

**DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND YOUTH POLITICAL MOBILIZATION:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE NEPAL GEN Z PROTESTS (2025)  
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**ABSTRACT:**

The Nepal Gen Z Protests of 2025 represent a critical turning point in the evolution of youth political engagement in contemporary Nepal. Emerging from digitally connected networks rather than traditional political party structures, the movement reflected deep generational dissatisfaction with corruption, unemployment, and perceived restrictions on digital freedoms. This study examines the protests as a case study of digital activism within an emerging democracy, analysing how social media platforms functioned as mechanisms of mobilization, coordination, and political expression. Drawing upon public sphere theory and network society theory, the paper argues that Generation Z in Nepal transformed digital platforms into alternative spaces of political participation, effectively challenging conventional hierarchies of power. While the protests demonstrated the capacity of decentralized digital networks to generate rapid collective action, they also revealed structural limitations related to sustainability, leadership, and institutional reform. By situating the Nepal Gen Z protests within broader theoretical debates on democracy and digital communication, this study contributes to an understanding of how youth-led digital movements are reshaping political landscapes in South Asia. The findings suggest that digital activism can amplify marginalized voices and alter public discourse, but its long-term democratic impact depends upon the responsiveness of formal political institutions and the ability of youth movements to transition from symbolic protest to sustained civic engagement.

**KEYWORDS:**

Digital Activism, Generation Z, Youth Political Mobilization, Network Society, Nepal Protests 2025.

## **Introduction**

The Nepal Gen Z protests of 2025 represent a significant moment in the evolution of youth political participation in contemporary Nepal. Emerging primarily through digitally connected networks rather than traditional political party structures, the movement reflects a generational shift in how political engagement is understood and practiced. Generation Z in Nepal, shaped by rapid technological expansion and social media integration into daily life, has developed new forms of civic expression that extend beyond electoral participation. The protests were rooted in growing dissatisfaction over unemployment, perceived corruption, governance inefficiencies, and concerns regarding restrictions on digital platforms. These grievances collectively fostered a climate of political frustration among young citizens who increasingly viewed online spaces as arenas for accountability and resistance. Unlike earlier protest movements in Nepal that relied heavily on centralized leadership or ideological mobilization, the Gen Z protests were characterized by decentralized coordination and horizontal participation. Social media platforms functioned not only as communication tools but also as infrastructures for collective identity formation. Youth participants shared grievances, circulated protest information, and amplified political demands in real time. This transformation reflects a broader shift in democratic participation, where digital communication reduces barriers to entry and allows rapid mobilization across geographic and social boundaries. The central concern of this study is to examine how digital activism enabled Nepalese youth to translate online dissent into offline collective action and to assess the broader implications of this transformation for democratic governance. By focusing exclusively on the Nepal Gen Z protests as a case study, this chapter situates the movement within the socio-political realities of Nepal while highlighting the generational dynamics that shaped its emergence. The introduction therefore establishes the foundation for analyzing how digital networks, youth identity, and political dissatisfaction converged to produce one of the most significant youth-led mobilizations in recent Nepalese political history.

## **Political and Socioeconomic Context**

The emergence of the Nepal Gen Z protests in 2025 cannot be understood without examining the broader political and socioeconomic conditions that preceded them. In recent years, Nepal has experienced

persistent structural challenges, particularly in relation to youth employment, governance transparency, and institutional trust. A significant proportion of the country's young population faces unemployment or underemployment despite increased access to higher education and digital literacy. This disconnect between educational advancement and economic opportunity has contributed to a growing sense of frustration among Generation Z citizens, many of whom perceive limited prospects within existing economic structures. Simultaneously, dissatisfaction with political leadership has intensified. Allegations of corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and slow policy implementation have weakened public confidence in traditional party systems. Young citizens increasingly view established political institutions as unresponsive to their aspirations. This perception of political stagnation fostered a climate in which alternative channels of participation became attractive. In urban centres such as Kathmandu, rapid technological expansion further transformed the communicative environment. Internet penetration and smartphone usage expanded significantly, enabling youth to engage continuously in digital interaction, information sharing, and political discourse.

The digital ecosystem preceding the protests played a crucial role in shaping political consciousness. Social media platforms became spaces where grievances were articulated, debated, and amplified without reliance on traditional media gatekeepers. Unlike earlier generations, Nepalese Gen Z citizens developed political awareness through networked communication, viral content, and peer-generated narratives. Exposure to global protest movements through digital channels also reinforced the belief that collective action could generate tangible political impact. Moreover, attempts to regulate or restrict digital platforms were interpreted by many youth as direct challenges to freedom of expression. Such developments intensified perceptions that the state sought to control emerging spaces of civic engagement. Consequently, digital platforms evolved into arenas of resistance as well as discussion. The convergence of demographic energy, economic dissatisfaction, declining institutional trust, and digital empowerment created a politically charged environment. The Nepal Gen Z protests thus emerged not as isolated events but as products of structural socioeconomic pressures interacting with an increasingly networked communicative landscape that enabled rapid collective mobilization.

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## Emergence and Dynamics of the Nepal Gen Z Protests

The Nepal Gen Z protests unfolded through a distinctive sequence in which digital expression preceded and structured offline mobilization. Initial dissent appeared as short-form videos, memes, and personal commentaries that articulated frustration over unemployment, corruption, and perceived restrictions on digital freedoms. These posts rapidly circulated across platforms, generating shared narratives of grievance and a sense of collective urgency. As engagement intensified, online discussions evolved into coordinated calls for public assembly, with protest details disseminated through stories, group chats, and encrypted messaging channels. This transition from dispersed digital commentary to synchronized street action illustrates how networked communication can compress the timeline of mobilization. In urban centres such as Kathmandu, gatherings drew large youth participation and significant media attention. The movement's decentralized structure proved central to its expansion. Without reliance on a single leader or party apparatus, participants operated through horizontal coordination, adapting locations and communication strategies in response to administrative monitoring. This fluidity reduced organizational vulnerability and enhanced resilience, while also reinforcing a generational identity rooted in autonomy and digital competence. Symbolic creativity further amplified the movement's reach. Protest art, slogans, and viral imagery condensed complex political concerns into accessible visual language, strengthening solidarity and attracting diaspora engagement.

At the same time, the dynamics of digitally mediated protest presented strategic challenges. The absence of formal leadership complicated negotiation with authorities and hindered the articulation of a unified long-term agenda. Sustaining momentum required continuous online engagement, risking participant fatigue as attention cycles shifted. Nevertheless, the protests demonstrated that digitally native youth can transform communication networks into organizational infrastructure, enabling rapid agenda-setting and visible collective presence. By converting online discourse into sustained public demonstrations, the Nepal Gen Z protests exemplified a contemporary model of connective mobilization in which identity formation, coordination, and political pressure are interwoven within the architecture of digital platforms.

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## Theoretical Interpretation of Gen Z Protests

The Nepal Gen Z protests can be critically examined through contemporary democratic and communication theories that illuminate how digital activism reshapes political participation. One of the most relevant theoretical lenses is the concept of the public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a domain in which citizens engage in rational–critical debate about issues of common concern, free from domination by state or market forces. In the context of the Nepal Gen Z protests, social media platforms functioned as an expanded digital public sphere where young citizens articulated grievances regarding corruption, unemployment, and governance failures. Unlike traditional media systems that operate through hierarchical gatekeeping, digital platforms enabled horizontal dialogue, allowing youth voices to circulate widely and shape public discourse. However, the Nepal case also reveals tensions within Habermas’ normative framework. While digital spaces expanded access to political discussion, much of the mobilization was driven by affective expression rather than structured deliberation. Viral posts, symbolic imagery, and emotionally charged narratives often generated greater engagement than detailed policy debates. Algorithmic amplification further intensified selective exposure, sometimes reinforcing polarization rather than fostering inclusive dialogue. Thus, while the protests demonstrate the expansion of the public sphere into digital domains, they also highlight the limitations of deliberative ideals within algorithm–driven environments. Another essential framework for understanding the protests is the network society theory advanced by Manuel Castells. Castells argues that power in contemporary society operates through networks structured by information and communication technologies. According to this perspective, communication networks become central arenas in which power is exercised and contested. The Nepal Gen Z protests exemplify this transformation. Rather than confronting the state through traditional party mechanisms, digitally connected youth exerted influence by mobilizing attention, visibility, and symbolic pressure through online networks. The movement’s decentralized and leaderless structure aligns with Castells’ argument that modern social movements often operate as flexible, adaptive networks rather than rigid organizations.

The protests can also be interpreted through the theory of connective

action, which suggests that digital movements are organized through personalized participation rather than collective ideological commitment. In Nepal, individuals joined the protests not necessarily through formal membership or ideological alignment but through shared digital expressions of frustration. Personalized posts aggregated into collective momentum, illustrating how digital platforms facilitate coordination without centralized authority. This form of participation reflects a generational shift in political engagement, where identity-based communication replaces traditional organizational loyalty. The theoretical significance of the Nepal Gen Z protests lies in their capacity to test and refine democratic theory within an emerging South Asian context. The case demonstrates that digital activism simultaneously democratizes communication and introduces structural vulnerabilities. Networked participation enhances visibility and rapid mobilization, yet sustainable institutional reform requires translation from digital energy to formal political processes. Consequently, the Nepal Gen Z protests represent both a confirmation of contemporary theories of networked power and a reminder that democratic transformation depends on the interaction between digital communication and institutional responsiveness.

### **Impact, Limitations, and Democratic Implications**

The Nepal Gen Z protests generated immediate and visible political impact by placing youth concerns at the centre of national discourse. Issues such as unemployment, corruption, and digital freedoms gained renewed prominence in public debate, compelling political leaders to acknowledge the grievances of young citizens. The protests challenged the prevailing assumption that Nepalese youth are politically disengaged and instead demonstrated their capacity to organize, articulate demands, and influence agenda-setting through digitally mediated networks. By transforming online dissent into coordinated public demonstrations, the movement signalled the emergence of Generation Z as a consequential political constituency within Nepal. Beyond immediate visibility, the protests also reshaped perceptions of political participation. Digital platforms became recognized not merely as spaces for social interaction but as arenas for civic engagement and accountability. Youth participants experienced a heightened sense of political efficacy, as collective digital action translated into tangible public presence. This shift suggests a broader transformation in democratic culture, where continuous engagement

through networked communication supplements traditional electoral processes.

However, the movement also revealed structural limitations inherent in digital activism. The decentralized and leaderless structure that enabled rapid mobilization simultaneously complicated negotiation and policy follow-through. Without formally designated representatives, translating protest demands into sustained institutional dialogue proved challenging. Furthermore, the momentum generated by viral content was vulnerable to the fast-moving cycles of digital attention. Maintaining long-term engagement required sustained coordination that extended beyond moments of heightened public visibility. Another significant limitation concerns the relationship between digital expression and substantive reform. While online mobilization effectively amplified grievances, institutional change depends on legislative processes, bureaucratic capacity, and political will. Digital activism can pressure authorities, but it cannot independently restructure governance systems. Additionally, concerns regarding surveillance, misinformation, and polarization underscore the fragility of digital public spaces. Algorithm-driven amplification may intensify emotional mobilization while weakening deliberative debate. Despite these challenges, the Nepal Gen Z protests represent an important democratic development. They illustrate the transformative potential of digitally networked youth participation while emphasizing the necessity of integrating digital activism with formal political engagement. Ultimately, the long-term democratic significance of the protests will depend on whether youth energy evolves into sustained civic participation capable of influencing policy, strengthening accountability, and reinforcing democratic institutions.

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