

An Assessment of the Effect of TikTok Use on Gen Z Behavior: A Corporate Communication Perspective on the #RejectFinanceBill2024 Protests in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract—From the recently witnessed finance bill protests in 2024 in Kenya, there is a growing capacity of social media platforms which shapes political action in the country. Traditionally, political action was based on already established institutional channels, however, TikTok is blurring this by making it possible for mobilization and participation being initiated from various people who do not necessarily have a belonging to institutions. Additionally, during the same protests, there was intensified information sharing and participation in online digital political activism. There is limited scholarly work on the effects of TikTok on offline and digital political activism. Therefore, this study sought to find out the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County. Data was collected through content analysis guided by a content analysis code and questionnaires distributed through Google forms. A total of 120 videos were analyzed and 380 respondents took part in the study. The study sample was obtained through snowballing. From the study, the findings indicate that there was a close relationship between the behavior of generation Z and their physical participation in the reject finance bill demonstrations. This was after data from content analysis was thematically analyzed and that from questionnaires was analyzed by the aid of SPSS. Therefore, the study concludes that TikTok was an integral site for organization, communication and facilitation of the reject finance bill political activities on the ground.

Index Terms—Crisis communication, issues management, digital political activism, reject finance bill 2024, digital communication strategy, generation Z behavior, TikTok effect, TikTok use, finance bill 2024.

1. Introduction

The practice of corporate communication has always been transformed as a result of technological changes. Although, along the history, institutional communication has been characterized by one-way communication and top-down communication but Cornelissen (2020), states that corporate communication as a management function that coordinates internal and external stakeholders to create a favorable reputation for the organization. To emphasize this, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), argues that contemporary communication

environment no longer grants organizations a monopoly because various stakeholders have power to communicate, evaluate and share organizational narratives through platforms that organizations might not be taking seriously. This shift demands for a digital communication strategy.

According to Dimock (2019), generation Z make up the most digitally active stakeholders of various organizations. As a result of the pervasive connectivity, the generation Z have developed distinct communication behaviors. Therefore, they are likely to create a new set of behavior that has not been witnessed before. For instance, Sanjida (2025) posits that there is a connection between an engagement on social media and participation in offline political and civic activities among people. This participation is strengthened by the fact that social media facilitates rapid flow of information, real-time public debates and a networked collective action. In relation to this, (Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017), point out that various social media platforms have shaped and supported various political activities across the world like black lives matter, end SARS, me too and occupy wall street. The success of these activities indicates that digital political activism goes beyond dissemination of information.

Specifically, TikTok has driven digital political activism in Africa as witnessed in different countries like Nigeria through End SARS in 2020. According to Uwalaka & Watkins (2021), it has been possible for TikTok to drive various activism activities due to its unique features. When it comes to Kenya, there is a long political history which comes with high tension times and instances of fierce struggle. Activities like Mau Mau, Saba Saba and recently the #RejectFinanceBill2024 have been politically driven. The #RejectFinanceBill2024 came at a time when TikTok was in place and therefore it witnessed large participation both online and offline. Therefore, this study delves into unravelling the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County

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2. Statement of the Problem

TikTok is rapidly emerging as a dominant social media platform among generation Z across the globe. According to Statista (2026), the platform has more than one billion active users and the greatest proportion of these users are aged between 18 and 24 years old. As a platform, TikTok has distinctive affordances which ease its use, impact and reach in comparison to other social media platforms. According to scholars like Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Zulli & Zulli, 2022, For You Page (FYP) driven by algorithms, in-built short form video creation tools, the hashtag aggregation, participatory features like comment, like and duet and video embedment features like stitch speed up circulation of political content and digital mobilization of youths for a common course of action. A combination of these features present an opportunity and a challenge at the same time to communication experts and practitioners. In a communicative environment, TikTok as a social media platform would be a good servant when it comes to stakeholder communication allowing conveyance of institutional narratives, reinforcement of organizational messages and defending of the organization against negative narratives according to Habermas, (1989) and Papacharissi, (2015). However, TikTok's algorithmic architecture make emotionally resonant and visually compelling content to be more visible than the formal communication from organizations. According to Kelleher (2018), such algorithmic prioritization creates a fundamental symmetry in which stakeholder generated counter-narratives outweigh organization-initiated messages. Once such a thing happens, the stakeholders tend to act on the most visible messages. In such a case, they are likely to act against organizations that are handling crisis and issues. When such a thing happens, then there are high chances that the organization handling the crisis will have a tough time handling crisis communication. In relation to this, the 2024 reject finance bill demonstrations presented a real problem arising from TikTok algorithms. Even though there were messages from the government, but they were made invisible by algorithm driven content on the reject finance bill. Therefore, this study seeks to find out the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County. This will aid in filling the persisted gap between practice and scholarship in corporate communication that was experienced during the #RejectFinanceBill2024.

A. Study Objectives

This study had one objective of the study which was to find out the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County.

B. Research Question

This study had one question of the study which was; what effect did TikTok have on Generation Z's behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County?

3. Literature Review

There have been several studies that sought to uncover the

civic awareness which is a cognitive outcome of exposure to TikTok content. In a similar manner, study findings also point to a close relationship between civic awareness and behavior of the same people who are informed. The behavioral effects indicate visible actions that result from exposure to TikTok content in relation to #RejectFinanceBill2024. Behavior of people can be seen through participation in the protest, a decision to attend the protest related activities like mobilization and fundraising, online activism like signing of online petitions and development of a strengthened civic identity and political urgency. This study is theoretically grounded in a dimension of Scheufele's (1999) on the framing effects of exposure of online messages. In addition to this, Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) argument about the connective action networks which carry a potential to translate online personalized expressions into offline participation in political activities.

From a study by Karimi and Fox (2023), there is a strongly relationship between exposure to TikTok content and the physical participation in political activities by the young adults. This study further points out that TikTok has a higher potential of facilitating participation in political activities of the young adults. In addition to this, Okibe (2024), examined the role of mobilization done through TikTok on the 2024 generation Z demonstrations found out that the online mobilizations increased participation in the physical protests during the #RejectFinanceBill2024. The findings of Auko (2025) are in agreement with the findings of Karimi and Fox (2023) that there is a connection between offline and online activities in relation to political activities relating to the reject finance bill 2024.

Convincingly, previous studies points to a close relationship between exposure to TikTok content or activities and participation in real demonstration activities. However, most of these studies were not done through a mixed research design. Therefore, this study seeks to find out the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County through a mixed research design with an aim to triangulate the study findings. This will provide necessary insights on the most appropriate approach to crisis communication, issues management, social media monitoring and stakeholder communication when a crisis strikes.

4. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed research design. The mixed research design was guided by the proposal of Creswell & Creswell (2018) that studies of this nature need a mixed research design. Through a mixed research design, it was possible for the researcher to both qualitatively and quantitatively explain the effect of TikTok on Gen Z behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests in Nairobi County. The study site was Nairobi county because it was the primary centre of the 2024 generation Z demonstrations, it has the highest internet penetration and is a home to the largest number of generation Z who make up the study population. The sampling frame for the study was universities in Nairobi network. The exact population of generation Z who took part in the study was not known and therefore, to select a study sample, Cochran's (1977) formula was used and it yielded a sample of

384 respondents. To obtain the respondents for the study, the researcher identified the first respondent and requested them to make a referral. The same process was repeated until a required number of respondents had been attained. For the content analysis, 120 TikTok videos were selected for coding, a sample size consistent with Krippendorff's (2019) guidance that video based content analysis requires a sufficiently large corpus to support reliable thematic interpretation. Snowball sampling was adopted because it allowed the researcher to identify respondents who met the study's specific eligibility criteria. Both primary and secondary data were collected, drawing on content analysis of TikTok videos and a questionnaire administered via Google Forms, supported by a content analysis coding sheet and a structured questionnaire as the two data collection instruments. A pilot study was conducted to test and refine both instruments prior to full data collection. To ensure coding reliability, Cohen Kappa (κ) was calculated during the pilot phase, with coding refined until each variable reached the $\kappa \geq 0.70$ threshold that Krippendorff (2019) identifies as the standard for acceptable inter-coder agreement, before proceeding to full scale data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

5. Study Findings, Discussion and Analysis

From the study, it was visible that as a result of exposure to TikTok content, the behavior of generation Z was greatly influenced. This was in agreement with the findings of Karimi and Fox (2023) who emphasize the effect of TikTok on offline political activism. The number of people who took part in offline demonstrations had been exposed to TikTok content that had invited them and motivated them to take part in the demonstrations. It is therefore clear that TikTok enhanced participation of some generation Z in the demonstrations both online and offline.

The study also established that the number of generation Z's who took part in online activities was very high. This points to the findings of Dimock (2019), that the highest number of people who use TikTok and other social media platforms were the generation Z. Therefore, there is no doubt that if using TikTok has effects on behavior of people, then such effects will be heavily experienced among the generation Z because they are heavy users of the platform. From the findings, their heavy use combines both consumption and production of content for the platform.

The study established that the generation Z who took part in the physical demonstrations had also taken part in the online activities like planning and coordination of the protests. Therefore, taking part in the physical activities had been transferred from an online activity to the physical activity. This indicates a close nexus between the behavior of generation Z online and offline. This confirms the argument by Bennett and Segerberg (2013), who state clearly that online activities have a potential of translating into an offline activity. Therefore, this was the case whereby the behavior of generation Z that was witnessed online also became visible offline when they turned up in large numbers to implement some of the slogans that had

been shared online like #OccupyParliament.

Additionally, TikTok enhanced the voice of generation Z and allowed them to voice their concerns. In the absence of TikTok as a platform, they would have remained silent but with the introduction of TikTok, they had a platform through which their voice would be heard. A large number of people who were speaking the same language through new posts, reposting other people's content and reacting to similar posts made their voices to be amplified. Through increased discussion on the topic, it became possible to increase mobilizations as posited by Okibe (2024). This was the case because, the online discussion also became part of discussions around dinner tables and among family members and friends. This extended discussions of this matter had an extended effect of further spreading the message that came with a personal appeal. Such a personal appeal played an elementary role in the mobilization of more people to take part in demonstrations.

There was still a group of generation Z who took their time to document demonstration activities and share them through the platform. This ensured that people from different parts of the world had a real picture of what was happening. Part of documentation entailed recording steps made, progress of demonstrations, police brutality and persistence of demonstrators as shown by those demonstrating. This was a way of showing the world that generation Z are busy taking part in the demonstrations. The ripple effect of such sharing was seen in increased number of those who turned up to take part in demonstrations because one post motivated more people to turn up and be part of the history in the making.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings suggest that Generation Z's behavior during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests was, to a substantial degree, associated with their exposure to TikTok content. A considerable proportion of respondents who attended demonstrations in person identified their engagement with TikTok as a contributing factor in their decision to participate. Exposure to this content was linked to a greater self-reported willingness to take part in a range of related activities, including speaking out publicly, signing online petitions and demonstrating solidarity with the protest movement. This pattern was accompanied by an increase in political interest, which appears to have further reinforced respondents' participation across these activities.

From a corporate communication perspective, these findings position TikTok not merely as a youth entertainment platform but as a functioning stakeholder communication infrastructure, one through which Generation Z organized, informed itself and mobilized largely independently of formal institutional channels. The apparent absence of coordinated government or corporate messaging on the platform during the protest period left this infrastructure to operate without institutional engagement, a gap that is consistent with Coombs' (2007) argument that a communication crisis emerges when an organization fails to recognize and respond to the communication behavior of its stakeholders. This suggests that institutions seeking to engage Generation Z stakeholders,

whether in a crisis or in ordinary civic communication, need to treat platforms such as TikTok as legitimate, primary channels of stakeholder mobilization rather than peripheral ones and to develop monitoring and response capabilities matched to the speed and affordance driven nature of platform-based communication.

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