From Habermas' Bourgeois Public Sphere to Gerbaudo's Online Crowds: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Kenya's #EngageThePresident on X Space

Paul Muya and Josephine Otiende

From Habermas' Bourgeois Public Sphere to Gerbaudo's Online Crowds: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Kenya's #EngageThePresident on X Space

[iD] [1]*Paul Muya

PhD Candidate, School of Communication, Daystar University

[iD] [2]Josephine Otiende

PhD Candidate, School of Communication, Daystar University

Crossref

Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to examine the discourse of governance, bio-power and political accountability in Kenya. Applying the lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis, the study explores #EngageThePresident X Space. At this forum, President Ruto and Gen Z participants engaged in a discussion at the height of the 2024 anti-tax law protests in Kenya.

Methodology: Underpinned by public sphere theory, we first examine the construction of subjects' positions and power relations within the discourse. Second, we analyse discourses surrounding governance, political accountability and bio-power in Kenya. Third, we explore how language, institutions, and cultural norms influence the production of knowledge, categorisation of individuals, and construction of contextual truths.

Findings: The study found that Gen Z emerged in the discourse as a fragmented subject, ranging from patriotic and emotionally volatile to naïve and tech-savvy citizens. President Ruto was constructed with multiple conflicting subject positions, demonstrating a dynamic nature of political fashioning in a legitimacy crisis. In addition, while the President tried to reassert control through a package of consultative governance, Gen Z's fragmented discourse infused the state narrative with grief, rage, irony and resistance. Kenya's #EngageThePresident represents a reconfiguration of the public sphere in the digital age, one where collective emotion, decentralised participation and real-time responsiveness redefine governance discourse.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study contributes to the practice of Foucauldian discourse analysis by examining the accelerated pace of digital narratives in digital media in the Global South. It highlights a broader democratic recalibration in which citizens are not passive recipients of state narratives but active co-authors of the nation's political discourse and statecraft. The study recommends that entrenching platformised engagement between political leaders and subaltern citizens has the potential to catalyse political stability for the maturing nations in the Global South. Future research on the impact of Gen Z awakening on the political destiny of President Ruto is deemed necessary.

Keywords: *Social Media, Public Sphere, Discursive Governance, Political Accountability, Gen Z*

JEL Codes: *F54, F5*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, digital activism has emerged as a global phenomenon, reshaping how political participation, resistance and discourse unfold (Pardosi et al., 2024). In Africa, digital platforms have become vital spaces for civic engagement, resistance to authoritarianism and the amplification of local grievances to global audiences. These digital spaces have empowered youth and marginalised communities to challenge dominant narratives, mobilise for social change and build transnational solidarity across borders.

Kenya has a long history of resistance and activism, evolving from anti-colonial struggles to contemporary digital movements. In post-independence Kenya, youth and student activism became a central component of political resistance. In the 1970s and 1980s, university students led protests challenging authoritarianism through demonstrations and underground movements (Melchiorre, 2020). In the 2000s, activism expanded into digital spaces, with social media platforms like Twitter (now X) becoming platforms for organising and amplifying dissent. Kenyan youth, particularly Gen Z, have leveraged these platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers and assert their voices (Nyabola, 2018). Social media has enabled rapid mobilisation, as seen in movements like #MyDressMyChoice, which highlighted gender-based violence, and #SomeoneTellCNN, which challenged Western media portrayals of Kenya (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019). These digital campaigns reflect a broader trend of "digital decolonisation," where marginalised groups reclaim narrative power and resist global inequalities in representation (Mignolo, 2009; Nyabola, 2018).

The 2024 protests against the Finance Bill marked a watershed moment in Kenya's digital activism. Triggered by proposed tax hikes, the protests quickly evolved into a broader critique of state corruption, economic inequality, and police brutality (Njuki et al., 2024). Hashtags like #RutoMustGo and #RejectFinanceBill2024 served as discursive anchors, uniting diverse grievances under a common banner (Fairclough, 1992). These hashtags constituted a moment where "language is conceived as one element of the social process dialectically interconnected with others" (Fairclough & Graham, 2002, p. 188). Gen Z-led protests harnessed social media to share infographics, organise demonstrations, and document police violence (Njuki et al., 2024, 2024; Arzani, 2025), transforming the X platform into an alternative public sphere (Nyabola, 2018; Twinomurinzi, 2024). Humour, memes, and pop culture references further strengthened solidarity and countered state narratives (Mukhongo, 2020).

Despite its empowering potential, digital activism in Kenya faces challenges such as state surveillance, misinformation, and algorithmic bias (Nyabola, 2018; Earl et al., 2022). The government has increasingly used cybercrime laws to intimidate online dissent, while platforms like X often prioritise sensational content over substantive political discourse (Cotter et al., 2021). Nevertheless, Kenyan activists continue to innovate within these constraints, using social media to amplify their voices and mobilise both local and global support (Tufekci, 2017).

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 (GoK, 2010), provides for the establishment of legislative actors, including Members of the National Assembly, Senators, and Members of the devolved 47 County Assemblies. Viewed from Habermas' public sphere theorising, the National Assembly, County assemblies and the Senate represent idealised forums for rational-critical debate about matters of public interest, free from coercion and state or market control (Habermas, 1989). In this ideal form, the public sphere functions as an intermediary between citizens and the Executive, enabling public opinion to influence political action and

accountability through inclusive, accessible, and rational communication (Habermas, 1989). This concept has been particularly influential in democratic theory, as it emphasises the importance of open discourse in shaping policy decisions and accountability.

However, the internet and digital media have precipitated a shift in the concept of the public sphere, which has undergone significant evolution, particularly in the digital age. Initially, the public sphere was a space where consensus was sought through reasoned argumentation, facilitated by legacy media and public meeting places like coffee houses and theatres. Scholars have moved away from the idea of a singular, integrative public sphere to a fragmented network of multiple, overlapping spheres, influenced by digital communication ecosystems (Schäfer, 2015). Moreover, the digital era has transformed the public sphere from situational to ubiquitous, where any action can become publicly visible to an unlimited audience due to lowered communication barriers and datafication processes (Stahl, 2020). Additionally, the rise of platformization has weakened traditional intermediaries like legacy media, as tech platforms increasingly organise public communication through opaque algorithms and content moderation systems (Helberger, 2019; Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022; Habermas, 2023).

From a Fairclough perspective, Gen Z's choice of language in the discourse of #RutoMustGo, #RejectFinanceBill2024 and language construction was not merely a reflection of social processes but was actively shaped by society's contestation of power. This dialectical relationship highlights how discourse both constitutes and is constituted by social structures, including power relations (Fairclough, 2001a). Therefore, the nexus between Fairclough and Foucault lies in their shared focus on the relationship between discourse, power, and social practices, albeit with differing emphases and methodologies. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a linguistically-oriented framework for analysing texts, focusing on micro-level textual analysis and its connection to macro-level social structures (Fairclough, 1992). FDA, on the other hand, emphasises the formation of discourses and their role in constituting subjects and power relations, particularly through concepts like governance and bio-power (Foucault, 1984, 2008).

This study hinges on texts and their application in discourse to analyse the formation of subjects and power relations (Foucault, 1984, 2008) in #EngageThePresident X Space. The use of Fairclough's lexical choices and transitivity patterns complements Foucault's exploration of governance and bio-power, revealing how linguistic mechanisms in #RutoMustGo and #RejectFinanceBill2024 hashtags illuminate the interplay between textual representations and broader socio-political contexts, offering a nuanced perspective on the ideological underpinnings of governance and bio-power (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1984, 2008).

Social media accelerates the evolution of discourse, allowing researchers to observe shifts in narratives and power structures over shorter periods. Arzani (2025) argues that FDA can adapt to the accelerated pace of digital narratives by examining how stories evolve and influence public opinion in the digital public sphere (Terranova, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2022). This approach aligns with Foucault's concept of conducting a "history of the present" to diagnose contemporary issues (Garland, 2014; Arzani, 2025). Arzani (2025) demonstrates how FDA can uncover the discursive anchors—such as hashtags—that structure meaning, mobilise solidarity, and challenge power in digital spaces. This aligns with Foucault's emphasis on the role of discourse in shaping knowledge and power relations (Foucault, 1972; Arzani, 2025).

Problem Statement

The social media public sphere, as theorised by Gerbaudo (2022), operates under a plebeian logic dominated by online crowds rather than rational publics. Social media platforms prioritise low-intensity interactions, such as reactions (e.g., likes, shares), which aggregate user preferences and influence content visibility through algorithms. This sphere is marked by emotional mobilisation rather than reasoned deliberation, and its democratic logic is plebiscitary, resembling ongoing micro-referendums rather than deliberative processes (Gerbaudo, 2022). Unlike the inclusivity envisioned by Habermas, the social media public sphere is highly hierarchical, with a minority of users generating content and the majority engaging in shallow participation (Nielsen, 2006). This transformation highlights the shift from a rational, consensus-driven model to one shaped by affective and reactive dynamics, raising questions about the implications for democracy in the digital age.

However, the FDA has not sufficiently addressed the dynamics of leaderless movements facilitated by digital platforms, where decentralised narratives challenge traditional hierarchies of power (Twinomurinzi, 2024), such as in #EngageThePresident X Space in Kenya. While the FDA is well-suited to examine the intersection of power, discourse, and digital communication, its application in understanding the dynamics of social media platforms and their role in shaping public discourse is limited, which is the gap that this study fills. In addition, the FDA traditionally examines discourse over extended periods; however, the rapid turnover of digital content challenges this approach (Sam & Gupton, 2023), as exemplified by the #EngageThePresident X Space.

Unlike previous digital activism and political mobilisations in Kenya, the 2024 anti-tax laws protests, which occurred between June 1 and July 12, 2024, were decentralised and lacked formal leadership (ACLED, 2024). #RejectFinanceBill2024 generated over 14 million engagements on X from nearly 400,000 unique users. Retweets accounted for more than 80% of these interactions, emphasising the platform's critical role in message amplification and rapid information dissemination (Nendo, 2024). BBC's writers Fleming & Muia (2024) reported that 150,000 people joined the #EngageThePresident X Space with 3.3 million others listening (Owino, 2024). While #EngageThePresident X Space brought the subaltern Gen Z and the President together on a digital platform for dialogue, studies have overlooked the emerging discourses which form the basis for this study.

The political leadership in Kenya benefit from this study in illuminating the implications of Gen Z's entry into the political arena and the wider digital activism. Scholars will benefit from the methodological practice of harnessing the FDA in the 'present history' of social media and the frontiers of social media present in the field of political communication. This study, therefore, utilises the FDA on #EngageThePresident X Space narratives between Gen Z and the President to illuminate issues of governance, accountability and bio-power in Kenya's context, guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How did issues of governance and bio-power play out during #EngageThePresident X Space?

RQ2. How did the digital activism shape the discourse of political accountability during the #EngageThePresident X Space?

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Habermas' (1989) Public Sphere Theory. Initially introduced in his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a domain of social life where individuals could come together to discuss and influence political action, emphasising rational-critical debate as central to democratic legitimacy. This early model was rooted in the historical context of bourgeois society, highlighting the role of print media and coffee houses in fostering public discourse (Habermas, 1989). Gerbaudo's plebeian public sphere captures the transformation of public discourse in the digital age, where online crowds, not traditional elites, shape political narratives (Gerbaudo, 2022). Unlike Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, the plebeian public sphere is emotional, participatory, informal, and driven by ordinary people, especially youth and marginalised voices, who use social media platforms (Gerbaudo, 2022).

The African public sphere is shaped by everyday resistance, digital technologies, and citizen journalism, which challenge state control and redefine public discourse (Willems, 2010; Mutsvairo et al., 2014; Siziba & Ncube, 2015). However, in Africa, this ideal is complicated by factors such as state censorship, socio-economic inequalities, and limited access to communication technologies (Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012). Despite these challenges, alternative forms of public engagement have emerged, particularly through digital platforms and everyday resistance (Moyo, 2011).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the rise of citizen journalism has further reshaped the public sphere. Mutsvairo et al. (2014) argue that citizen journalists, driven by social responsibility, use digital technologies to report on issues ignored by mainstream media, particularly during crises. For example, during Kenya's 2007 post-election violence, citizen journalists documented human rights abuses and created crisis-mapping tools like Ushahidi, providing critical information in the absence of traditional media coverage (Goldstein & Rotich, 2008). Willems (2010) highlights how Zimbabweans used humour and rumour as everyday forms of resistance to challenge state narratives and reclaim the public sphere. Similarly, Siziba and Ncube (2015) analyse the role of satirical memes in contesting the myth of Robert Mugabe's invincibility, showing how digital platforms have become spaces for silent resistance. However, citizen journalism in Africa also faces ethical challenges, such as the spread of misinformation by citizen journalists operating without formal guidelines (Moyo, 2009). Politically, the public sphere serves as a platform for marginalised voices, enabling them to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for social change.

In recent years, Habermas has revisited and updated his theories to address the challenges posed by the digital age and the transformation of media landscapes. His book New *Structural Transformation of Public Sphere Deliberative Politics* explores how digital technologies and online platforms have reshaped the public sphere, introducing new opportunities for participation while also raising concerns about fragmentation, misinformation, and the commercialisation of discourse (Habermas, 2023). This evolution reflects a shift from a singular, unified public sphere to a more pluralistic and networked model, accommodating diverse voices and perspectives.

In the wake of the proliferation of social media, scholars have moved away from the idea of a singular, integrative public sphere to a fragmented network of multiple, overlapping spheres, influenced by digital communication ecosystems (Schäfer, 2015). The African public sphere is applied to contextualise Kenya's #EngageThePresident X Space forum, where President

Ruto engaged citizens, particularly Gen Z, who are increasingly afforded digital media, marking a significant shift from traditional top-down to horizontal communication. The forum provided an opportunity for Gen Z to discuss with state authority, embodied by the President, not in formal institutions such as parliament, but through hashtags, voice chats, live reactions, and retweets. This resonates with Gerbaudo's (2022) claim that leadership in the plebeian public sphere is "choreographed" through platforms that blend spontaneity with emotional resonance. However, the discourse emerging from this forum remains understudied.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Foucauldian discourse analytical framework, underpinned by a social constructionist epistemological perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as the methodological framework to explore the construction of subjects' positions and power relations within discourse (Foucault, 1982). The approach focuses on uncovering the mechanisms of power, surveillance and governance embedded in discourse. The method used in this study was inspired by Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical phases to analyse discourses surrounding governance and political accountability in Kenya. The archaeological phase focused on identifying discursive rules that define systems of thought and language. The genealogical phase examined the conditions under which statements are perceived as meaningful and true (Foucault, 2005). This framework explores how language, institutions, and cultural norms influence the production of knowledge, categorisation of individuals, and construction of societal truths (Khan & MacEachen, 2021).

Discourse, as defined by Foucault, extends beyond language to include systems of knowledge and meaning that structure our understanding of reality, determining what can be said, who can say it, and what is accepted as knowledge (Waitt, 2010). Foucault's concept of power/knowledge is central to this analysis, highlighting how power operates relationally and shapes knowledge through discourse (Waitt, 2010; Khan & MacEachen, 2021).

The study utilised Foucault's concepts of "positions of speech," "discursive subjects," and "concepts" to identify patterns in #EngageThePresident X Space transcriptions collected from a YouTube recording (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9eIc-VoVC4). As a single case, it was selected for its particularities and ordinariness (Stake, 1995), informed by President Ruto hosting the X Space on Thursday, July 4, 2024. The forum was primed as a platform for engaging with the issues agitated for by protestors, leading to anti-tax law protests and the breaching of Parliament on June 25, 2024. The X Space session lasted 2 hours.

A total of 150,000 people joined the X Space forum (Fleming & Muia, 2024), with 3.3 million others listening (Owino, 2024). Twelve participants contributed to the discussion, including 11 Gen Z representatives and the President. The Statehouse Spokesperson and the blogger moderated the session and are excluded from the analysis. A purposive sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015) was employed to select excerpts that accentuated themes from the corpus of the X Space transcription.

The analysis followed Foucauldian principles, focusing on three key dimensions. First, texts were analysed to identify how Gen Z and President Ruto were constructed within the discourse. This involved examining explicit and implicit portrayals, including their roles, behaviours, and attributes (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Secondly, the study explored how power relations were enacted through discourse, including mechanisms of surveillance, regulation, and discipline. Particular attention was paid to how participants - Gen Z and President Ruto -

were positioned as requiring governance or management (Foucault, 1991). Thirdly, the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts were analysed to understand how discourse shapes societal norms and practices. This included examining recurring themes, metaphors, and the interplay between dominant and alternative discourses (Cheek, 2004). The analysis involved a close reading of the transcription to identify key themes, discourses, and power relations, with particular attention to language choices, framing mechanisms, and underlying assumptions (Foucault, 1982). The analysis also incorporated Foucault's notion of "problematization" to explore how Gen Z are perceived as a subaltern in the Kenyan political terrain and his concept of "conditions of possibility" to understand how language shapes practices and perceptions (Foucault, 1990, 2005).

To ensure methodological rigor, codes were developed inductively, guided by the research questions. Themes were identified through an iterative analysis process, ensuring alignment with Foucauldian principles. Reflexivity was maintained through regular consultations among the research team to evaluate interpretations critically. As the data was sourced from publicly available materials, no additional consent was required.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Subject Construction

The Foucauldian principle was applied to analyse how President Ruto and Gen Z were constructed as discursive subjects and how power relations were enacted and contested during the interactive session.

a) **Gen Z participants**
Gen Z emerged in the discourse as a fragmented subject, ranging from patriotic and emotionally volatile to naïve and tech-savvy citizens.

i. Gen Z as the concerned citizen/ patriotic citizens/rational citizens
The Gen Z participants took the position of an informed and rational actor, emphasising their civic consciousness and rejecting being portrayed as anarchic and apolitical.
Extracts 1:
"We read the Bill, we understand what it means..." and *"We are not just making noise, we are awake..."* are examples of discourse that explicitly position Gen Z as rational, competent actors who are informed and politically literate.
"*We read the Bill*" is a declaration of political literacy. This also challenges the dominant discourses that portrayed Gen Z as apolitical and easy to manipulate.

ii. Gen Z as Emotionally volatile, Angry
Extracts 2:
President Ruto: "*... we must remain calm and sober as a nation.*"
President Ruto's statement of "calm and sober" aligns with a Foucauldian understanding of pastoral power, where authority assumes the role of a moral shepherd, managing passions perceived as disorderly. That rhetoric implicitly constructs Gen Z as irrational and emotionally volatile. The sobriety normative marker portrays Gen Z's protest as void of maturity and control.

iii. Gen Z as a Digitally naïve, victim subject
A section of the Gen Z audience expressed their fear of being watched and targeted.
Extracts 3:
Participant: "*We are not safe. Some of us are scared to speak. People are disappearing.*"
Participant: "*Some of us are missing. People are being picked up.*"

Gen Z is seen as a subject under surveillance and threat. This aligns with Foucault's (1991) concept of biopolitical subjectivity, which is controlled by fear, risk, digital tracking, and bodily control, and also with the agency of political actors, as well as objects of state attention through digital intelligence surveillance (Zuboff, 2019).

iv. Gen Z as a moral consciousness of the nation
Extracts 3:
Participant: "*We are the future, but we are also the conscience.*"
This statement positions Gen Z as the nation's ethical voice. This moral subject portrays dissent as patriotic, rather than anarchic, and not externally instigated, as the state framed it. Extract 4 illustrates Gen Z demanding political accountability from those with instruments of power.

Extracts 4:

Participant: *"Mr. President, sisi tunataka kujua, huyu askari amekuwa akiuwa watu kwa maandamano atashikwa siku gani? Kwa vile amekuwa akiroam freely tangu last month amekuwa tu all over the city. Tunataka kujua atashikwa siku gani, kwa vile ilikuwa inasemekana amekuwa ivo tangu kitambo na si wa kwanza. We just need answers about him thank you.*" (Mr. President, we want to know when the policeman who killed during the protest will be arrested? He has been roaming the city streets freely since last month. When will he be arrested and we know he has been like that for a long time … he is not the first one. *We just need answers about him thank you.*")

b) **President Ruto**
President Ruto was portrayed with multiple conflicting subject positions, demonstrating a dynamic nature of political fashioning in a legitimacy crisis.

i. The President as a listening father
Extracts 5:
President Ruto: "*As a father of young people, I hear you.*"
This discourse portrays a patriarchal metaphor explicitly constructing President Ruto as a caring paternal figure, positioning Gen Z by implication as his children. This aligns with governmentality through familiar metaphors to moralise governance and reinforce hierarchical relationships while authorising discipline under the guise of care (Foucault, 1991). The constitution of 'a father' resonates with the fetishization of African political leaders often portrayed as superhuman figures immune to the ravages of time and criticism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

ii. The President as a rational technocrat
Extracts 6:
President Ruto: *"... the budget is about numbers, let us engage factually."*
This technocratic construction appeals to rationalism and calculative logic to dispel anger and grief from the extrajudicial killings discourse. It constructs a binary between reason, the state, and emotion, portraying Gen Z as the reason, and protest as an illegitimate discourse that is reactionary and irrational. It frames accountability as a technocratic competence rather than a moral responsibility. The discourse of budget and numbers embodies how power shapes what is considered truth and knowledge in society. Discourses determine which statements are accepted as legitimate and which are excluded, thereby influencing social legitimacy (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Khan & MacEachen, 2021). The President's statement effectively portrays Gen Z as mediocre in terms of budget appreciation.

iii. The President as an outsider in power
Extracts 7:
President Ruto: "*I was once like you. I fought the system, too.*"

This statement by the President served as a discourse containment strategy, suggesting that dissent should evolve into assimilation within the state authority system. The President's rhetoric delegitimises protest while deflecting the critics. By constructing a subjectivity of proximity and temporary identification, the President seeks to collapse the structural asymmetry between the state and Gen Z. From a Foucauldian perspective, the X Space forum was not merely a conversation, but a disciplinary mechanism through which subjects were constituted, regulated, and, in some cases, resisted.

Findings illustrate that the constructions of subjects were not fixed or neutral, but emerged from historical, contingent discourses of youth, governance, and power in Kenya dating back to the early 1970s to date (Wa Thiong'o, 1997; Nyabola, 2018; Melchiorre, 2020). Gen Zs resisted being portrayed as irrational, but they redefined themselves as ethical, informed and politically conscious citizens. On the other hand, President Ruto calibrated conflicting subject positions to retain authority, emphasising dissent as manageable but within state-defined parameters.

Power, Surveillance, Governmentality and Disciplinary Mechanisms of Subjects

Foucault (1991) viewed power as both repressive and productive through the regulation of conduct. #EngageThePresident X Space was a theatre of soft governance where several forms of power were exercised through language, platform-mediated/ controlled visibility, discipline and affective control. The study findings were as follows:

a. Normalisation through dialogue
Extracts 8:
President Ruto: "*This is what democracy looks like, dialogue not destruction.*"

The President repeatedly highlighted engagement as a civic virtue, portraying the #EngageThePresident forum as a model of participatory democracy. The dialogue afforded by X Space played into a normative template for controlled discourse, shifting the boundary of what is considered acceptable uproar on the street. The ensuing discourse suggests that protest is acceptable only when it takes a dialogue form, but not when it is physical or disruptive.

b. Bio-political calculation
When Gen Z participants spoke about accountability for the extrajudicial killings, the President responded in a managerial tone.
Extracts 9:

Participant: "*Mr President, sisi tunataka kujua, huyu askari amekuwa akiuwa watu kwa maandamano atashikwa siku gani? Kwa vile amekuwa akiroam freely tangu last month amekuwa tu all over the city. Tunataka kujua atashikwa siku gani, kwa vile ilikuwa inasemekana amekuwa ivo tangu kitambo na si wa kwanza. We just need answers about him thank you.*" (Mr. President, we want to know when the policeman who killed during the protest will be arrested? He has been roaming the city streets freely since last month. When will he be arrested and we know he has been like that for a long time … he is not the first one. *We just need answers about him thank you.*")

President Ruto: "*We are looking into it. There are processes. We will account for every life.*"

This dialogue portrays bio-political rationality, placing human life and death as a measurable unit of governance. The president distanced himself from direct moral culpability through depersonalising and proceduralising responsibility for the extrajudicial killings.

c. Surveillance, gaze and regulation of speech.
Gen Z were conscious of being under surveillance, being recorded and flagged out (Zuboff, 2019). They explicitly referenced fear of surveillance.
Extracts 10:
Participant: "*People are being watched. Speaking up could get you in trouble.*"

The online nature of the forum amplified the probability of visibility and self-regulation. This clearly illustrates Foucault's (1977) idea of the panopticon, whereby the possibility of being observed disciplines subjects into compliance. During the engagement, power operated through the anticipation of punishment, which produced a paradox of free speech from hypervisibility tension, altering speech behaviour.

d. Platformed power and soft discipline
The X Space served as a mechanism of soft control. The format created an illusion of symmetrical engagement, but moderation, selection of different speakers and response framing enacted boundaries on acceptable speeches as evidenced below:
Extracts 11:

Participant: "*I think Allai can speak for himself. We can't limit anybody from speaking, everybody has a freedom to speak here*"

Participant: "*No. Allai is very biased. But you know Allai has always been against this….(inaudible)."*

President Ruto: "*Thank you for speaking with decorum. That is how we build a country. Do I answer those or I thought you said we take three people? Can we take Edith? Edith was somewhere. There is a lady called Edith … was somewhere or something?"*

The extract is a clear indication of how power disciplines dissent by establishing behavioural templates for good citizenship. This turns dissent into something that is to be formatted, polite and governable. Speakers who were 'calm' and or 'constructive' were implicitly rewarded, while confrontational tones were punished through dismissal or evasion, as evident in this discourse.

e. Governable subjects

Both subjects – President Ruto and Gen Zs - were placed in discourses that required governance. Gen Zs were constructed as in need of guidance, maturity and knowledge, justifying paternalistic dialogue. Gen Z framed the President as fallible and subject to the will of the people, which made the President a subject of civic discipline. This led to dual governance, with each agency seeking to redefine the boundaries of political conduct.

f. Discourse of police brutality

Extracts 12:

Participant: *Mr President, sisi tunataka kujua, huyu askari amekuwa akiuwa watu kwa maandamano atashikwa siku gani? Kwa vile amekuwa akiroam freely tangu last month amekuwa tu all over the city. Tunataka kujua atashikwa siku gani, kwa vile ilikuwa inasemekana amekuwa ivo tangu kitambo na si wa kwanza. We just need answers about him thank you."* (Mr President, when will the killer cop be arrested? He has been roaming the streets [Nairobi] since last month [June 2024]. We are want to know when he will be arrested since rumors has it that he has been 'a killer cop' for a long time).

Participant: "*So on the eve of the day guys were protesting at the Parliament, I'm a photographer, and that's what I do. And the guy who was shot, he was shot right in front of me…. no one was remorseful, it's like, I don't know. It's just like life doesn't matter to you guys in the government, … I saw the boy being killed…. he was carrying nothing, like literally, he was carrying nothing. I even have the videos when the boy was shot."*

Participant: *If you're having difficulty locating the police, we have videos and pictures of them. So that should be easy*.

Police brutality was enacted as state-sanctioned, placing the President in a position of responsibility and control. Gen Z demanded that the President take responsibility for the arrest of the killer cop, whose information the President said he was unaware of. Gen Z illustrated the act of "sousveillance" (Mann et al., 2003), redefining how digital media are used as protective tools for documenting state abuses in real time.

g. Corruption
The discourse of corruption was enacted through proximity to power, display of opulence, undermining justice, and de-labelling. The President contested the discourse, labelling it instead as his measure of success. The discourse of corruption points to how individuals and groups perceive themselves and others, often through processes of normalisation (Foucault, 1978; Hodges et al., 2008).

Extracts 13:
Participant: "*When we elected you as the president, normally they say, you set a thief to catch a thief but this time round when we elected you Mr. President that you can help us now catch those people who are corrupt in this nation, you are just there laughing with them.*"

President Ruto: *"But let me also respond to you about matters of corruption. I want to promise you that part of the pushback we had on implementing our universal health coverage is because of corruption. Many corrupt people who are gaming NHIF were against what we were doing. That is why they went to every court available trying to sabotage this program, because they know that they will be out of business once we roll out this program, because there will be no room for them to hide."*

Discursive Tension and Contradictions

The dialogue on X Space served as a stage of colliding and overlapping discursive logics. The tension enacted a logic of state power versus a logic of digital resistance; paternal authority versus horizontal solidarity; rational/technocratic speech versus affective speech; institutional accountability versus lived, embodied accountability; and discursive containment versus discursive rupture.

The findings reveal a crisis of representation, whereby the state's institutional language cannot conclusively contain the moral and affective dissent of Gen Z. Although the forum was framed as a democratic engagement, it functioned as a technological tool of discipline that sought to normalise dissent within governable perimeters.

Discursive Practices and Social Reproduction/Norms and Competing Meaning Systems

Guided by the Foucauldian framework, the research team sought to explore how meanings from #EngageThePresident were stabilised, resisted, or subverted. Following Cheek's (2004) framework, the research team also sought to explore how #EngageThePresident X Space influences societal norms beyond online engagement, reinforces long-standing ideologies, and lends meaning to counter-discourses.

1. Platformized discourse
   Drawing on Gerbaudo's (2022) concept of the plebeian public sphere, the study affirmed how digital media platforms facilitate dialogue. #EngageThePresident used the X Space platform where the digital crowd question the President virtually.
   Extracts 15:
   Participant: "*Yeah, my question is to the president, why is it that the things you're asking about today are not new thing, are the thing you did promise in your campaign, and the other time you are being played of videos of you saying the same thing, you had to find a way of not listening to those videos. The one thing that you promised us. One of them is corruption. Your people around you, you've addressed this one. You can't tell me out of the 100 people you have around you, 90% of them are corrupt, or have a story of corruption, and you are doing nothing about them.*"

2. Contextualization and intertextuality
   President Ruto contextualises himself as a responsive leader during the #EngageThePresident forum.
   Extracts 15:
   President Ruto: "*But I have heard you, and I have heard many Kenyans who have talked on this platform, and I'm very happy that we are having this conversation on X.*"

   The President addressed other layered discourses, such as accusations of arrogance by other members proximate to state power.

   President Ruto: "*He made mistake, I will apologize for him. Maybe he said what he shouldn't have said, but they are among the young people I am mentoring....*"

3. Competing discourses and the struggle for hegemony
   While the President attempted to construct a discourse of dialogic governance, Gen Zs framed the #EngageThePresident X Space as performative appeasement, digital distraction and a containment strategy. The study findings highlight Foucault's (1991) view of discourse as a site of struggle rather than a consensus ground through which other counter-discourses gain traction.

4. Affective and political emotion
   Although traditional political discourses mostly favour rational debate, #EngageThePresident dialogue was deeply affective in that grief, betrayal, fear, and rage came out strongly. The affective discourses constructed a moral economy of protest versus the state's bureaucratic logic. Gen Z's emotional testimonies counter-evidenced the technocratic framing of government, weakening discourses that sought to proceduralize dissent.

5. Discourse normalisation and reproduction
   Although the format of the #EngageThePresident dialogue favoured a horizontal symmetrical model, it was moderated, limiting spontaneity. Moderators were themselves gatekeepers of Gen Z voices. Participants deified the institution of the

presidency through deferential language, "*with all due respect, Your Excellency…*" a rhetoric steeped in the post-colonial public sphere (Rodney, 1972; Waswa, 2021).

Dominant versus Alternative Discourses

Findings show that even in a digital counter-public, hegemonic norms can persist and be internalised or coexist with resistance. The #EngageThePresident was not just an isolated political event but a pivotal point in the circulation of competing discourses concerning governance and accountability. Table 1 summarises how discourses were enacted.

Table 1: Dominant vs Alternative Discourses

Dominant Discourses	Alternative discourses
Dialogue is equal to democracy.	Dialogue is a scripted tool for containment.
Youths in need of mentorship.	Youths are politically mature and awake.
State is listening and responsive.	The state represses through surveillance and control.
Numbers and factual arguments	Lived experiences and affective supersede

Table 1 shows that while the government tried to reassert control through a package of consultative governance, Gen Z's fragmented discourse infused the narrative with grief, rage, irony and resistance. Discursive reproduction and normalisation on #EngageThePresident X Space was not linear but affective, networked and unstable.

In summary, several discourses emerged with a focus on RQ1 on the discourse of governance, reflecting the state's effort to maintain control and Gen Z's effort to contest it and renegotiate their political voice.

a. Dialogic governance as performative

The President constructed a discourse of open and consultative leadership through repeatedly verbalising dialogue, listening and inclusion. He also constructed contradictory discourse, emotional discrediting and rhetorical containment as seen in phrases like "…*let's remain sober*".

This approach to governance embodies Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality, in which control is exercised not only through repression but also through civility, discourse, and institutional rationality. The enactment of authority by the state, exemplified by the President, resonates with Mbembe's (1992) view of the post-colonial state as a site of excesses where power is dramatised through ceremonies and festivities, often leading to a mutual "zombification" of both rulers and the ruled.

b. Governance through technocracy

The President repeatedly framed the proposed tax laws in Finance Bill 2024 as a mathematical and technical issue, rather than a moral and political crisis, thereby exposing a technocratic discourse. He exalted expert knowledge and fiscal reasoning above public experiences and suffering. This technocratic discourse emphasised a knowledge-over-power discourse, whereby the state assumes superiority. Gen Zs challenged this discourse by asserting their knowledge of the Constitution, law, and their lived experiences.

c. Counter government discourse
   Gen Zs portrayed the state as coercive, deceptive, and lacking a human touch.

"*You lie to us*", expressed betrayal. "*Who is accountable for the deaths?*", portrayed impunity, and "We are being silenced" portrayed violence meted by the state apparatus. The President portrayed the state authority as consultative, negotiable, visible and answerable.

With a focus on RQ2 #Engagethepresident X Space showcased how digital technologies have transformed public sphere discourse and the manifestation of political accountability.

a. Procedural to affective accountability.
   Accountability discourses have traditionally been bureaucratic, involving reports generated through institutional channels and bureaucratic processes. In the digital era, accountability is affective through naming the dead, sharing personal stories, and demanding emotional recognition. Accountability in the digital era is moral visibility, rather than institutional transparency.

b. Platformed public sphere as counter-institutions
   The #Engagethepresident forum was not just a discursive platform but also a platform-mediated exercise. Gen Zs helped collapse the long-standing bureaucracy between the state and the citizens through engaging in real-time interactions, but also exposed the weaknesses of digital proximity as an illusion of symmetry.

c. Surveillance, sousveillance and digital risks
   Gen Z's engagement with the President via the X platform brought about biopolitical risks. Participants expressed fear of state monitoring, as well as fear and threats (Milan & Treré, 2022). Consequently, digital activism is being progressively shaped by a contradictory tension. Radical visibility, as seen in Gen Z's assertion of agency and challenge to narratives, is being compromised by surveillance vulnerability, particularly through state monitoring and punishment of dissent. Here, digital accountability is ambivalent in that it both empowers and exposes. The alternative of "sousveillance" (Mann et al., 2003) was facilitated by the recording of the X Space on digital media, providing perpetual access and "shares" by the digital natives.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the discourse of governance, bio-power and political accountability in #EngageThePresident X Space. It illuminated the constitution of Gen Z and the President's role in representing the dynamics and evolving politics in Kenya. #Engagethepresident represent a contemporary site of governance, where subjects are constructed through discursive practices. Power operates through rationality, visibility, and normalisation, while resistance serves as a discourse of interruption, subversion, and reframing. The contestation of power was not only repressive but also productive. New norms emerged through Gen Z engagement and the emergence of subjectivities, "a listening president," and truths, "we are consulting".

Surveillance (Zuboff, 2019) is also seen as a means to diffuse state brutality through sousveillance (Mann et al., 2003). Resistance was discursive; it constituted not just slogans but emotional truths that shed light on the state's lack of authority to control narratives and its

shortcomings. #Engagethepresident X Space portrayed that digital spaces are generative platforms for fresh political identities, accountability, and engagement, not just a vehicle for amplifying the traditional public sphere (Habermas, 1962, 1989).

The #EngageThePresident X Space exemplifies a transformative shift in political communication and citizen engagement, signalling a departure from Habermas' notion of the bourgeois public sphere, toward Gerbaudo's model of emotionally driven, networked "online crowds" (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2022). This transition reflects the evolution of the public sphere from a formal, hierarchical and often exclusionary space to a decentralised, horizontal, and affect-laden digital arena where subaltern citizens exercise political agency outside traditional institutional frameworks.

The discourses that emerged during the X Space, ranging from corruption and broken promises to exclusion, state violence, and opacity, illustrate how digital platforms have become vital conduits for airing grievances, shaping narratives, and demanding accountability (Dinh & O'Leary, 2025). Unlike Habermas' ideal of dispassionate discourse, #EngageThePresident digital public sphere was characterised by personal testimonies, emotional storytelling, and affective solidarity, with participants drawing on their lived experiences to challenge state narratives and advocate for substantive change.

Gerbaudo's framework of choreographed spontaneity and online crowds provides a fitting lens to understand how these digital engagements operate: leaderless yet coordinated, emotionally charged yet politically potent. The platform blurred the line between media consumer and producer, enabling users to function as citizen journalists, watchdogs, and agenda setters (Mutsvairo et al., 2014). More critically, it highlighted the demand for accountability, where public engagement is not merely symbolic but tied to structural reform, redress, and symmetrical dialogue.

The 2024 protests against the Finance Bill in Kenya precipitated postcolonial crises rooted in authoritarian governance, economic exploitation and cultural denigration imposed by colonial powers (Rodney,1972; Mbembe, 2001) bequeathed to the emerging states. The relics of post-colonial states' control over media and public discourse, which suppresses alternative voices and truths (Chuma, 2004), were tested during the protest. The study resonates with Nyamnjoh's (2005) and Willems's (2010) findings that alternative media and social spaces, including performatives, are emerging as vital avenues for contesting state hegemony and offering counter-narratives.

Digital natives represent the ballooning youth population in the Global South who are emerging from the periphery to the centre of political agency, disrupting the status quo and hitherto political deification of the elite by the Baby Boomers and Generation X. Afforded by the digital evolution, smartphone ownership and internet penetration in Kenya, Gen Z's ability to access, produce and consume information will shape political discourse way into the future. The study points to a political elite that will contend with the awakened youthful generation in statecraft from the campaign trail to the ballot, from pledges to their actualisation and from assuming state power to judicious exercise of accountability. The silent revolution will catalyse political stability for the maturing nations in the Global South.

The study contributes to the practice of Foucauldian discourse analysis by examining the accelerated pace of digital narratives in digital media in the Global South. The study recommends that entrenching platformised engagement between political leaders and subaltern

citizens has the potential to catalyse political stability for the maturing nations in the Global South. Future research on the impact of awoke Gen Z on the political destiny of President Ruto is deemed necessary.

Statements and Declarations

The authors received no specific grant from any public, commercial or not-for-profit agency to aid in the research or writing of this article.

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

Arzani, S. (2025). *Tweets of Resistance: Social media and Mobilization in Contemporary Kenya. A discursive study on the Kenyan protests and online activism in 2024.* [Master's Thesis, *Lund University]*. https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/9201474

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED). (2024). Anti-tax demonstrations spread nationwide and highlight Kenya's structural challenges. *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data.* https://acleddata.com/report/anti-tax-demonstrations-spread-nationwide-and-highlight-kenyas-structural-challenges-july

Arribas-Ayllon, M., & Walkerdine, V. (2008). Foucauldian discourse analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 91–108). Sage.

Boulton, M., Garnett, A., & Webster, F. (2022). A Foucauldian discourse analysis of media reporting on the nurse-as-hero during COVID-19. *Nursing Inquiry, 29*(1), e12471. https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12471

Castells, M. (2012). Networks of outrage and hope. Social movements in the internet age. Cambridge: Polity Press

Cheek, J. (2004). At the margins, discourse analysis and qualitative research. *Qualitative Health etResearch, 14*(8), 1140–1150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304266820

Chuma, W. (2004). "*Liberating or Limiting the Public Sphere? Media Policy and the Zimbabwe Transition, 1980–2004.*" In Zimbabwe: Injustice and Reconciliation, edited by B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage, 119–139. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

Cotter, K., Medeiros, M., Pak, C., & Thorson, K. (2021). "Reach the right people": The politics of "interests" in Facebook's classification system for ad targeting. *Big Data & Society*, *8*(1), 2053951721996046. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951721996046

De Angelis, G. (2021). Habermas, democracy and the public sphere: Theory and practice. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *24*(4), 437-447.

Dinh, T., & O'Leary, S. (2025). The unaccounted effects of digital transformation: participatory accountability in a humanitarian organisation. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *38*(3), 824-852.

Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review. *Science Advances*, *8*(10), eabl8198. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl8198

Fairclough, N. (2001a). *Language and Power* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change* (pp. 62-240). Policy Press.

Fairclough, N., & Graham, P. (2002). Marx as Critical Discourse Analyst: the Genesis of a Critical Method and its Relevance to the Critique of Global Capital. *Estdios de Sociolinguistica,* 3 (1), 185-229.

Foucault M (2008) The Archaeology of Knowledge. Routledge: London

Foucault, M. (2005). *Vidensarkæologien* [Archeology of knowledge]. In T. Larsen, & R. Hougaard (Eds.), *Vidensarkæologien Michel Foucault* (pp. 43–267). Aarhus, Denmark: Forlaget Philosophia.

Foucault M (1984) What is Enlightenment? In: Rabinow P (ed). The Foucault Reader. Random House, Inc: New York, pp 32–50.

Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry, 8*(4), 777–795. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197

Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87–104). University of Chicago Press.

Foucault M (1991) Governmentality. In: Burchel G, Gordon C and Miller P (eds). The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality. Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, pp 87–104.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The use of pleasure: The history of sexuality, Vol. 2*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume I—An introduction*. Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock Publication.

Fleming, L. & Muia, W. (2024, July 5). Kenyan leader faces furious young people in online debate. *BBC News, London. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce58y8ngdk5o*

Garland, D. (2014). What is a "History of the Present"? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions. *Punishment & Society*, 16(4), 365–384.

Gerbaudo, P. (2022). Theorizing reactive democracy: The social media public sphere, online crowds and the plebiscitary logic of online reactions. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 120–138.

Goldstein, J. & Rotich, J. (2008). Digitally networked technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election crisis. Working paper, Berkman Center for Internet and Society. http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2008/Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Post-Election_Crisis,.2008 (accessed September 19, 2025).

Government of Kenya (GoK) (2010). The Constitution of Kenya 2010. Nairobi: *Government Printer.*

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigm in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 99-136). Sage Publications.

Hammond, C., Ncube, M., & Fido, D. (2025). A Foucauldian discourse analysis of the construction of people of colour (POC) as criminals in UK and US print media following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice, 25*(1), 344–363. https://doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2024.2317745

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Helberger, N. (2019). On the democratic role of news recommenders. *Digital Journalism, 7*(8), 993–1012. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1623700

Hodges, B. D., Kuper, A., & Reeves, S. (2008). Discourse analysis. *British Medical Journal, 337*, a879.

Jungherr, A., & Schroeder, R. (2023). AI's impact on the public arena. *Communication Theory, 22*(02), Y02. https://doi.org/10.22323/2.22020402

Khan, T. H., & MacEachen, E. (2021). Foucauldian discourse analysis: Moving beyond a social constructionist analytic. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*, 16094069211018009. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211018009

Khene, C., Siebörger, I., Thinyane, M., & Simuja, C. (2021). Power participation in digital citizen engagement in South African local government: The case of MOBISAM. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2108.09798*.

Mann, S., J. Nolan & B. Wellman (2003). "Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments." Surveillance & Society 1(3): 331-355.

Mbembe, A. (1992). "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony." *Public Culture* 4 (2): 1–30.

Melchiorre, L. (2020). "A new animal": student activism and the Kenyan state in an era of multiparty politics, 1991-2000. Journal of Eastern African Studies. 14. 10.1080/17531055.2020.1832370.

Mkandawire, K., & Mwalabu, M. (2024). Corruption in public service delivery. In *Corruption Proofing in Africa* (pp. 116-129). Routledge.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. *Theory, Culture and Society*, *26*(7–8). https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275.

Mills et al, 2009 – *Mills, A.J., Durepos, G., Wiebe, E*. (Eds.). (2009). Encyclopedia of case study research. Sage Publications.

Milan, S., & Treré, E. (2022). Big Data from the South(s): An Analytical Matrix to Investigate Data at the Margins. In D. A. Rohlinger, & S. Sobieraj (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology (pp. 76–93). Oxford University Press.

Moyo, D. (2009). Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election. *Journalism Studies* 10(4): 551–567.

Moyo, L. (2011). Repression, propaganda and digital resistance. In *African media and the digital public sphere*, ed. F. Banda, O.F. Mudhai and W.J. Tettey, 125–142. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mukhongo, L. (2020). Participatory Media Cultures: Virality, Humour, and Online Political Contestations in Kenya. Africa Spectrum. 55. 148-169. 10.1177/0002039720957014.

Mutsvairo, B., Columbus, S., & Leijendekker, I. (2014). Reconnoitering the role of (citizen) journalism ethics in the emerging networked public sphere. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, 35*(3), 4–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2014.963279

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2009). "Making Sense of Mugabeism in Local and Global Politics: 'So Blair, Keep Your England and Let Me Keep My Zimbabwe'." Third World Quarterly 30 (6): 1139–1158.

Nendo. (2024). *The #Reject Revolution: When Tweets Take to the Streets. The Story of 25 Million Posts Powering Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests"* https://www.nendo.co.ke/post/the-reject-revolution-kenyan-rejectfinancebill2024-protests

Njuki, E., Mbaka, N., & Atieno, C. (2024). Hashtag Activism: Examining #RutoMustGo and #RejectFinanceBill in Showcasing Kenyans on X as an Imagined Community of Language Users. OALib. 11. 1-24. 10.4236/oalib.1112256.

Nothias, T., & Cheruiyot, D. (2019). A "Hotbed" of digital empowerment? Media criticism in Kenya between playful engagement and co-option. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 136-159.

Nielsen, J. (2006). The 90-9-1 rule for participation inequality in social media and online communities. *Nielsen Norman Group Articles*. Retrieved from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/participation-inequality/

Nyabola, N. (2018) Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics. 1st edn. Zed Books. Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/1990637.

Nyamnjoh, F. (2005). *Africa's Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging*. London: Zed Book.

Owino, V. (2024, July 4). Inside Ruto's two-hour engagement with the youth on X Spaces. *Daily Nation. https://nation.africa/kenya/news/inside-ruto-s-two-hour-engagement-with-the-youth-on-x-spaces--4680820*

Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K.E. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*, 533-544.

Pardosi, P., Muttaqim, H., & Sugeng, I. S. (2024). Social Media Activism: The Rise of Digital Movements in the Global South. *Cognitionis Civitatis et Politicae*, *1*(6), 411-421.

Raby, R. (2005). What is resistance? *Journal of Youth Studies, 8*(2), 151–171.

Radoli, L. O., Eboi, A. A., Aswani, D. R., & Nakhumbi, R. O. (2025). X Space and the Revolution of Digital News Content: The Case of Generation-Z Protest Narratives in Kenya. *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research*, *1*(1), 602-621.

Rauchfleisch, A., Vogler, D., & Eisenegger, M. (2021). Public sphere in crisis mode: How the COVID-19 pandemic influenced public discourse and user behavior in the Swiss Twitter-sphere. *Javnost - The Public, 28*(2), 129–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1923622

Rodney, W. (1972). How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, London & Nairobi: Heinemann

Sam, C. & Gupton, J. (2023). Of Power and Stories: *Using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis for a Digimodern Era.* Contributions to the 28th Congress of the German Society for Educational Science: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Sharp, L., & Richardson, T. (2001). Reflections on Foucauldian discourse analysis in planning and environmental policy research. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning, 3*(3), 193–209.

Schäfer, M. S. (2015). Digital public sphere. *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication, 15*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc087

Seeliger, M., & Sevignani, S. (2022). A new structural transformation of the public sphere? An introduction. *Theory, Culture & Society, 39*(4), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221109439

Siziba, G., & Ncube, G. (2015). Mugabe's fall from grace: Satire and fictional narratives as silent forms of resistance in/on Zimbabwe. *Social Dynamics.* https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2015.1106124

Stahl, T. (2020). Privacy in public: A democratic defense. *Moral Philosophy and Politics, 7*(1), 73–96. https://doi.org/10.1515/mopp-2019-0031

Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. SAGE Publications.

Terranova, T. (2015). Securing the Social: Foucault and Social Networks. In S. Fuggle, Y. Lanci, & M. Tazzioli (Eds.), *Foucault and the History of Our Present*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Terzis, G. (2016). The end of hypocrisy: Online activism and ethno-political conflicts. *Pacific Journalism Review, 22*(1), 105-120.

Tufekci, Z. (2017). Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest. Yale University Press.

Twinomurinzi, H. (2024). From tweets to streets: How Kenya's generation Z (Gen Z) is redefining political and digital activism. In *African Conference on Information Systems and Technology. 13.* (p. 13).

Waitt, G. (2010). Doing Foucauldian discourse analysis-revealing social realities. In I. Hay (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (pp. 217-240). Don Mills, Ont. : Oxford University Press. https://ro.uow.edu.au/era/2196/

Waswa, D. (2021). On Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Political Theatre: An Artist's Conflict with the State over Performance Space. Kenya Scholars and Studies Association (KESSA), Fall 2021, Volume 9, Number 2, 30.

Wa Thiong'o, N. (1997). Enactments of power: The politics of performance space. *TDR*, 11-30.

Willems, W. (2010). "Beyond Dramatic Revolutions and Grand Rebellions: Everyday Forms of Resistance during the 'Zimbabwe Crisis'." Comminicare 29: 1–17.

Zoller, H. M. (2003). Health on the line: Identity and disciplinary control in employee occupational health and safety discourse. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 31*(2), 118–139.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. Profile Books.