) has been made where selected countries (Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Madagascar) differ from each other in terms of regime type, geographic location, and language but have one commonality regarding digitally organized Generation Z protests resulting in political rupture.

Rationale of Case and Country Selection

The case selection procedure used theoretical sampling (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006) rather than statistical sampling. This was done to achieve optimal causal and historical variation while preserving analytical comparability. Each case fulfills the following operational criteria:

Youth Centrality. The principal organizers and communicators must be Generation Z youths.

Digital Centrality. The tools or means of mobilization must be social media platforms (TikTok, Facebook, Telegram, Twitter/X, YouTube).

Political Outcome. Each movement must have resulted in identifiable political effects, such as resignation of the executive or state head, regime instability, or formal institutional reform/response.

Scholarly Documentation. Each case must be covered by peer-reviewed or reliable institutional literature, enabling credible process tracing.

Country Selection

Nepal. The post-2006 republic system was characterized by elite capture and democratic fatigue. Generation Z movements reflect disillusionment with unfulfilled revolutionary promises, weak public delivery systems, and corruption. (Hachhethu, 2014; Lawoti, 2005; Shrestha & Subedi, 2022)

Bangladesh. The context was characterized by a hybrid regime in the midst of authoritarian consolidation. Digital mobilization emerged as resistance against restricted civic space, corruption, the quota system, and systematic patronage and clientelism. (Ahmed, & Ashraf, 2025; Akter & Fichman, 2025; Hasan, 2025; Chowdhury, 2024; Islam et al., 2025; Rana et al., 2025).

Madagascar. The post-crisis democracy where youth-led online dissent challenges institutional fragility, corruption, embezzlement, weak governance, and poor accountability (Marcus & Ratsimbaharison, 2005; Randrianja, 2012; Shi, 2025).

Sri Lanka. The Aragalaya movement of 2022 was an example of how digital networks can catalyze regime turnover amid economic collapse. Acute economic crisis, hyperinflation, high youth unemployment, corruption, and elite privilege were key causes of the protest (Imtiyaz, 2025; Hemachandra, 2024; Jayamaha, 2022).

Myanmar. Military governance; 2020-21 protests reveal generational defiance against entrenched hierarchical traditions. Public sentiment against dictatorship, solidarity with ethnic minorities, economic collapse after the 2021 coup, and rejection of the 2025-26 election are the key causes of the Gen Z protests (Chambers & Dhu Da, 2024; Putra, 2024; Khine, 2023).

Together, these cases illustrate diverse causes of youth-led digital resistance. These are rooted in historical legacies of authoritarianism, economic precarity, and democratic erosion. This cluster of cases allows for South-South comparative insights that expand the scope of CHA beyond Western protest models (Connell, 2007).

Literature Selection Procedure

The funneling technique was adopted according to the guidelines for Systematic Literature Review (SLR) (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Table 1). It is a three-step process that narrows down a voluminous pool of literature into an analytical body:

Table 1
Literature Selection Process

Stage	Purpose	Approx. Sources	Outcome
Stage 1: Broad Scoping	Identify all relevant literature on Gen-Z protest, digital activism, and Global South mobilization.	250	Initial corpus (academic + grey sources).
Stage 2: Screening & Filtering	Apply inclusion/exclusion criteria based on youth centrality, digital mobilization, and political relevance.	80	Thematic literature subset
Stage 3: Analytical Core	Select cases with rich empirical and historical data for CHA analysis.	35	Final corpus (~7 per country)

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Important keywords used were “Generation Z protests”, “online activism”, “youth activism,” “youth and democracy”, “Generation Z movement”, “Global South,” “digital mobilization,” and “comparative historical analysis.” This approach combined SLR’s transparency with iterative, theory-driven refinement, ensuring that the chosen materials were consistent with theory (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

Data Collection Methods

The triangulation method was used, involving multiple sources: archival research, digital ethnography, and secondary literature.

Archival research entailed national newspapers, NGO reports, and official government communications to trace protest chronologies and state responses. Digital ethnography involved connective ethnography, as described by Hine (2015). We conducted non-participant observations of public protest spaces from January to March 2026. Sampling was through purposive criterion sampling. Posts included in the study were: public, had protest mobilization, documentation, or frame, and received more than 100 engagements. Data collection stopped when saturation was achieved.

Search of platforms involved native searching of Facebook posts. Hashtags and keywords were determined through an iterative process in pilot reading and included local languages. The total digital corpus is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Digital Data Corpus

Country	Platforms	Search terms / hashtags	Date window	Total posts
Myanmar	Facebook, Telegram, X	#WhatsHappeningInMyanmar, #SpringRevolution	1 Feb 2021 – 31 Dec 2023	110
Bangladesh	Facebook, YouTube, X	#QuotaReform2024, #StepDownHasina, quota Andolan	1 Jul 2024 – 15 Aug 2024	125
Nepal	TikTok, Facebook, X	#NoSocialMediaBan, #GenZNepal, #सामाजिकसञ्जाल, #GenZआन्दोलन, #TikTokBanand # Nepo Babies	1 Nov 2023 – 31 Jan 2025	130
Sri Lanka	Facebook, WhatsApp public, X	#GoHomeGota, #Aragalaya	1 Apr 2022 – 31 Jul 2022	120
Madagascar	Facebook, X	#Madagascar,	1 Jan 2023 – 31 Dec 2024	100
Total number of posts				585

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical interpretation proceeded from CHA's process tracing and temporality logic as follows:

- Mapping the continuities of history in order to establish linkages between past waves of political mobilizations and present-day digital activism.
- Critical junctures analysis in order to identify institutional crises or ruptures that

spurred youth mobilizations (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007).

- Comparative Analysis to evaluate the differences in the interaction between structural legacies and digital opportunities in each case.
- Data coding was conducted in MAXQDA, with coding frames developed both theoretically and empirically.

Theoretical Integration

The framework draws upon three key theories: Castells’ (2012) theory of social movement networks that provides the terminology used in explaining the notion of mass self-communication, which is the essence of online activism; Skocpol’s (1979) theory of structure and comparison, which helps put the explanation into context through macro-institutional histories and the notion of path dependency developed by Rueschemeyer & Mahoney (2003), along with comparative temporal sequences described by Pearson (2004). The combination of all three theories allows for an understanding of why digital activism develops through different historical paths.

Ethical Considerations

Since the subject matter of the study was politically sensitive, ethical considerations were strictly followed: (a) There were no human subjects for a sample as part of the study (b) Exclusively relying on data available from publicly available information online to conduct content analysis as per the ethical standards set forth by Townsend & Wallace (2016) and (c) Conscious consideration of researcher positionality while analyzing politically sensitive stories.

Table 3
Summary of Methodological Coherence

Stage	Methodological Focus	Philosophical Grounding
Stage 1	Case & literature identification (funneling + SLR hybrid)	Critical-interpretivist; Comparative Historical Analysis; Critical social science
Stage 2	Multi-source data collection	
Stage 3	Process tracing & cross-case comparison	

Note. Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Results

This research highlighted how Gen Z-led protests in the global south Context: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar can no longer be seen in isolation as mere reactions or youthful revolts. Rather, they represent a historical reaction to the structural issues that have existed from the beginning of post-colonial nation-states, hybrid democracies, and authoritarian states in the developing world.

Using the Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA) approach, which was explained by Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), the following causal chain can be identified from the five country studies:

Institutional Failure → Legitimacy Crisis → Historical Political Culture → Youth Marginalization → Digital Network Mobilization → State Suppression → Partial Rupture or Systemic Instability.

Through the sociological lens, these political movements illustrate the interaction between:

- Historical structures and political agency (Skocpol, 1979)
- State power and civil society resistance (Gramsci, 1971)
- Networked communication and collective identity formation (Castells, 2012) and
- Emergence of Mannheim's (1952) distinct generational consciousness.

In lieu of explaining these protests as technologically deterministic phenomena, our findings suggest that digital platforms functioned as mediating infrastructures through which historically accumulated frustrations were transformed into visible political action. The comparative evidence strongly supports Mahoney's (2000) concept of *reactive sequences*: The unresolved contradictions and grievances from earlier democratic transitions and state-building processes produced counter-mobilizations led by digitally connected youth people.

Historical Political Cultures and Path Dependence

One of the most powerful insights to emerge from the comparative analysis is the strong presence of historically inherited political cultures among the young activists in each case. As CHA highlights, today's political outcomes can be traced back to path-dependent institutions. This finding supports the theory to an extent that cannot be ignored. In all cases examined, young people mobilized themselves because of their historical traditions of resistance, and a summary is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Historical Political Legacies and Protest Continuities

Country	Historical Political Legacy	Contemporary Manifestation
Myanmar	Anti-colonial nationalism (1948); 1962 military coup; 1988 student uprising; 2007 Saffron Revolution; inter-generational revolutionary tradition.	Spring Revolution and Civil Disobedience Movement
Bangladesh	1952 Language Movement; 1971 Liberation War; 1990 democratization; cycles of military-backed civilian rule (Islam et al., 2025).	Anti-quota and anti-authoritarian mobilization
Nepal	End of Rana rule (1951); Establishment of party less panchayat system (1962); 1990 Jana Andolan (peoples Revolution); 1996-2006 Maoist insurgency; 2006 republic transition; elite recapture and democratic fatigue (Hachhethu, 2014; Sapkota, 2026)	Digital-rights uprising against elite recapture, anti-corruption and nepotism
Sri Lanka	Post-independence ethnic conflict (1983-2009 civil war); Rajapaksa dynasty; majoritarian democracy was accused for masking authoritarian personalism (Wickramasinghe, 2010; Uyangoda, 2007; Kadirgamar, 2024)	Aragalaya and anti-corruption mass politics
Madagascar	Post-colonial instability; 1975-2002 socialist/ authoritarian rule under Ratsiraka; recurring military interventions; patrimonial democracy (Marcus & Ratsimbaharison, 2005; Solofoson et al., 2024; Shi, 2025)	“Gen Z Mada” protests against governance failure (Shi, 2025; Solofoson et al., 2024)

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Findings from analyzing the historical political legacy challenged the prevailing view that describes Gen Z protests simply as “a new type of digital movements.” Instead, it indicated that digital activism draws on a history of political culture that has accumulated over time.

The case of Myanmar provides the best illustration. The Spring Revolution was not entirely novel in Myanmar in 2021. It was founded on anti-colonial struggles, the 1988 student uprising, and the 2007 Saffron Revolution (Chambers & Dhu Da, 2024; Callahan, 2003; Thein et al., 2023). This aligns with Skocpol’s (1979) assertion that revolutionaries’ mobilization is usually a consequence of a political culture that has been historically sedimented and transmitted generationally. Generation Z has been socialized not only in grievances but also in protest cultures, morality, and memories of resistance.

In a similar way, the student revolt in Bangladesh was significantly influenced by the symbols of the Language Movement and by earlier movements against autocratic regimes in the 1990s. In terms of tradition, the politics of universities and students was always seen as the locus of resistance to regimes. However, the study's findings show that this tradition was distorted, with digital spaces replacing traditional physical campuses as venues for politicization and mobilization.

Nepal's case study further underscores the point made above. The 2024–2025 protests by Gen Z youth were essentially rooted in accumulated resentment over the failure of the republican order introduced after 2006. While the monarchic system was overthrown and democracy was institutionalized through federalism, youths felt their demands were not fully met due to factors such as elite domination and corruption. Consequently, the ban on social media had significant symbolic meaning because it was an attempt by the state to control the communicative space where political identities were expressed.

State-Society Relations and the Crisis of Legitimacy

The second major observation concerns changes in state-society relations in the Global South. In all five cases examined, the demonstrators expressed a deep mistrust of the formal political systems in their respective countries. Table 5 is the representation of the state's governing tradition. As far as Weber's (1978) sociological perspective on authority is concerned, each of these five cases involved a legitimacy crisis.

Table 5

Crisis of Legitimacy Across Cases

Dimension of Crisis	Myanmar	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Madagascar
Authoritarian governance	✓	✓	Partial	Partial	Partial
Elite capture, Nepotism and favoritism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Youth exclusion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crisis of expression	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Declining institutional trust	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

The study found that although many democracies were formally democratic, they increasingly tended to be seen as non-democratic. This was especially noticeable in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In Nepal, although democracy was still functioning despite being declared a republic, politics increasingly featured coalition politics, patron-client networks, bureaucratic inertia, and intra-party deals. It is for this reason that Generation Z activists saw the

social media ban as an act of censorship and as a disconnection of the democratic state from its citizens (Koirala, 2025; Lomzza & Gupta, 2025; Earl et al., 2022).

This was also seen in Sri Lanka. Even though it enjoyed some electoral legitimacy, the administration of President Rajapaksa increasingly resembled the hegemonic bloc described by Gramsci (1971). In the end, economic failure led to the loss of hegemonic legitimacy and to the channeling of latent social resentment into revolutionary civic rage (Barak, 2010). Finally, it is important to note the role of coercive state power in the Global South.

In Myanmar, we can see clearly how Tilly’s (1978) description of the “repressive state apparatus” applies. After the military coup, the state used coercion and repression through violence, arrests, the shutting down of the internet, surveillance, and other tools. However, as has been shown, the use of repression may actually lead to greater mobilization of collective action (Bünthe, 2022; Jones, 2014; Khine, 2023).

In a similar manner, Bangladesh and Nepal employed digital repression for dissidence regulation purposes. Digital censorship and shutdown practices demonstrate how the state comes to understand that internet communication is perceived as politically threatening. Thus, the research examines the shift from conventional authoritarianism to digital authoritarian governance, in which control over communication infrastructures plays a crucial role (Barak, 2003).

The theoretical importance of one of the research results lies in the emergence of Generation Z as a separate generation. Building on Mannheim’s (1952) theory of generations, it is possible to observe that despite being from different countries, Generation Z protestors shared similar political experiences, such as insecurity concerning their socio-economic future, disillusionment with political elites, digital socialization, knowledge about protests around the world, and discontent with institutional rigidity. Table 5 demonstrates the key features of the Gen Z movement.

Table 6
Characteristics of Generation Z Political Subjectivity

Political Characteristic	Manifestation Across Cases
Horizontalism	Leaderless and decentralized mobilization
Digital nativity	Reliance on online coordination
Anti-elitism	Rejection of traditional political parties/Elites
Intersectionality	Inclusion of gender, ethnic, and minority issues
Affective politics	Emotional and symbolic mobilization

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Table 6 presents a brief overview of the common features of the protest across cases. One important similarity in all five protests was a refusal of centralized leadership. Instead of hierarchical organizational forms characteristic of earlier revolutionary actions, protests relied on loose online networks. This trend is consistent with the theoretical framework developed by Bennett & Segerberg (2013) in the context of their theory of connective action, in which collective action emerges through the personalization of online communication rather than organizational frameworks.

Specifically, the protesters in the Sri Lankan Aragalaya did not affiliate themselves with traditional parties. Likewise, the Nepali protest lacked centralized hierarchical leadership and instead relied on decentralized youth networks. This horizontal approach explains broader sociological trends in late modernity, including distrust in government and politics, individualized political identities, and flexible, networked organizations.

On the other hand, the results also demonstrate a critical weakness of such a horizontal approach. While extremely effective at disrupting existing systems, fast mobilization and rapid results, horizontal movements had difficulty instituting viable political alternatives.

Digital Infrastructures and Networked Protest

Findings from the analysis show that digital technology serves as a means of communication, a site of politics, an instrument of international solidarity, and a terrain of state power at once. Table 7 shows the digital platforms used during the protest. However, the study does not lend itself to technological determinism. Digital technology was not the cause of the protest. Instead, it played a catalytic role in spreading narratives, amplified unresolved pre-existing grievances, and motivated protestors to organize horizontally.

Table 7

Digital Infrastructures and Protest Functions

Platform	Primary Function	Country Examples
Facebook	Mass coordination and public discourse	Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Madagascar
TikTok	Visual satire and emotional mobilization	Bangladesh, Nepal
Telegram/Signal	Encrypted activist coordination	Myanmar, Bangladesh
YouTube	Political commentary and livestreaming	Nepal
X/Twitter	Hashtag activism and international visibility	Sri Lanka
Discord	Discussion on strategy and planning	Nepal, Madagascar

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

Clearly, the findings confirm Castells’ (2012) idea about the emergence of the network society and the gradual shift towards conducting political communication via decentralized digital networks rather than institutionalized media systems. In Nepal, the development of social media platforms led to the emergence of alternative public spheres for the politically excluded youth. Therefore, the Nepalese government’s ban on social media was not merely media regulation but an attempt to regain control over the entire process of political communication.

Myanmar protesters utilized digital platforms such as Facebook and encrypted messaging to counter governmental propaganda and document acts of violence by the military internationally (Rathnayaka & Abeykoon, 2023; Imtiyaz, 2025). Thus, communication via digital media became both a tool for survival and a form of globally visible witnessing. These same tendencies can be observed in all the case studies considered. As mentioned above, these tendencies are connected to the idea of the public sphere proposed by Habermas (1989), but adapted to a digitized reality.

Finally, Generation Z movements engaged in highly emotional and symbolic repertoires of protests, including memes, satirical content, live streaming, symbolic occupation of sites, and artistic protest performances. A brief conclusion on the utilization of such symbolic repertoires is shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Protest Repertoires Across Cases

Country	Symbolic Repertoires	Political Meaning
Myanmar	Three-finger salute; livestreaming violence	Resistance against military rule
Bangladesh	Hashtag campaigns; visual satire	Anti-authoritarian critique
Nepal	“Nepo Kids” memes; anti-ban campaigns	Rejection of elite politics
Sri Lanka	Occupation of presidential residence	Reclaiming sovereignty
Madagascar	“Gen Z Mada” identity formation	Assertion of youth citizenship

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

According to Gramscian theory, these demonstrations can be viewed as contests for cultural hegemony. Generation Z questioned the state’s official discourse through humor, imagery, and creativity on social media. The study shows that symbolic politics became highly significant in environments lacking institutional avenues for voicing discontent.

In Sri Lanka, the occupation of government institutions signified the assertion of sovereign power from a regime of corrupt politicians. Similarly, in Nepal, anti-nepotism movements via memes conveyed their frustrations to the public using

cultural symbols. These symbolic conflicts show how modern activism relies more on the affective and communicative aspects of politics than ideological ones.

State Repression and Digital Authoritarianism

Across all cases, states attempted to suppress protests through combinations of coercive force, surveillance, legal restrictions, internet shutdowns, and discursive delegitimization, along with counter-narratives. Table 9 illustrates how the state attempted to suppress the protest.

Table 9

State Repression Tactics

Repression Strategy	Myanmar	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Madagascar
Social media ban and Internet shutdowns	✓	✓	✓	Limited	Partial
Mass arrests	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Military deployment	✓	Partial	Partial	✓	Partial
Surveillance	✓	✓	✓	Partial	Partial
Emergency laws	✓	✓	✓	✓	Partial
Counter Narratives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

The results show that states are now more aware of digital communication as an important space for political struggle. In Myanmar and Bangladesh, internet blackouts were efforts to disrupt the infrastructure of protest coordination. The banning of social media in Nepal was also a tactic of communicative containment.

This relates to academic theories of digital authoritarianism, which refer to the practice of authoritarian governance in networked societies. Nevertheless, the results also reveal that protesters devised counter-strategies, including the use of virtual private networks, encryption, diaspora communication, and decentralized coordination. Hence, an ongoing “arms race” was established between digital repression and digital resistance.

Outcomes: Rupture Without Full Transformation

Gen Z protests achieved significant political disruption in a short period, but rarely a full structural transformation. Table 10 presents a brief analysis of immediate outcomes immediately after the protest across cases.

Table 10*Protest Outcomes Across Cases*

Country	Immediate Outcome	Structural Outcome
Myanmar	Expansion of armed resistance	Ongoing instability
Bangladesh	Leadership displacement	Interim government formation
Nepal	PM resignation and ban reversal	Interim government formation and election declared
Sri Lanka	Presidential resignation	Limited systemic reform
Madagascar	Leadership crisis	Fragile transition

Note. Table created by the authors based on the review; 2026.

An important comparative finding was that, although the Generation Z social movements were highly effective at disrupting governments, they had little success in establishing new systems. This phenomenon is supported by a crucial distinction in the theory of social movements: while social movements are adept at disruption, institutions excel at reproduction.

- Hence, based on the findings, it appears plausible that digital activism may undermine the legitimacy of political institutions.
- Comparative Synthesis: Reactive Sequences and Historical Change in the Digital Era

Through the lens of CHA, one can see a clear historical trend across all the cases. In each case:

- Previous promises of democracy and development created expectations of inclusion,
- The failure of institutions caused disillusionment among young people,
- Digital networks facilitated quick connection and mobilization,
- State coercion strengthened group cohesion along with identity construction,
- Political crises led to a partial rupture but not a complete transformation of the system.

This sequence clearly confirms the theory of reactive sequences by Mahoney (2000). The Generation Z protests are thus historically determined responses to the contradictions of post-colonial state-building, neoliberal inequalities, and democratic stagnation. Finally, the results indicate that:

- Digital activism is a product of historical political culture, now manifested through contemporary digital platforms/resources.
- youth activism is structurally determined.

Therefore, contemporary protest should not be viewed as the “end” of traditional politics but as the creation of new political identities embedded in history, rooted in structure, and emerging through technology.

Discussion

The present research focuses on the roles of historical political cultures, state-society relations, and technological infrastructures in Generation Z digital activism across five societies from the Global South: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. The intention in utilizing the CHA methodology alongside Castell’s theory and a generation study was to transcend the limited scope of knowledge about digital activism, which was based solely on its technological dimension.

Generation Z activism cannot be simply seen as spontaneous, but rather as part of historically accumulated political dynamics characterized by a crisis of legitimacy, exclusion, and institutional failure. The digital tools used by activists are best understood not as instruments for protests per se, but rather as communication infrastructures that enable activists to articulate their grievances and memories.

An important contribution of this research study is the assertion that modern-day Generation Z protests are historically situated within the political past and culture of each country under consideration. The evidence found during this analysis is in agreement with the underlying theoretical assumptions of comparative historical analysis (Skocpol, 1979; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003), namely, that contemporary political events are conditioned by path-dependent institutions and structural contradictions.

In all five countries, social mobilization did not occur in response to a single event, but rather in the wake of unfulfilled promises and unresolved political conflicts that have accumulated over decades. Such catalysts include: Military coups, social media restrictions, economic collapse, quota controversies, utility shortages, and many others. It is also consistent with the idea of reactive sequences (Mahoney, 2000), which refers to contradictions arising from prior institutional structures or reforms. For example, the Nepali republican revolution of 2006 brought the promise of democracy, federalism, and inclusive reform, but the ensuing political capture and governmental inefficiency resulted in a period of post-revolutionary disenchantment. In this sense, the imposition of restrictions on social media was especially explosive.

Equally important, the Aragalaya in Sri Lanka should not be seen through an exclusive economic meltdown lens. Rather, the economic collapse served as an immediate trigger to what is better explained by decades of dynasty rule, political consolidation,

corruption, and ethnicized state power. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Rajapaksa regime was more than a failure; it was the historically sedimented form of politics that had lost its legitimacy.

Myanmar stands out as the best example of continuity in contentious politics. The Spring Revolution built on the legacies of previous rounds of popular mobilization against the military dictatorship, most notably, the student revolution in 1988 and the Saffron Revolution of 2007. The point corresponds to Skocpol's (1979) position that revolutions mobilize from historically sedimented political cultures.

The results are consistent with the idea of generations advanced by Karl Mannheim (1952). Mannheim suggested that a generation becomes political when it shares specific historical experiences that shape its collective consciousness. According to this logic, Generation Z participants in the five cases were characterized by a unique form of political consciousness shaped by factors discussed above.

Unlike other generations, whose political activism was structured by political parties, trade unions, or ideologically driven groups, the politics of Generation Z was highly decentralized and leaderless, driven by digital communication. This study reinforces Bennett and Segerberg's theory of connective action (2013), which posits that political participation is organized via digitally enabled, personalized networks rather than traditional collectivist networks.

Among the comparative findings of this study is the growing personalization of the political participation of Generation Z activists across the Global South. Unlike previous generations of activists, who were politically organized through ideology-based political parties, trade unions, or collective political movements, the protests of Generation Z often revolved around material concerns, internet freedom, meritocratic fears, and future concerns. In Nepal, the anger stemmed from frustration with corruption, nepotism among elites, youth unemployment, and internet censorship, revealing fears about barriers to social mobility. The reform of the quota system protest in Bangladesh initially arose from concerns about unequal employment opportunities and subsequently evolved into resistance to the authoritarian regime. There are some similar cases in Sri Lanka and Madagascar, where material deprivation served as the spark that ignited political resistance (Shi, 2025).

Nevertheless, this issue should not be approached solely from a political angle. Instead, it must be analyzed using the sociological lens of precarity, suspicion, and segmented citizenship in the era of neoliberalism (Bauman, 2000). Myanmar

is a notable exception in this case since Generation Z protests were organized under democratic, ethnic solidarity, and anti-military regime principles, forming a revolutionary wave. Therefore, it may be concluded that Generation Z activists oscillate between individual and collectivist politics depending on the level of oppression and crisis in state institutions.

Generation Z protesters become increasingly disillusioned with conventional forms of political participation and mediation. Specifically, young people who participated in protests in Nepal and Sri Lanka demonstrated deep disdain for party politics and elite negotiations. This skepticism was not directed at individuals but at the whole premise of representative politics.

This is an example of wider transformational processes taking place in late modernity and neoliberal globalization, including: institutional mistrust, personalization of politics, precarity, decline in collective organizations, and fragmented citizenship. Therefore, this is not only an indicator of technological advancements but also an illustration of the wide-ranging transformation in the dynamics of people, institutions, and politics.

However, this raises a crucial contradiction that has already been highlighted. Even though mobilization through digital technologies was horizontally oriented and did not involve leaders, it threatened to undermine the movements' sustainability. This supports the argument advanced in social movement theory regarding the sustainability of digital mobilizations, as noted by Tufekci (2017).

Sri Lanka's Aragalaya offers an excellent case study of this dilemma. Aragalaya succeeded in weakening the Rajapaksa government but lacked clear institutional mechanisms to turn mass mobilization into sustainable structural change. Likewise, Nepalese protests were able to extract political concessions from their opponents but did not alter their elitist political institutions. In other words, while connective action made protests inclusive, it simultaneously revealed the lack of robust organizational structure within the digitally networked protest movements.

The importance of digital infrastructure for redefining political communication and civic engagement becomes evident from the above discussion. It provides strong evidence to support Castells's (2012) argument that digital spaces are "spaces of mass self-communication."

In all five cases, Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, Signal, YouTube, Discord, and Twitter/X served as organizing infrastructure, emotional community, symbolic resistance arena,

and alternate public sphere, respectively. It represents a shift in the sociological understanding of politics itself.

Traditionally, universities, trade unions, media, and political parties were central institutions in political socialization. In the case of Gen Z, it was revealed that digital platforms were playing an increasingly important role in these activities. In Bangladesh and Nepal, the online space had become a place where political grievances were expressed, identities formed, and emotions shared.

From Habermas's (1989) perspective, digital platforms constitute digitally mediated public spheres in which citizens challenge legitimacy. But unlike Habermas's idea of the bourgeois public sphere, these public spheres are fragmented, algorithmically governed, and highly surveilled. As such, they challenge any idealistic accounts of digital democracy. Though digital communication technology created more opportunities for mobilization, it also left activists vulnerable to surveillance, misinformation, social media manipulation, internet shutdowns, and even algorithmic suppression. It validates Tufekci's (2017) analysis of the networked protest paradox - the paradox that, in making mobilization possible, digital networks also expose activists to new vulnerabilities.

The same applies to Myanmar as well. The mobilization and the provision of support via digital means, such as social media and encryption software, were made possible. Nevertheless, these same digital technologies became vulnerable to government surveillance and internet blackouts because, at that point in time, the military government recognized that the potential threats posed by the use of digital communication technology extended beyond that.

The next important point to note concerns the evolution of state power in the digital era. In all the examples discussed above, the government used a combination of coercive measures, legal threats, internet blackouts, surveillance, and discourse-based delegitimization. This is consistent with critical theories of the state, notably those articulated by Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971). It was not enough for the state to suppress the protests through coercion. In addition, an attempt was made to control and regulate symbolic and communicative channels that facilitated dissent. The banning of social media use in Nepal can serve as an illustration of the mechanism of state action discussed. Here, the government understood social media as another locus of legitimacy, in opposition to the state itself, and sought to control the discussion by banning internet communication.

These examples demonstrate how digital authoritarian regimes emerge. Instead of suppressing mobilization, such governance actually exacerbates it. This idea is consistent with Tilly's (1978) theory, which posits that coercive governance can radicalize contention when the government loses its moral legitimacy. Myanmar is the ultimate example. The use of force turned the demonstrations into a full-scale revolutionary movement, leading to civil war and parallel governance systems. The state's attempts to monopolize power through repressive measures actually exacerbated the legitimacy problem.

Compared with other examples, Generation Z mobilizations rely heavily on affective and symbolic dimensions. Contrary to previous ideologies organized around political concepts, these protests are often grounded in emotions, internet memes, symbols, irony, and moral appeals. Following Castells's (2012) assertion about the role of outrage and hope in networked movements, emotional energies flow quickly through digital communication systems. Thus, sociologically speaking, affective politics became an important aspect of modern-day mobilization. The emotions of anger, shame, fear, and hope became the mechanism of collective identity construction.

In Sri Lanka, occupying presidential positions signified the restoration of sovereignty from corrupt elites. In Nepal, the "Nepo Kids" movement used symbols to express dissatisfaction with the prevalent culture of nepotism. In Myanmar, the three-finger salute was a symbolic act that created transnational symbolic solidarity with other resistance movements. These examples illustrate how Melucci's (1996) concept of the cultural dimension of social movements is applied in practice. It refers to social movements' struggles for meaning and identity, as well as for power and control over the discourse.

The significance of the current research project lies in its comparative approach, which focuses on the Global South. Much of the literature on digital activism is biased towards a Eurocentric perspective and makes implicit assumptions about the existence of certain institutional arrangements characteristic of liberal democracies. By investigating cases from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar, the current study shows that digital activism is conducted differently under postcolonial conditions.

Colonial legacies and postcolonial governance crises remained powerful factors in each country. Weaknesses in state institutions, seen in Madagascar, military-based governance in Myanmar, and democratic governance led by elites in Nepal, are manifestations of historical trends in postcolonial institutions.

In addition, it was found that there was an increasing pattern of South-South protest diffusion. Protests were shared virtually across national borders. Activists in Nepal and Madagascar acknowledged being inspired by protests in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, while protests in Myanmar had symbolic ties to broader regional groupings, such as the Milk Tea Alliance.

Contributions of the Study

Among other things, the research makes several contributions to sociological studies. To begin with, it helps develop comparative-historical analysis in the field of digital activism. While the former tends to focus on immediate effects, speed, and innovation, the latter is primarily concerned with the development of institutions over time. Therefore, in merging the two perspectives, one can conclude that digital mobilizations cannot be considered historically unconditioned phenomena. Secondly, the study enriches Castells's theory of networked social movements by incorporating postcolonial state structures and conditions specific to the Global South into the discussion of digital communications. The study shows that digital networks function differently in fragile democracies and authoritarian states than in stable liberal democracies. In addition, the research helps develop the field of generational sociology by discussing how Generation Z forms its political subjectivity through digital nativity, precarity, and disillusionment with democracy. Lastly, the study contributes to critical sociology by helping to understand how contemporary state power is exercised through digital governance and infrastructure.

Conclusion

In this research, the concept of digital activism led by Generation Z youths was studied from the perspectives of Comparative Historical Analysis, Castells' model of networked social movements, and generational sociology across five countries: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. It has been shown that modern youth activism in the Global South cannot be reduced to technology or fragmented protest events. Instead, they should be seen as historically rooted reactions to prolonged periods of crisis marked by various forms of legitimization, exclusion, democratic breakdowns, and economic insecurity.

In each of the five case studies, digital platforms played a role that went beyond mere communication tools, becoming a political infrastructure that helped construct collective identities and resistance movements. Social media helped Generation Z activists create political public spheres as alternatives to institutions that youth today see as corrupted, exclusionary, or ineffective. Where formal political representation failed or was absent, digital public spheres served as substitutes for political discussion, debate, and organization. At the same time, however, digital platforms became sites of surveillance, censorship, and repression.

What is more, the comparative findings indicate that Generation Z is also politically distinctive due to certain interlinked features, including being digital natives, profound skepticism towards conventional political structures, a horizontal, leaderless organizational style, transnational awareness of politics, and increased concerns about socio-economic issues and injustices. Thus, the mentioned protests are seen as a reflection of a new formation in the realm of political subjectivity and citizenship in an era of late modernity, precariousness, and post-colonialism.

At the same time, the research highlights inherent contradictions in Generation Z activism. Although these movements have been raising calls for democracy, accountability, dignity, and justice, they have also been showing a growing trend towards personalized and self-referential forms of political engagement. In several instances, particularly among middle-class youths in urban areas, mobilization was primarily fueled by personal grievances, such as unemployment, inflation, digital censorship, inequality in education, and poor prospects for the future, rather than by ideological or collective welfare-based programs. This does not imply that Generation Z is politically passive or socially apathetic. In fact, it indicates that political engagement occurs within a context of precariousness and insecurity. Digital activism has huge potential to create disruption, but it has been seen to struggle to sustain political institutions. The youth activism witnessed in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal contributed significantly to the removal of leaders in power through a political crack. The digital activism witnessed in Myanmar helped to foster a revolutionary uprising against the ruling junta. However, the fall of regimes has not always been a catalyst for transformation.

From a comparative-historical perspective, the research identifies a recurring causal sequence across the five cases:

- Long-term (historical) institutional failures and democratic disappointments
- Erosion of political legitimacy and representational trust
- Youth exclusion, economic precarity, and generational frustration on large scale
- Digitally mediated mobilization and connective action
- Escalating state repression and digital control
- Partial political rupture without full systemic transformation.

This pattern strongly supports CHA's emphasis on path dependence, reactive sequences, and historically conditioned political outcomes. It is clear that the actions of Generation Z activists do not occur in a historical vacuum, but are driven by the cumulative institutional contradictions and political crises left behind by preceding generations.

Additionally, variations between cases are brought to attention. For example, in Myanmar, digital activism continued the legacy of a revolutionary struggle against military rule and transitioned into an anti-authoritarian movement. In Bangladesh, digitally organized student activism broke through the complacency of the authoritarian system and revealed its vulnerabilities. In Nepal, the demonstrations showed democratic exhaustion among young people and their disenchantment with post-revolutionary politics. The Aragalaya movement in Sri Lanka showed how quickly an economic crisis can translate digital indignation into large-scale anti-governmental action. Finally, Madagascar serves as a case study demonstrating how global protest cultures spread in the Global South, creating a space for digitally constructed political identities despite poor technological infrastructure and governmental instability.

This research is also important for postcolonial literature on digital democracy and social movements because it rejects Eurocentric perspectives. The analysis shows that Generation Z activism in the Global South is shaped by a history marked by colonization, partial and weak democratic transformation, economic dependence, and unstable political systems. Therefore, it cannot be viewed as the reproduction of digital politics in the Global North – on the contrary, it is a struggle for citizenship, dignity, and sovereignty under structural disadvantage.

Finally, the research concludes that Generation Z activism is not the end of politics and a digital revolution. On the contrary, it can be regarded as a manifestation of emerging political subjectivity that combines history, technological advancements, and structural crises. Generation Z activism reveals the rupture in the interplay between youth and politics – between young generations and public authorities.

Nevertheless, the endurance of partially implemented reforms and periodic manifestations of authoritarian behavior demonstrate the structural constraints under which digital activism operates. Whether the future course of such protests hinges more on the development of new technologies or the visibility of their acts remains secondary to how effectively the political institutions of the Global South are able to resolve the underlying crisis of legitimacy, marginalization, inequality, and democratic participation that gives rise to youthful defiance. In the absence of real change within political structures, the cycle of protests, repression, and partial revolution described in this paper will likely be repeated, creating instability while simultaneously shaping the future of democracy in the Global South.

References

- Ahmed, E., & Ashraf, A. (2025). Youth Voices Unleashed: Media Narratives in Bangladesh's 2024 Quota Reform Movement. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(1), 100-106. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.vi-i.25301>
- Akter, S. and Fichman, P. (2025), Digital Activism during the July 36 Protest in Bangladesh. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 62: 1340-1342. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.1397>
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)*. In L. Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 127–186). Monthly Review Press.
- Barak, A. (2010). *The judge in a democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Barak, G. (2003). *Violence and nonviolence: Pathways to understanding*. Sage Publications.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity Press.
- Bayat, A. (2010). *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804773638>
- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139198752>
- Bünthe, M. (2022). Ruling but not governing: Tutelary regimes and the case of Myanmar. *Government and Opposition*, 57(2), 336–352. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2020.38>
- Calhoun, C. (1995). *Critical social theory: Culture, history, and the challenge of difference*. Blackwell.
- Callahan, M. P. (2003). *Making enemies: War and state building in Burma*. Cornell University Press.
- Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, R. D. (2007). The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism. *World Politics*, 59(3), 341–369. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100020852>
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the internet age*. Polity Press.
- Chambers, J., & Dhu Da, S. N. (2024). “Living with” revolution: The everyday experiences of Myanmar’s Generation Z revolutionaries. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 54(5), 781–800. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2024.2359373>
- Chowdhury, N. (2024). The return of politics in Bangladesh. *Journal of Democracy*, 36(1), 65–78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/JOD.2025.A947884>

- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Polity Press.
- Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review. *Science Advances*, 8(10), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl8198>
- Edmunds, J., & Turner, B. S. (2002). *Generational consciousness, narrative, and politics*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Freedom House. (2023). *Freedom on the net 2023: The repressive power of artificial intelligence*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2023/repressive-power-artificial-intelligence>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.
- Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests* (J. J. Shapiro, Trans.). Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (T. Burger, Trans., with assistance from F. Lawrence). MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)
- Hachhethu, K. (2014). *State of democracy in Nepal: Survey report*. Tribhuvan University.
- Hasan, K. (2025). Bangladesh 2009–2024: The return to authoritarianism under the Awami League and its implications. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 15(4), 1657–1679. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i4/25282>
- Hemachandra, S. V., & Sivasundaram, S. (2024). Historical Vistas on Sri Lanka's 2022 People's Uprising. *History Workshop Journal*, 97, 3–42. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbad024>
- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Imtiyaz, A. R. M. (2025). Why did they rebel? *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 60(3), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096251341583>
- Islam, M. A., Nur, S., Mahmud, I., Rakiv, M., Noor, R. N., & Moniruzzaman, M. (2025). Gen Z's digital uprising in Bangladesh. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12, 102181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102181>
- Jayamaha, J. (2022). The youth uprising movements in Sri Lanka in 2022. *Sprink Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(7), 360–366. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v1i07.38>
- Jones, L. (2014). The political economy of Myanmar's transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(1), 144–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.764143>

- Kadirgamar, A. (2024). The cultural life of democracy. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 47(4), 726–742. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2024.2380179>
- Khine, N. K. (2023). Digital rights in the post-coup Myanmar: Enabling factors for digital authoritarianism. *Journal of Human Rights and Peace Studies*, 9(2), 186–216. Retrieved from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/HRPS/article/view/266778>
- Kitchenham, B., & Charters, S. (2007). *Guidelines for performing systematic literature reviews in software engineering*. Keele University.
- Koirala, J. (2025). Gen Z protests and role of social media in Nepal [Preprint]. Cambridge Open Engage. <https://doi.org/10.33774/coe-2025-x0j4z>
- Lawoti, M. (2005). *Towards a democratic Nepal*. Sage Publications.
- Lomzza, R. D., & Gupta, S. G. (2025). Hashtags, VPNs, and youth rage. *South India Journal of Social Sciences*, 23(7), 104–109. <https://doi.org/10.62656/SIJS.v23i7.2279>
- Mahoney, J. (2000). Path dependence in historical sociology. *Theory and Society*, 29(4), 507–548. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007113830879>
- Mahoney, J., & Goertz, G. (2006). A tale of two cultures. *Political Analysis*, 14(3), 227–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpj017>
- Mahoney, J., & Rueschemeyer, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Comparative historical analysis*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803963>
- Mannheim, K. (1952). The problem of generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Essays on the sociology of knowledge* (pp. 276–322). Routledge.
- Marcus, R. R., & Ratsimbaharison, A. M. (2005). Political parties in Madagascar. *Party Politics*, 11(4), 495–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068805053214>
- Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. PublicAffairs.
- Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in time*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400841080>
- Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400841080>
- Przeworski, A., & Teune, H. (1970). *The logic of comparative social inquiry*. Wiley Interscience.
- Putra, B. A. (2024). Digital activism in Southeast Asia. *Frontiers in Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1478630>

- Rana, M. S., Sharmin, S., Amin, M. B., & Oláh, J. (2026). From revolt to revolution: Exploring motivating factors of Bangladesh's July 2024 uprising. *Research in Globalization*, 12, 100341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2026.100341>
- Randrianja, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Madagascar, le coup d'état de mars 2009*. Éditions Karthala.
- Rathnayaka, S., & Abeykoon, A. M. S. A. (2023). Galle Face protest and social media activism. *Journal of Multidisciplinary & Translational Research*, 8(1), 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.4038/jmtr.v8i1.70>
- Rueschemeyer, D. (2003). *Can one or a few cases yield theoretical gains?* In J. Mahoney & D. Rueschemeyer (Eds.), *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences* (pp. 305–336). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803963>
- Sapkota, M. (2026). Gen Z movement 2025 in Nepal. *Journal of Political Science*, 26, 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v26i1.90793>
- Shi, X. (2025). Gen Z, digital activism, and regime change in Madagascar. *Megatrends Afrika*. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2025MTA-S61>
- Shrestha, R., & Subedi, D. (2022). Youth and political violence in Nepal. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 14(3), 332–350. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12658>
- Skocpol, T. (1979). *States and social revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815805>
- Solofoson, G., Randriamihaingo, J., Ranaivo, J., Rakotomalala, H. N., & Razafindratoha, O. V. (2024). Madagascar, facing cyclical political crises since 1972: Issues and strategies for sustainable reconstruction. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*, 11(10), 790–796.
- Thein, K. N. M., et al. (2023). Myanmar Generation Z revolution. *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika*, 18(2), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.20473/jsd.v18i2.2023.124-135>
- Tilly, C. (1978). *From mobilization to revolution*. Addison-Wesley.
- Townsend, L., & Wallace, C. (2016). *Social media research: A guide to ethics*. University of Aberdeen.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300228175>
- Uyangoda, J. (2007). *Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: Changing dynamics* (Policy Studies No. 32). East-West Center Washington
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.
- Wickramasinghe, N. (2010). From civil war to soft authoritarianism: Sri Lanka in comparative perspective. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 22(3), 331–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2010.510268>