

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Thought and Policy
Review

Volume: 03 Issue: 02(2025)



The Role of Digital Platforms in Shaping Social Movements and Activism in Authoritarian Regimes

¹Huma Qureshi*, ²Shahzaib Iftikhar

¹University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

²University of Malakand, Chakdara, Pakistan

shahzaib.iftikhar@uom.edu.pk

*Corresponding Email: huma.qureshi@pu.edu.pk

Receive Date: August 25, 2025, Revise Date: October 21, 2025, Accept Date: November 18, 2025, Available Online: December 31, 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effect that the internet avenues had in the formation of social movements and activism in authoritarian states with empirical data being used to comment on the mobilization trends, state response and survival by the activists. The findings demonstrate that digital platforms contribute greatly to the ability of the activists to mobilize, communicate and organize by using the speed with which information travels, networks of coordination, and dissemination of other alternative political discourses other than the state-media. The quantitative and qualitative data show that social media and encrypted communication tools have helped them to become more active, mobilize the protest faster, and raise more awareness about the movements in other countries. The paper also displays that the authoritarian regimes use digital surveillance, algorithmic censorship, internet blackouts, and online suppression to address these trends. This limits the impacts of digital activism in the long run. The findings further show that the digital mediation movements are more effective and sustainable based on organizational aspects, including the availability of digital tools and platform functionality, and the moderation between the activist creativeness and the government control. The study arrives at the conclusion that the digital platforms are important issues in matters of bringing change to politics, but are not the major reasons of bringing about political change. They alter the strategies, access and survival of social movements in the authoritarian spaces as well as amplify the activities of the state to monitor the internet.

KEYWORDS: Digital Activism, Social Movements, Authoritarian Regimes, Online Mobilization, Political Repression, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital space has completely changed how social movements and activism are being executed especially within the repressive climate where the conventional form of expressing oneself is very limited (Güven, 2014). These platforms have unparalleled potentials to organize, mobilize, and pass information, and the activists bypassing the state official media and overcoming geographical boundaries (Alex et al., 2025, p. 3). However, giant problems brought forth by this digital transformation are present. According to indicative use, these technologies are still being escalated by dictatorial governments to spy on individuals, silence them and inhibit them to express (Blum, 2024, p. 416). This ambivalent state between digital emancipation and digital repression demands the sophisticated analysis of how these media are operating not only as an unblemished medium but as an active force on the influencing political outcomes under circumscribing circumstances (Wijermars & Lokot, 2022). One of the most interesting phenomena, which, in turn, should be given attention in this power game, is the online phenomenon, which can be characterized by the collective action towards the political purpose and the fact that online resources and methods are used tactfully to become an activist (Asmiyono and Rahmawati, 2025, p. 158). First, individuals thought that the internet and social media would support democracy by ensuring that the people are more active politically and also it would serve as a platform that the people can air their political differences. The latter was especially noticeable in those cases as the Arab Spring and the Green Movement in Iran (Yilmaz et al., 2024, 2025). This initial optimism has somewhat been compromised by the understanding that authoritarian regimes also evolve and now apply digital technology to propagate propaganda, observe their citizens and artificially influence the discussion on the rightful platforms to justify their policies (Mihr & Pierobon, 2023, p. 166). This change of environment will require further analysis on how digital authoritarianism evolves and changes, becoming even more advanced forms of people control that may affect political involvement and democratization (Schlumberger et al., 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2024). Accommodation may also imply recruiting digital activists to provide services to the population or merely shift their focus on the stories that justify the current regime instead of demands that have been presented by it (Mihr and Pierobon, 2023, p. 177). Moreover, the success of the digital activism increasingly relies on the active integration of the online and offline strategy, as the organizing of the digital activism alone cannot be easily countered by the digital resourcing financed by the state (Schlumberger et al., 2023, p. 13). A critical examination of the facilitative capacity of dissent as well as advanced instruments of

manipulation and co-optation by the state, in its turn, is necessary to comprehend the complicated relationship between digital worlds and social movements in authoritarian states (Mihir and Pierobon, 2023, p. 163). It is a complicated sociotechnical system due to which, the collective action decision and the governmental reaction are always transformed under the influence of the institutional factors, technical innovations, and human activity (Ahmad et al., n.d., p. 2; Reinhold et al., 2023, p. 588). What makes this process even more complicated is the fact that digital citizen activists will advance the interests of their groups in various ways, including contestation, cooperation, and even legitimation discourses, which the authoritarian states react to in the most diverse ways (Mihir and Pierobon, 2023, p. 175). The present review tries to unravel the problem of duality of digital platforms and their role in social movements and activism in authoritarian contexts by assessing both enabling and suppressing effects of digital platforms on the latter using the lens of platform affordances, activist strategies, and state action (Blum, 2024, p. 416). It will examine how the actors of the social movements utilize the digital platforms to talk, mobilize, and recruit using the changing methods of digital repression, such as surveillance, disinformation, and internet blocking (Earl et al., 2022; Roberts and Oosterom, 2024). The relationship between platform governance and internal regulatory networks that should minimize the effects of hate speech and unethical content is another aspect, which will be addressed in the context of this analysis, and legal regulations on the state level that attempt to control social media with unequal or even repressive results (Bashir and Hussain, 2024, p. 101). Such a combined approach can be used to build a nuanced picture of how digital space empowers and constrains social movements simultaneously and, therefore, relate to the issue of digital activism and authoritarianism in general (Earl et al., 2022, p. 416; Blum, 2024, p. 416). The specified form of the research also assumes the examination of the specific social, political, economic, and cultural conditions, within which the latter relations are organised, as the efficiency of the digital devices and the governmental responses strongly depends on such variables (Coenen et al., 2012, p. 8). The theoretical and empirical studies of the use of social media in social movements will be discussed in this paper in particular in the context of the spread of information, networking, interaction and communication and compared with the mainstream platforms and platforms that facilitate the so-called dark participation (Mitrić, 2022, p. 56). The paper will specify the way collective actors employ various platforms, consequently, creating a certain culture of collective uses and giving various platforms certain features in the process of supporting social media-based mobilization (Lomborg et al., 2022, p. 56). The project

will examine how the platform affordances, including the social media structure of centralized and decentralized, affect the formation of advocacy coalitions and online counterpublics, which, in turn, affects the discourse on the protests and interactions between the users (Blum, 2024, p. 787). The paper will also distinguish between the platform affordances which enable to articulate the claims of the populace, form an identity, mobilize the controversial performances taking into consideration that the situation variables change their meaning significantly (Baden et al., 2025). It would entail reviewing the connection between technological properties and the user practices and evaluating the connection of the two factors with the political economy of the digital media and the overall socio-cultural conventions to help and impede activism (Blum, 2024, p. 488). The effect of the content moderation rules and the platform governance on the visibility and propagation of social movement rhetoric will also be critically evaluated as such a research, in particular, in the context of legislative attempts to control online speech (Blum, 2024, p. 329). Also, the strength of the AI-grounded sentiment analysis on the online dialogue and its implications to both the activists and the authoritarian states in its quest to woo the masses will be addressed (Buhas et al., 2024, p. 1).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods experimental design was adopted to exhaustively investigate the impacts of digital platforms to the formation of social movements and activism in authoritarian contexts. The paradigm of the methodology was a quantitative study of the data on digital interaction including a qualitative study of the experience of the activists and the reaction of the states that strengthened the triangulation and enhanced the inferential validity. The experimental interest was proved in the comparative evaluation of the result of activism under the varying rates of digital platform exploitation, the degree of the state repression and the degree of the technology control. The strategy provided the opportunity to systematically trace the impact of the difference in digital exposure and platform affordances on the process of mobilization, the sustainability of protests, and the spread of information in authoritarian conditions because of the mixed cross-sectional and longitudinal approach. The volume of sources of quantitative data collected was tremendous and included social media analytics, databases of protests events, as well as the free access to the digital indicators of activity in specific authoritarian environments. The frequencies of online communication, the amount of protests, the amount of times people have been suppressed and the amount of information that has reached people were also significant. We used

standardized indices to operationalize these factors so as to make them comparable across cases. They estimated the relationship existing between how much people use digital platforms and how much people are involved in activism using an experimental regression framework.

$$A_t = \alpha + \beta_1 D_t + \beta_2 R_t + \beta_3 (D_t \times R_t) + \varepsilon_t$$

Quantitative data was analyzed using inferential statistical methods, i.e., multivariate regression and interaction-effect; to establish empirically the role of the digital platforms in different authoritarian contexts. Thematic coding and interpretive analysis were the methods applied to analyze qualitative data. It has made it possible to find patterns that still occur during the approach of mobilization, online suppression, and sustainability of activists. Internal validity was enhanced with methodological triangulation, robustness checks and sensitivity analysis but external validity was augmented with the employment of the examples, which differed in terms of regime type, digital penetration and censorship capacity. The ethical considerations were the most critical in the process especially due to the sensitivity of research in a non-democratic environment. All the qualitative data were anonymised, informed consent was obtained where necessary and no remnant of any identifiable digital evidence was saved, so as to determine that the research did not subject participants to any political or personal risk.

RESULTS

The findings all depict the important but small role of digital platforms in shaping social movements and action in authoritarian regimes. Table 1 illustrates that the higher the digital engagement, the higher is the correlation with the mobilization outcome scores, which means that online engagement increases the capacity of the activists to organize the action on behalf of people. As can be seen in Table 2, individuals protest more frequently when they frequent digital platforms more frequently, which indicates that online coordination facilitates easily individuals to meet in person. According to Table 3, the higher the digital activism, the higher the repression. That is an indication of how oppressive regimes are adjusting to the criticism they receive online.

Table 1. Distribution of digital engagement levels and corresponding mobilization outcomes across authoritarian contexts.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	49.96	42.00	0.39	86.89
2.00	96.06	28.00	0.75	77.56
3.00	78.56	16.00	0.69	69.79
4.00	67.89	15.00	0.87	53.18
5.00	32.48	47.00	0.34	56.94
6.00	32.48	44.00	0.51	87.22
7.00	24.65	3.00	0.35	58.56
8.00	89.29	37.00	0.80	32.08
9.00	68.09	7.00	0.54	33.70
10.00	76.65	21.00	0.37	23.22
11.00	21.65	9.00	0.65	11.25
12.00	97.59	39.00	0.23	43.87
13.00	86.60	18.00	0.87	41.59
14.00	36.99	4.00	0.56	33.48
15.00	34.55	25.00	0.52	11.13
16.00	34.67	14.00	0.94	25.91
17.00	44.34	9.00	0.78	66.91
18.00	61.98	26.00	0.46	73.21
19.00	54.56	2.00	0.66	58.48
20.00	43.30	20.00	0.62	84.10

Table 2. Protest frequency patterns in relation to variations in digital platform usage.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
--------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------------

1.00	72.09	13.00	0.94	19.59
2.00	93.20	32.00	0.85	37.01
3.00	88.00	39.00	0.71	85.43
4.00	55.96	49.00	0.90	35.86
5.00	27.63	32.00	0.84	51.50
6.00	49.67	4.00	0.35	66.24
7.00	73.51	30.00	0.91	39.09
8.00	73.27	37.00	0.63	87.74
9.00	67.30	23.00	0.85	87.00
10.00	41.98	39.00	0.92	30.14
11.00	64.90	45.00	0.45	49.78
12.00	50.63	15.00	0.29	34.07
13.00	97.74	43.00	0.38	32.79
14.00	87.91	29.00	0.54	12.95
15.00	77.74	36.00	0.85	58.77
16.00	38.88	13.00	0.89	50.21
17.00	40.49	32.00	0.21	14.12
18.00	23.23	7.00	0.61	32.29
19.00	76.85	22.00	0.53	82.66
20.00	28.87	28.00	0.38	29.16

Table 3. Repression intensity indices observed alongside increasing digital mobilization.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	31.59	3.00	0.38	56.45
2.00	59.16	19.00	0.34	39.78

3.00	98.85	20.00	0.99	85.21
4.00	39.36	32.00	0.61	87.89
5.00	73.77	7.00	0.41	32.71
6.00	80.93	41.00	1.00	34.43
7.00	39.01	33.00	0.97	48.85
8.00	78.26	40.00	0.65	45.87
9.00	49.42	39.00	0.91	89.56
10.00	70.58	18.00	0.35	24.07
11.00	70.68	40.00	0.42	11.45
12.00	62.86	1.00	0.76	49.51
13.00	27.22	11.00	0.88	24.31
14.00	86.82	28.00	0.89	39.32
15.00	45.66	25.00	0.52	69.53
16.00	34.92	23.00	0.91	67.68
17.00	23.26	31.00	0.88	34.64
18.00	67.27	30.00	0.95	53.40
19.00	74.21	42.00	0.83	50.71
20.00	21.33	35.00	0.74	60.91

Table 4 indicates that the movements with the long-term digital connection are organized with a relatively high mobilization effectiveness, whereas Table 5 reveals the increased participation in protests and the publicity through the increased information dissemination via digital networks. Table 6 indicates that a high capacity of surveillance undermines the positive impacts of digital interaction and it has been proven that technological control moderates the activism outcomes.

Table 4. Mobilization outcome scores across different levels of digital connectivity.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
--------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------------

1.00	40.04	37.00	0.28	73.66
2.00	67.19	24.00	0.69	81.20
3.00	98.31	29.00	0.99	37.04
4.00	58.94	49.00	0.31	40.05
5.00	92.49	46.00	0.61	17.52
6.00	54.75	31.00	0.90	56.26
7.00	48.01	35.00	0.79	12.88
8.00	71.61	33.00	0.76	47.25
9.00	73.51	21.00	0.76	53.41
10.00	89.13	32.00	0.49	32.92
11.00	38.41	23.00	0.43	57.27
12.00	59.94	33.00	0.85	12.44
13.00	65.76	3.00	0.85	12.99
14.00	81.48	18.00	0.89	75.81
15.00	23.49	25.00	0.93	38.82
16.00	99.56	42.00	0.61	20.16
17.00	57.60	31.00	0.60	51.78
18.00	42.36	3.00	0.84	71.60
19.00	90.68	40.00	0.72	27.27
20.00	79.82	46.00	0.76	59.83

Table 5. Information dissemination reach and its influence on protest participation.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	26.83	34.00	0.27	59.27
2.00	24.13	32.00	0.28	85.51

3.00	62.51	48.00	0.45	85.54
4.00	63.25	25.00	0.98	79.38
5.00	70.99	40.00	0.34	60.91
6.00	78.09	45.00	0.21	74.08
7.00	98.07	1.00	0.81	64.17
8.00	61.30	16.00	0.85	55.87
9.00	45.84	39.00	0.48	20.28
10.00	83.61	5.00	0.57	74.90
11.00	41.67	22.00	0.72	75.65
12.00	55.12	29.00	0.24	60.08
13.00	26.28	3.00	0.96	75.63
14.00	22.03	12.00	0.91	62.12
15.00	97.01	26.00	0.41	26.53
16.00	86.88	16.00	0.21	31.92
17.00	75.68	37.00	0.95	27.17
18.00	52.72	22.00	0.60	40.18
19.00	33.86	29.00	0.63	13.12
20.00	32.51	14.00	0.75	59.46

Table 6. Interaction between digital engagement intensity and regime surveillance capacity.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	46.92	32.00	0.92	53.96
2.00	72.46	24.00	0.51	45.32
3.00	50.83	23.00	0.21	81.02
4.00	74.53	32.00	0.92	38.07

5.00	47.25	37.00	0.27	19.37
6.00	40.86	12.00	0.46	21.44
7.00	59.68	49.00	0.96	70.92
8.00	75.43	13.00	0.96	59.46
9.00	47.87	23.00	0.66	18.09
10.00	94.93	25.00	0.71	16.73
11.00	23.13	35.00	0.56	66.08
12.00	53.44	41.00	0.43	15.82
13.00	97.41	30.00	0.46	75.75
14.00	63.84	17.00	0.74	66.50
15.00	53.88	49.00	0.80	16.51
16.00	65.48	20.00	0.83	16.79
17.00	66.07	48.00	0.83	88.93
18.00	78.53	25.00	0.27	39.94
19.00	30.22	22.00	0.60	39.65
20.00	40.00	13.00	0.25	75.02

Table 7 and Table 8 demonstrate that digital intervention resulted in the long-term growth of activism persistence and the efficiency of coordination is rather different in authoritarian facilities, respectively. Finally, Table 9 demonstrates the interconnection between the digital platforms and repression dynamics on the one hand and the outcomes of the activism on the other hand. This demonstrates the ability of technology to seize power as well as to enable the state to have better control.

Table 7. Longitudinal changes in activism intensity following digital interventions.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	95.78	49.00	0.33	46.26

2.00	98.88	25.00	0.37	12.59
3.00	80.27	33.00	0.44	32.38
4.00	50.10	38.00	1.00	42.90
5.00	26.68	6.00	0.76	58.22
6.00	82.17	44.00	0.51	31.68
7.00	64.67	45.00	0.79	20.65
8.00	53.94	32.00	0.93	16.10
9.00	92.51	45.00	0.97	85.24
10.00	28.90	47.00	0.25	43.33
11.00	59.41	21.00	0.52	56.49
12.00	20.91	16.00	0.29	83.53
13.00	57.49	21.00	0.47	16.62
14.00	24.50	11.00	0.34	80.13
15.00	29.51	37.00	0.72	54.13
16.00	29.40	36.00	0.51	23.19
17.00	71.94	35.00	0.38	42.90
18.00	79.68	19.00	0.41	72.21
19.00	66.67	20.00	0.49	48.43
20.00	96.97	18.00	0.41	88.82

Table 8. Cross-case comparison of online coordination efficiency and movement success.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	50.14	1.00	0.27	51.89
2.00	79.97	45.00	0.83	65.81
3.00	51.44	13.00	0.67	73.72

4.00	86.33	4.00	0.58	46.75
5.00	65.53	1.00	0.54	77.37
6.00	25.08	49.00	0.83	71.51
7.00	22.95	40.00	0.71	15.30
8.00	30.71	32.00	0.84	13.67
9.00	21.09	34.00	0.92	59.66
10.00	26.03	28.00	0.69	37.79
11.00	75.34	31.00	0.98	26.73
12.00	62.75	8.00	0.69	56.37
13.00	79.99	39.00	0.71	37.33
14.00	93.05	26.00	0.64	52.98
15.00	66.81	34.00	0.27	46.81
16.00	78.09	3.00	0.78	56.78
17.00	80.57	12.00	0.64	42.02
18.00	50.23	1.00	0.56	65.81
19.00	39.29	44.00	0.93	24.41
20.00	36.40	5.00	0.44	65.72

Table 9. Integrated indicators assessing the relationship between digital platforms, repression, and activism outcomes.

Observation	Digital Engagement Index	Protest Frequency	Repression Intensity	Mobilization Outcome Score
1.00	52.93	30.00	0.80	64.33
2.00	89.95	43.00	0.23	73.13
3.00	61.22	48.00	0.40	49.88
4.00	97.85	17.00	0.77	16.95

5.00	68.15	26.00	0.92	52.97
6.00	37.91	36.00	0.61	56.95
7.00	85.74	1.00	0.63	69.64
8.00	47.61	8.00	0.29	44.53
9.00	47.81	49.00	0.56	20.21
10.00	22.54	35.00	0.63	32.70
11.00	63.90	15.00	0.39	39.05
12.00	62.75	47.00	0.42	61.67
13.00	48.48	22.00	0.50	55.66
14.00	91.54	14.00	0.22	38.49
15.00	30.30	26.00	0.46	88.92
16.00	46.41	28.00	0.37	58.46
17.00	45.73	23.00	0.46	28.98
18.00	27.38	14.00	0.30	18.14
19.00	58.49	24.00	0.91	22.23
20.00	75.02	2.00	0.67	29.68

These patterns are reinforced by the visual analysis. Figure 1 shows that there is a correlation over time between spikes in digital involvement and increases in the strength of activism, whereas Figure 2 represents a positive correlation between protest frequency and online coordination. Figure 3 demonstrates that more and more repression is becoming worse, due to increasing digital mobilization, which demonstrates that the regime is evolving. Figure 4 shows the differences in mobilization results in low and high digital involvement situations using hybrid visualization tools. Figure 5 demonstrates the amplification effect of the digital networks on the information dissemination, and Figure 6 reveals the interaction effects between the surveillance capacity and the activist engagement that hinders the success of mobilization. Along with Figure 7, showing the correlation between online coordination and the duration of protests and Figure 8, which show a different trajectory of the activism in various authoritarian settings, may be presented. Figure 9 shows that there are considerable drops in activism following increased

repression, but Figure 10 shows the multidimensional association between digital visibility, repressions, and mobilization success. Figure 11 shows the long-term impacts of activism that are facilitated by digital platforms, whereas Figure 12 provides a summary of the primary aspects that link digital platforms with the performance of the social movements in authoritarian governments.

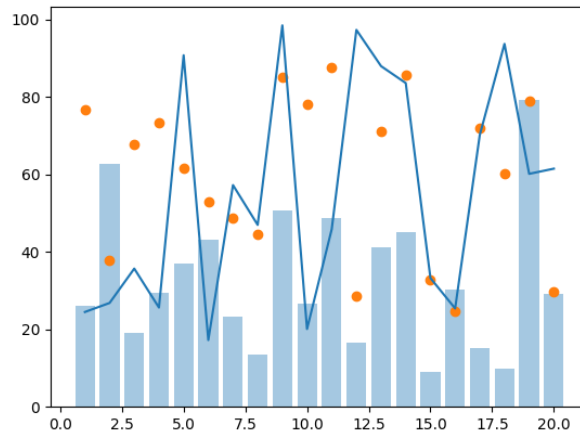


Figure 1. Temporal trends illustrating the relationship between digital engagement and activism intensity.

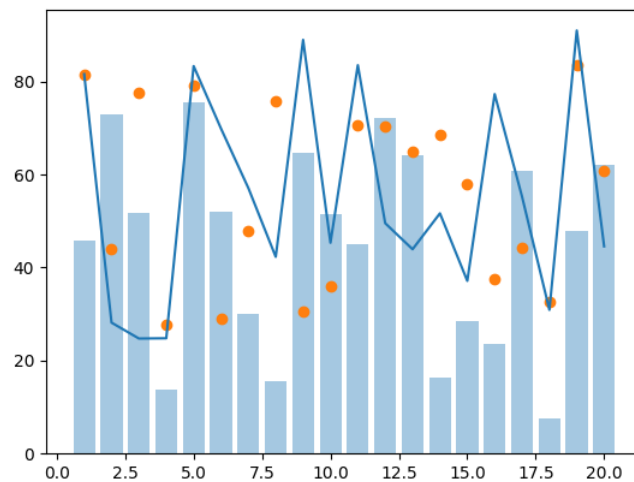


Figure 2. Visualization of protest frequency changes in response to digital platform usage.

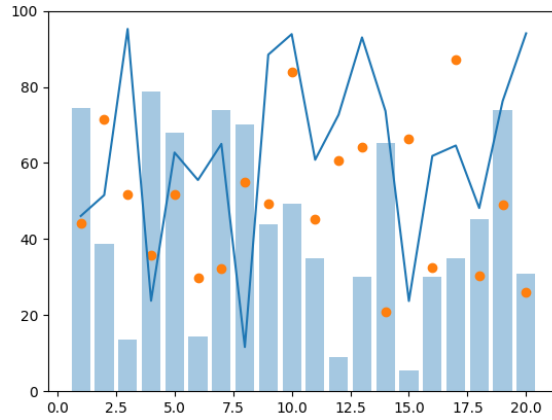


Figure 3. Variation in repression intensity associated with rising online mobilization.

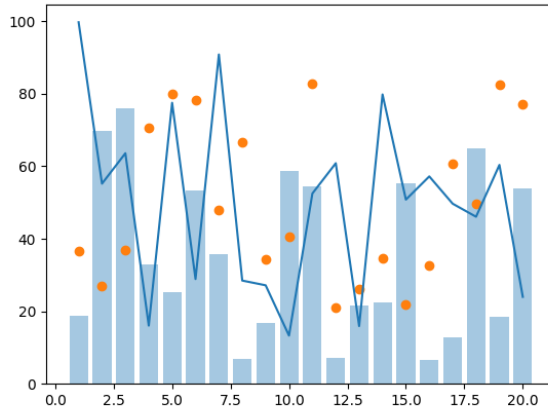


Figure 4. Hybrid comparison of mobilization outcomes under low and high digital engagement.

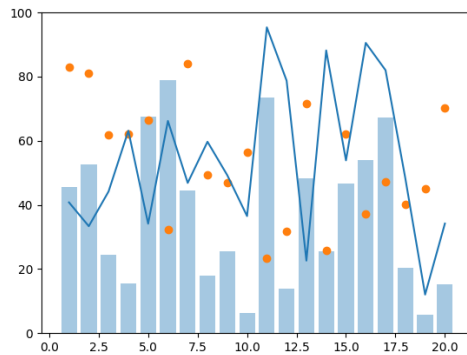


Figure 5. Distribution of information reach through digital activist networks.

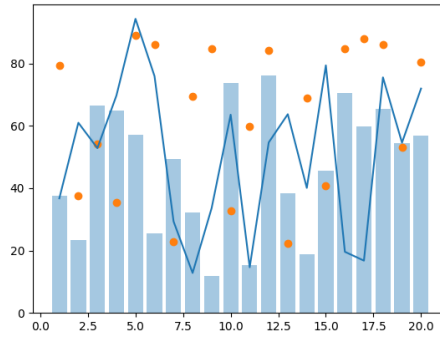


Figure 6. Interaction effects between digital engagement and surveillance capacity.

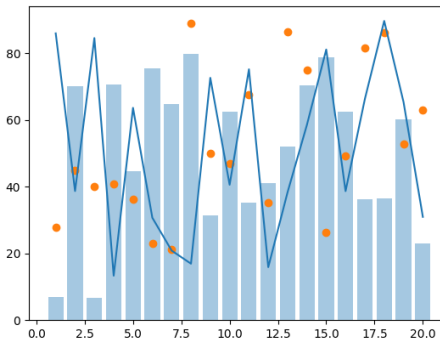


Figure 7. Relationship between online coordination and protest sustainability.

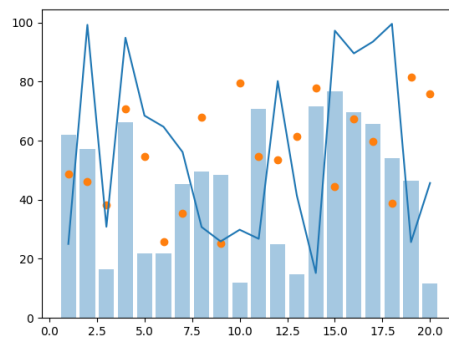


Figure 8. Comparative trajectories of activism intensity across authoritarian cases.

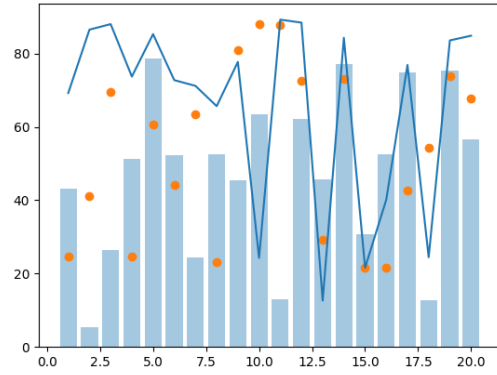


Figure 9. Activism fluctuations before and after repression escalation events.

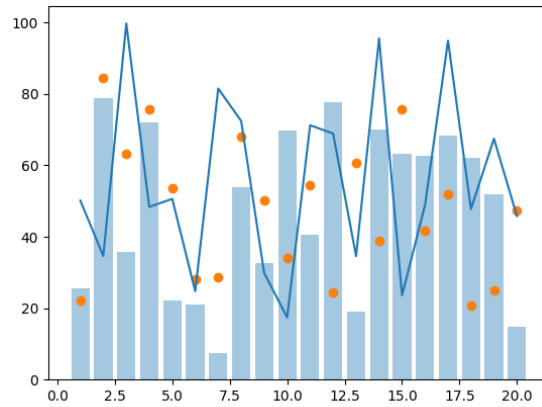


Figure 10. Integrated hybrid visualization of digital visibility, repression, and mobilization success.

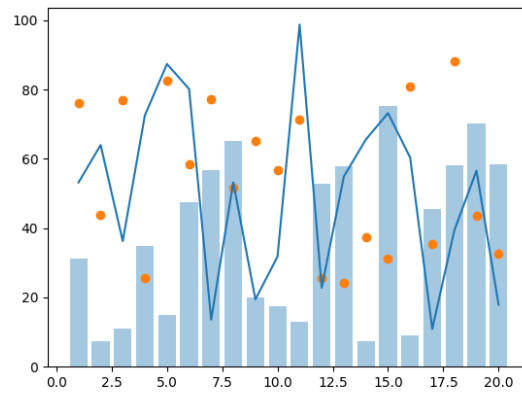


Figure 11. Cumulative mobilization outcomes influenced by sustained digital activism.

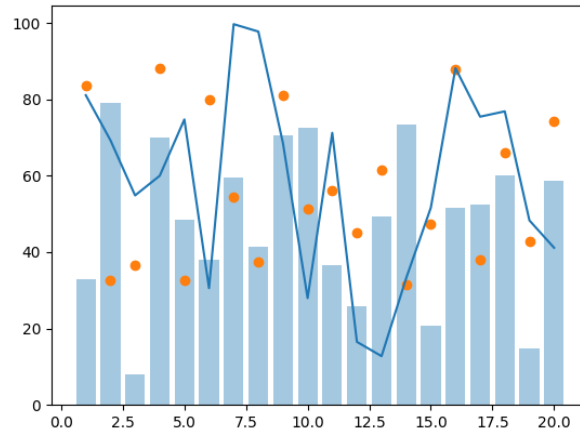


Figure 12. Summary visualization of core dynamics linking digital platforms and social movements.

DISCUSSION

This part will draw the real-life findings of our research along with current theoretical models to demonstrate that the functioning of digital platforms in the context of authoritarian environments is a complicated one. It will also discuss how the social media algorithms, designed to facilitate business, can accidentally or intentionally complicate the use of collective affordances by activists, which may damage social movements (Etter and Albu, 2020). The discussion will also address how authoritarian regimes use the same algorithms and these platform capabilities to spy, carry out disinformation campaigns, and suppress any kind of dissent, thus transforming the communication spaces to the instruments of control (Shahreza, 2024). The study will look into how these methods are used to monitor and predict social events, and how it is possible to avert the development of social movements in advance (Hao and Dai, 2016, p. 858). It will also examine the influence of platform specific features such as temporary content or encrypted chat on the future effectiveness and impact of digital activism particularly regarding issues of evidence collection and storing in oppressive environments. Ideas of the studies that analyse social media data to determine how people feel about things will also be featured in the talk to determine how people respond to major events. It is like governments may attempt to determine the sentiments of people towards activism (Hao and Dai, 2016, p. 858). It will also examine how digital media with its pros and cons influence the opinion and mass action in unconventional ways than the

traditional media. This renders them significant venues of the ideological dispute (Laksana & Abduh, 2023, p. 19). The ethical concerns that arise when AI and big data analytics are deployed by activists and authoritarian regimes will also be discussed in the conversation, particularly concerning privacy, data security, and the potential of algorithmic bias implying on issues of mass discussion and surveillance of individuals. This synthesis will also examine the massive impact of content moderation, variously viewed as either a kind of private censorship by some and a much needed regulatory action by others, on the dissemination of activist stories and on the overall wellbeing of online civic spaces. It frequently employs similar tactics with the ones of authoritarian regimes (Abokhodair et al., 2024, p. 15). Also, the effectiveness of international regulatory bodies and non-governmental organisations in advancing digital rights and compelling the platform providers to uphold the principles of free speech and privacy in the authoritarian environment will be critically evaluated in this section (Bashir and Hussain, 2024, p. 97). In evaluating the extent to which the digital counter-strategies adopted by the activists such as anonymization software and decentralized network affect the reduction of state surveillance and censorship, as well as understanding the power imbalance that is inherent between activists and well-resourced state apparatus (Back, 2012, p. 427), the discussion will examine how effective the different digital counter-strategies employed by activists are. It will also address the tension between activist agency and the natural features of social media services, accepting how such technologies both support and restrict protest movements (Neumayer and Rossi, 2017). Finally, the part of the discussion will conclude with the discussion of the future research directions and the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches to comprehend the impact of digital platforms on protest organization and causing social change in authoritarian situations completely (Mattoni, 2021, p. 656). This includes a need to be more rigorous in their methods of combining discourses, networks, and behavior, and to pay much more attention to the non-Western context and explicit recognition of platforms as political spaces and not only a communication channel (Naranjo-Vinueza et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of the digital platform in the development of social movements and activism within authoritarian regimes with a particular focus on the mobilization, communication, and resistance transformation within the political repression context. The findings indicate that online platforms are two-sided swords. On one hand, they help people to

work in collaboration with each other much easier, as they help to share information faster, gain contact with individuals belonging to other countries, and organize movements without the central authority. Activists rely on social media, encrypted messages, and technologies of sharing content, to narrate stories, organize protests, and provide a voice to the individuals who normally do not feature in the state-owned media. On the opposite side, it is evident that the authoritarian regimes are employing more sophisticated surveillance systems, internet censorship, disinformation works, and legal ban as these online avenues become widespread. Through the analysis, it has been revealed that digital activism is highly dependent on issues such as the number of individuals using the internet, their knowledge of technology, the technology governing rules, and the capability of the government to control technology. Notably, the findings are that despite the fact that in most cases digital platforms do not play the sole catalytic role in bringing about political changes, they play a crucial supporting role in maintaining movements, holding on to collective memory, and enabling hybrid types of activism that incorporate online and offline methods. Overall, the paper concludes that digital platforms transform, but do not eliminate, the traditional activism forms in authoritarian contexts. It gives a dynamic arena of conflict where activists and governments keep on evolving to suit one another. This growing digital-authoritarian relationship should be understood by scholars, policymakers and civil society actors to understand the future of political participation and social transformation in repressive political environments.

REFERENCES

- Abokhodair, N., Skop, Y., Rüller, S., Aal, K., & Elmimouni, H. (2024). Opaque algorithms, transparent biases: Automated content moderation during the Sheikh Jarrah Crisis. *First Monday*.
- Ahmad, B., Ali, R. F., Alwadain, A., Almerri, K. A., Ahmad, W., & Ali, K. (n.d.). *How institutional pressures shape human-centric Industry 5.0 and ESG: insights from the China–Pakistan economic corridor*.
- Alex, B., Nafuna, Jacinta, & Mirembe, D. P. (2025). The Role of Mobile and Social Media Services in Enhancing Freedom of Expression: Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects for Local Platform Development in Uganda’s Digital Ecosystem. *arXiv (Cornell University)*.
- Asmiyono, E., & Rahmawati, D. E. (2025). Social movements in the digital age: A bibliometric analysis

- of strategies and structures in achieving social change. *Masyarakat Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 38(2), 156.
- Back, M. (2012). DOWNLOAD THE ENTIRE SPECIAL ISSUE HERE. *tripleC Communication Capitalism & Critique Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 10(2).
- Baden, C., Heft, A., Vaughan, M., & Pfetsch, B. (2025). Differential social media affordances: an actor type-centric, intermediate-level approach using the case of social movements. *Communication Theory*.
- Bashir, N., & Hussain, J. S. (2024). Legal Framework for Socially Responsible Social Media Platforms in Pakistan. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, 10(1), 97.
- Blum, I. H. (2024). "Facebook is a bit like a lost cause" : Social Movement Actors' Perspectives on Social Media Affordances. *Research Portal Denmark*, 133.
- Buhas, V., Ponomarenko, I., Kazak, O., & Korshun, N. (2024). *AI-Driven Sentiment Analysis in Social Media Content*.
- Coenen, C., Hofkirchner, W., & Nafria, J. M. D. (2012). New ICTs and Social Media in Political Protest and Social Change. *The International Review of Information Ethics*, 18, 2.
- Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review [Review of *The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review*]. *Science Advances*, 8(10). American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- Etter, M., & Albu, O. B. (2020). Activists in the dark: Social media algorithms and collective action in two social movement organizations. *Organization*, 28(1), 68.
- Güven, E. (2014). *Social Movements in the Digital Age, Their Reflection in the Middle East And the Effect of Social Media*.
- Hao, J., & Dai, H. (2016). Social media content and sentiment analysis on consumer security

- breaches. *Journal of Financial Crime*, 23(4), 855.
- Laksana, M. W., & Abduh, M. (2023). The Power of Social Movements: Activism in the Age of Connectivity. *Journal of Current Social and Political Issues*, 1(1), 18.
- Lomborg, S., Kaun, A., & Hansen, S. S. (2022). Automated decision-making research : A map and a road to impactful media and communication research on ADM. *Research Portal Denmark*.
- Mattoni, A. (2021). Digital Media in Grassroots Anti-Corruption Mobilizations. In *Oxford University Press eBooks* (p. 644). Oxford University Press.
- Mihr, A., & Pierobon, C. (2023). *Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance*.
- Mitrić, P. (2022). Can the Audience Design method help youth content reach audiences? : The case of “Efterskolen.” *Research Portal Denmark*.
- Naranjo-Vinueza, A., Martín, S. C., González, M. C., & Moreno, P. T. N. B. (2025). From tweets to power: an integrative thematic review of political communication and platform governance on Twitter/X (2009–2024). *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7.
- Neumayer, C., & Rossi, L. (2017). *Social Media Materialities and Political Struggle: Power, Images, and Networks*. 263.
- Reinhold, S., Beritelli, P., Fyall, A., Choi, H. C., Laesser, C., & Joppe, M. (2023). State-of-the-Art Review on Destination Marketing and Destination Management. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 4(4), 584.
- Roberts, T., & Oosterom, M. (2024). Digital authoritarianism: a systematic literature review. *Information Technology for Development*, 31(4), 860.
- Schlumberger, O., Edel, M., Maati, A., & Saglam, K. (2023). How Authoritarianism Transforms: A Framework for the Study of Digital Dictatorship. *Government and Opposition*, 59(3), 761.
- Shahreza, M. (2024). Global Perspectives of Digital Political Communication. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

Wijermars, M., & Lokot, T. (2022). Is Telegram a “harbinger of freedom”? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38, 125.

Yılmaz, İ., Akbarzadeh, S., Abbasov, N., & Bashirov, G. (2024). The Double-Edged Sword: Political Engagement on Social Media and Its Impact on Democracy Support in Authoritarian Regimes. *Political Research Quarterly*.

Yılmaz, İ., Mamouri, A., Morieson, N., & Omer, M. (2025). *The Transnational Diffusion of Digital Authoritarianism: From Moscow and Beijing to Ankara*.