

# Nepal's Gen-Z Protests: How Social Media Fuels Political Change

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## Nepal's Discord revolution

**A social media-driven uprising showcased digital activism's potential. Yet it now faces risks of appropriation, misinformation, and fleeting impact.**

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[K. Kalyani, Mukesh Kabir](#)



Demonstrators at the entrance of parliament in Nepal on September 8. The most distinctive aspect of the Nepal protests was the use of social media to create momentum. | Photo Credit: Navesh Chitrakar/Reuters

In September 2025, Nepal witnessed massive [protests](#) by youth against corruption charges facing the incumbent government. Demonstrators expressed discontent with unemployment and mismanagement of public funds by political elites. The protests centred on governance and political accountability. The situation was aggravated by the banning of 26 social media sites. These platforms are ominously integrated in people's lives and a blanket ban was nowhere near acceptable.

After Nepal's monarchy was abolished in 2008 and constitutional democracy established, people hoped for improvement. Instead, wealth and resources became concentrated in the hands of political elites. [Social media](#) became a platform for “nepo kids”—children of the political elite—to display lavishness, while masses of youth suffered anonymously, without access to development.

### [Rebels with a cause](#)

The most distinctive aspect of the protests was the use of social media to create momentum, particularly among a generation closely interfacing with digital platforms. Protesters mobilised through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Discord. Youth congregated on Discord—using pseudonyms such as “Jalebi” and “Ghost”—to discuss political leaders and their disappointment with the government, and to respond to nepo kids who flaunted their wealth online.

While some claimed the protests aimed at reinstating the monarchy, it is crucial to evaluate the significant role social media plays in generating public opinion and mobilising masses. Social media-generated protest marks a watershed in how opinion is

shaped. While political unrest and circulation of elites have been witnessed for centuries, social media adds digitally mediated political subjectivities to people's minds, transposing them from passive receptors to active voices.

## **Media as political interlocutor**

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Politics has always been mass-mediated through mediated spaces. In conventional societies, civil society groups served this role; with digital platforms, television became the medium of interlocution. Eventually, digital space expanded to social media and AI generated digital sites, which became the new technologies of mediation. American writer Walter Lippmann points to how modern democracies potentially generate a “picture in our heads” through digital media, shaping our understanding of events. Reality arrives through pre-set frames and filters, generating stereotypes. In modern democracy, the political process is so complex that media becomes inevitable in mediating between people and State—disseminating information on public policy or government schemes through loops of media channels.

Public intellectual Noam Chomsky highlights the vulnerability media brings to democracy itself. Controlling media spaces through propaganda and politically motivated vision creates a smokescreen for masses, distorting reality. Within mainstream media today, such fabrication has become ubiquitous, often motivated by dominant political motifs and state-led propaganda.

Social media creates a shift in how media platforms conventionally mediate between masses and State. It allows mass participation and lends space to vent anguish and opinion. In Nepal, alternative media platforms such as social media helped youth galvanise their grievances and resentment against the political class. Social media ensures networking of virtual communities who connect around common concerns. Its power lies in traversing other sites through recurrent circulation of images. This reiteration disburses information and creates affective association of audience with information, potentially creating allyship among like-minded people and giving thrust to movements through a domino effect.

## **Global precedents**

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Something similar occurred in protests in 2020, popularly called #BlackLivesMatter. The protest, born as a Twitter hashtag, evolved into a movement for racial justice. This social media-generated movement created global ripples. In South Asia, particularly India and Nepal, it translated into digital mobilisation for caste justice under hashtags such as #DalitLivesMatter. While thematically diverse, these protests brought together marginalised identities globally—Blacks, minorities, Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, and LGBTQIA+ people. The phrase “I can't breathe” became a metonym for marginalised identities choked under dominant group regimes.

Across the globe, similar solidarities emerged for Palestine through hashtags such as #standwithPalestine and #freePalestine, expressing solidarity for Palestinian lives. Social media has become a space to rethink solidarities and create allyship transcending national boundaries, generating aspirations for justice and equitable treatment as citizens.



People carrying a “Black Lives Matter” banner during a student walkout protest against Donald Trump in Seattle, Washington on November 14, 2016. The #BlackLivesMatter protest, born as a Twitter hashtag, evolved into a movement for racial justice. | Photo Credit: Jason Redmond/AFP

Nepal’s case exemplifies youth aspiration for employment and dignified human life. When nepo kids flaunted luxuries, this showcased the gap between masses and political elites—particularly egregious when a new democratic framework had promised inclusivity and better life. Social media not only showcased failed promises but became virtual ground to express anguish and organise protest, acquainting masses with oppressed history, contested debates and slogans voicing their agenda. The episode exhibited coordinated protest with pre-set agendas through social media conversations. What appeared as protesters going awry on streets was gradual anger built within social media by showcasing nepotism and corruption.

Social media thus works as a digital interface capable of challenging power and bringing agendas to the negotiating table.

## The risks of appropriation

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Having discussed social media's emergence as pathway for social movements, the flip side requires examination.

The massive protest Nepal witnessed was soon appropriated by another spectrum of political elites—King Gyanendra. The social movement against corruption was interpreted as comeback for the Royal family. Some displayed support, but massive protest and uproar was certainly not about reinstating faith in monarchy. Discontentment was appropriated and projected as pro-monarchist protest. This reflects social media's dark side: while powerful for opinion-making, it is marked by ephemerality. Unlike conventional social movements, it lacks leadership or direction, rendering social media protests more vulnerable to appropriation.

Another side of appropriation is misinformation accompanying protests. Within Indian media, *Dainik Jagran* published the Nepal protest with the headline “Army handles situation in Nepal, Gen Z wants a Hindu rashtra”. This was clearly misguided propaganda to colour the movement when it started to lose momentum.

Something similar occurred with [Bangladesh](#) protests. The July 2024 protest involved similar patterns of social media usage and youth involvement. The July Revolution, as it is called, ousted Sheikh Hasina's government over reserving benefits for grandchildren of freedom fighters. Sheikh Hasina calling protesters “*Razakars*”—collaborators during the 1971 liberation war—further fuelled protest. Violent protests eventually made Sheikh Hasina leave her position and flee. Mainstream media orchestrated the protest as Islamist military takeover, supported through fake videos and AI-generated images.

## Challenges and questions

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Social media-generated protests resist clear compartmentalisation. While potential affect that social media generates through images, catchy memes or slogans keeps mass attention intact, and its nature can escape censorship, adding control to content creators' hands—information from admired influencers creates faith, all beginning with a click—there is a dark side.

Posts are often short-lived and fizzle out. Influencers cannot substitute for leadership. Without long-term organisational structure, social media-generated protests' fate is left to algorithms and clickbait. Sociologist Zeynep Tufekci argues that while social media interface with democracy can be empowering, it can also instigate instability within State. States cannot simply use conventional censorship tactics. The key takeaway from Nepal protests is that conventional censoring or banning social media creates more infuriated masses. Choking information creates instability and instigates chaos.

Social media's tricky nature as new civil society opens critical questions: How far can social media be trusted and authenticated? Social media-generated activism has tendency towards “slacktivism”—people restricting interest to clicks rather than real-time action. Social media remains vulnerable to appropriation, particularly by elites with

access and control over information flows. Can data generated on social media render new vulnerabilities to the emerging geopolitical landscapes? Recent protests across Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka against political regimes follow patterns, with social media ubiquitous in every protest. Social media has potential to generate narratives that distort, misinterpret, or circulate fake news.

The intersection of social media and AI platforms represents a new and enduring intervention in the digital world. It is crucial to examine how this evolving digital presence shapes the subjectivity of the masses during times of digital discord. In Nepal's case, what initially emerged as a claim for democratic rights was soon overshadowed by appropriation and misinformation, raising critical questions about the political remaking that occurs on digitally mediated platforms.

*K. Kalyani is Assistant Professor at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Mukesh Kabir is a media scholar and received his doctorate from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Views are personal.*