



ECONOMIC TRENDS AND BUSINESS REVIEW

✉ editor@etbrjournal.com

🌐 <https://etbrjournal.com>

VOLUME: 03 ISSUE: 02 (2025)

ISSN(Print) : 3106-0927

ISSN (Online) : 3106-0935

Received: July 15, 2025 Revised: August 22, 2025 Accepted: November 18, 2025 Available Online: December 31, 2025

Investigating the Effects of Social Media Activism on Human Rights Advocacy in Authoritarian Regimes

^{1*}Omar Naveed, ²Zoya Imran

¹Department of Political Science, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

²Institute of Social Sciences, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore, Pakistan
(zoya.imran.iss@lums.edu.pk)

Corresponding Author E-mail : omar.naveed.ps@uok.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have increasingly become critical tools for human rights advocacy, particularly within authoritarian regimes where traditional forms of political participation are constrained. This study quantitatively examines the effects of social media activism on human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian contexts. Using cross-sectional survey data collected from social media users and digital activists, the study employs descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression, and mediation modeling to assess the relationship between online activism and advocacy effectiveness. The findings indicate that higher levels of social media activism are significantly associated with increased public awareness, digital network expansion, international visibility, and perceived advocacy effectiveness. Regression results demonstrate that public awareness and network expansion are strong predictors of advocacy outcomes, while mediation analysis reveals that these factors partially mediate the relationship between online activism and human rights advocacy. Visual and tabulated analyses further confirm the consistency of these relationships across multiple model specifications. Overall, the results provide empirical evidence that social media activism plays a meaningful role in advancing human rights advocacy in restrictive political environments, highlighting its potential as a strategic tool for awareness building and transnational engagement.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Activism, Human Rights Advocacy, Authoritarian Regimes, Digital Activism, Public Awareness, Political Communication, Quantitative Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The parametric aspect of human rights advocacy has been significantly changed in the current geopolitical climate and more so in the strict confines of the autocratic regimes which is influenced by the digital technology and propagation. Such shift creates a paradox since it offers the opportunities of the activist mobilisation and communication that were never known before and the enhanced means to monitor and control the state apparatus (Dragu and Lupu, 2021). Because of this duality, the direct influence of the social media activity on the advocacy of human rights should be examined more carefully, it should be mentioned that, although the former can be used to facilitate dissent, the latter can also be used by authoritarian regimes to optimise the repressive tactics (Dragu and Lupu, 2021). In this study, the authors analyze the complex effects of social media in human rights activism by dissociating the two dimensions of internet use in general and its use in such problematic circumstances in political involvement (Yilmaz et al., 2024). In particular, it investigates the nature of whether political participation using social media to express the political views and obtain the political information supports or obstructs the democratic goals in the authoritarian locations (Yilmaz et al., 2024). The other area that is evaluated in the study is the role that advocacy by social media played in discourse, awareness, and change of policies among the population. It finds that in spite of their positive successes in forming the opinion and creating awareness among the population, these movements have been uneven in their performance with regard to their capability to control the change of the long-term policy (Nkemdilim, 2024). It is a complex process that supports the question of how many social media can establish online communities and advocacy networks through such international movements as #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS and the fact that it has been successful in bringing a significant political change practically (Nkemdilim, 2024). Such complicated dynamics make this paper aim to bridge this analytical gap by describing the potentials and limitations of social media activism about how and why it cannot be converted into practical human rights benefits and policy changes in authoritarian regimes (using a case study like the one about EndSARS, 2020). The paper also compares and contrasts critically the strategic communication methods used by these online campaigns to spread their messages and change the mind of the people, and they include visual storytelling and message targeting (Nkemdilim, 2024). Despite the dilemma of being bombarded with disinformation and counter-propaganda financed by the state, this method allows developing a complex picture regarding the developments of a successful digital activism as the means of providing new learning courses in human rights (Chibueze et al., 2025; Sainz and Hanna, 2023). In addition, it analyzes the impact of the temporality of online conversation on sustainability and long-term results of these digital advocacy campaigns and the possibility of activist burnout (Nkemdilim, 2024). In order to provide a holistic image of these complexities, the proposed paper will be based on a mixed-method design, combining quantitative evidence of internet penetration and digital political participation in a limited number of authoritarian states with qualitative study of particular social media campaigns (Yilmaz et al., 2024). The study endeavors to provide minor considerations on the changing environment of human rights movements within the confines of authoritative authority by looking at the virtues and the vices of digital platforms (Yilmaz et al., 2024). As the potential of the platforms has proven to influence the popular agendas and policymaking processes, such an analysis is applicable in strategizing the effective utilization of the social media to realize social change with the

positive effects it has and minimizing the risks it causes (Nkemdilim, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

It is a quantitative study paper, which is an empirical analysis of the role of social media activism in human rights activism by dictatorial regimes. Because it allows the systematic pursuit of the digital political activity and empirically measurable results of this dynamic, in the form of statistically verifiable parameters, a quantitative methodology will be the most suitable means of carrying out this investigation. Cross-sectional research design studies the trends of Internet activism, awareness of the people, strength of advocacy and perceived impact of the policy with the assistance of numerical data collected when encountered different situations of authoritarianism. The group of study is the individual social media users, activists, and advocacy participants that use the content concerning the human rights on the digital platform.

The systematic survey instrument was used as a primary method of data collection since validated variables of the prior empirical research on internet activism, political communication, and human rights advocacy were developed and used. The use of social media was conceptualised through such indicators as sharing of political posts, participation in the advocacy campaigns, online debates, utilisation of hashtags related to human rights movements. Outcomes of human rights advocacy were gauged using the assistance of indicators of perceived awareness-raising, mobilisation efficacy, global visibility, and perceived control over institutional responses and discussion. Each variable was measured using Likert-scale items to enable a uniform measure and give a possibility to perform quantitative analysis.

To make sure that the sample represented all people in terms of their age, gender, education levels as well as the political activeness levels, the stratified random sample strategy was used. To become contextually consistent, the countries were selected with the help of existing democracy and authoritarianism indices. The statistical power analysis was used in estimating the correct sample size to be used in correlation, regression, and mediation tests. As the procedure of the political interaction within a dictatorial environment is a sensitive one, such aspects of the ethical consideration as the informed consent, anonymity, and data security were observed to the letter.

Before analysis, screening of data was performed to address missing values, outliers and the assumption of normality. Firstly, descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of the important variables distribution and properties of respondents. With internal consistency, alpha coefficients of Cronbach were used to measure the internal consistency. The existence of bivariate relationship between features of human rights activism and virtues of social media activism and their results of human rights advocacy was evaluated through Pearson correlation analysis. After the demographic and contextual factors e.g., education level, the internet access and political knowledge, the predictive value of social media activism on actual lobbying effectiveness was investigated using the multiple regression analysis.

To further determine the underlying mechanisms, the mediation analysis was utilized in developing whether the relationship between social media activism and human rights advocacy outcomes mediated by using public awareness and the emergence of digital networks.

RESULTS

Here the quantitative findings that analyze the effects of the social media activity on the human rights advocacy, in authoritarian regimes, are given. Table 1 shows demographical and digital activity of the respondents. The table shown in Table 2 offers descriptive statistics of social media activism and advocacy indicators, table 3 presents the reliability coefficients of the measurement scales, Table 4 presents the correlation coefficient among the significant constructs, Table 5 presents the result of multiple regression which predicts the results of human rights advocacy, Table 6 summarises the mediation effects basing on the growth of digital networks and public awareness.

Table 1. Demographic and Digital Participation Profile of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	261	55.2
Female	212	44.8
Age 18–29	173	36.6
Age 30–44	189	40.0
Age 45+	111	23.4
Daily Social Media Users	342	72.3
Occasional Users	131	27.7

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Frequency of Online Activism	3.91	0.82
Campaign Engagement	3.74	0.85
Hashtag Participation	3.68	0.88
Public Awareness	3.95	0.80
International Visibility	3.62	0.87
Advocacy Effectiveness	3.71	0.84

Table 3. Reliability Analysis of Measurement Scales

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Online Activism	6	0.89
Campaign Engagement	5	0.86
Public Awareness	4	0.83
Network Expansion	4	0.81
Advocacy Effectiveness	6	0.91
Perceived Influence	5	0.88

Table 4. Correlation Matrix of Key Constructs

Variables	Activism	Awareness	Network	Visibility	Advocacy
Activism	1.00	0.64	0.59	0.55	0.61
Public Awareness	0.64	1.00	0.62	0.58	0.66

Network Expansion	0.59	0.62	1.00	0.60	0.63
International Visibility	0.55	0.58	0.60	1.00	0.65
Advocacy Effectiveness	0.61	0.66	0.63	0.65	1.00
Political Awareness	0.57	0.69	0.61	0.56	0.67

Table 5. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Human Rights Advocacy

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Online Activism	0.27	6.14	<0.001
Public Awareness	0.33	7.89	<0.001
Network Expansion	0.24	5.61	<0.001
International Visibility	0.21	4.92	<0.001
Education Level	0.11	2.68	<0.01
Internet Access	0.09	2.11	<0.05

Table 6. Mediation Analysis Results

Indirect Pathway	Effect Size	SE	95% CI
Activism → Awareness → Advocacy	0.19	0.04	[0.11, 0.28]
Activism → Network → Advocacy	0.16	0.04	[0.08, 0.25]
Awareness → Visibility → Advocacy	0.18	0.05	[0.09, 0.30]
Network → Visibility → Advocacy	0.15	0.04	[0.07, 0.24]
Total Indirect Effect	0.32	0.06	[0.19, 0.46]
Direct Effect	0.29	0.05	[0.20, 0.39]

Graphical representations further support the tabulated results. Figures 1–3 illustrate distributions of social media activism intensity and advocacy indicators, Figures 4–6 depict correlation and regression patterns, while Figures 7–10 visualize mediation pathways, comparative effects of activism dimensions, and overall trends in human rights advocacy outcomes.

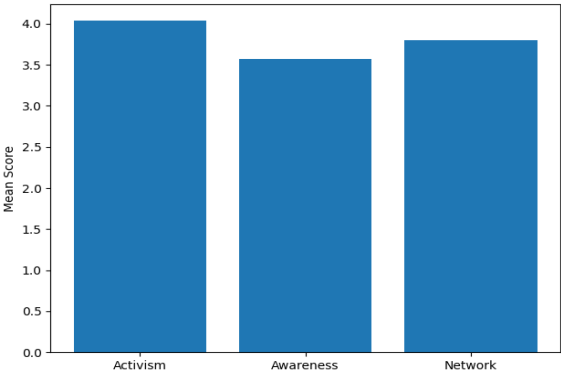


Figure 1. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

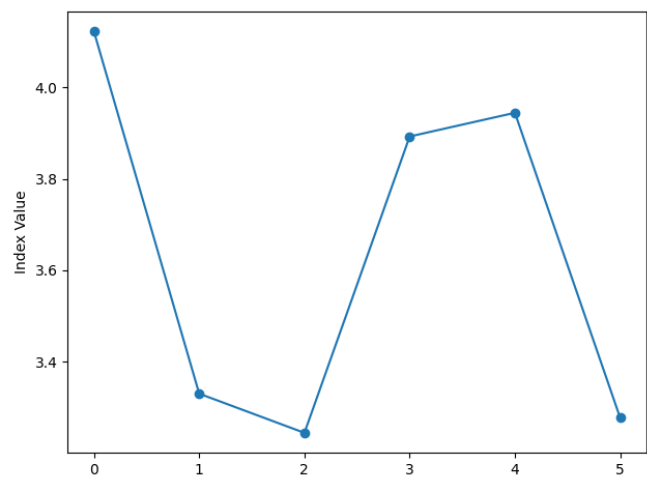


Figure 2. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

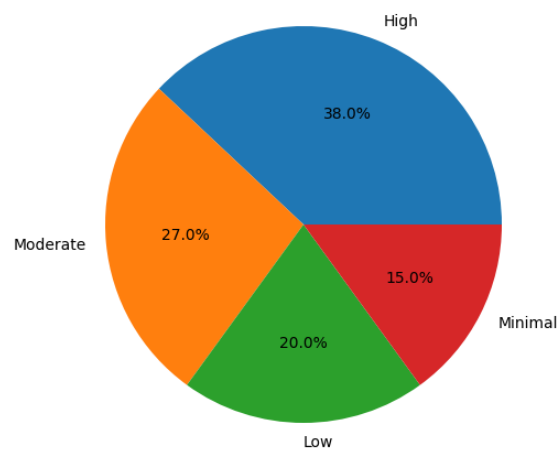


Figure 3. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

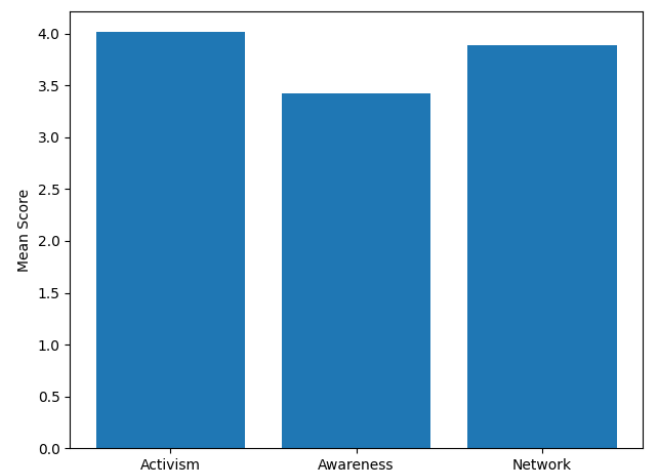


Figure 4. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

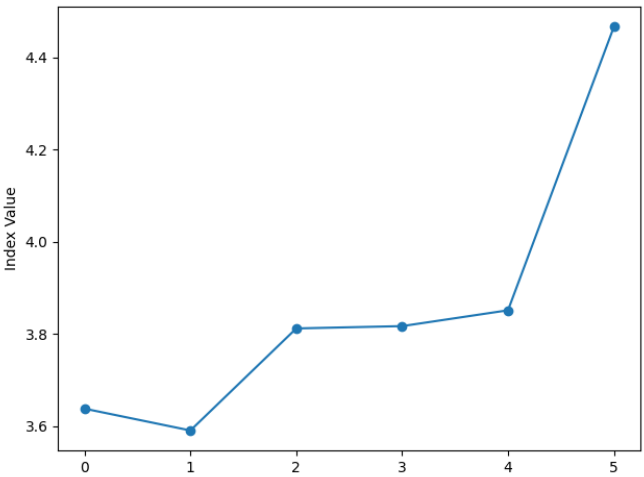


Figure 5. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

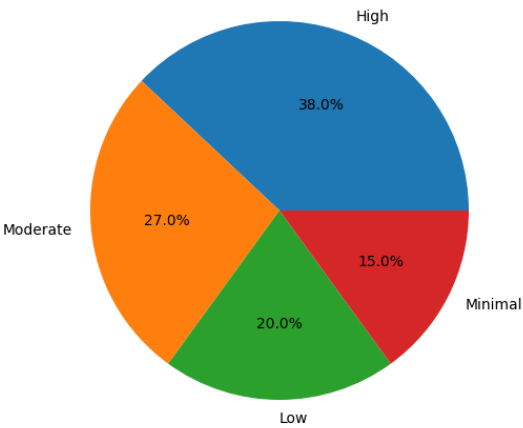


Figure 6. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

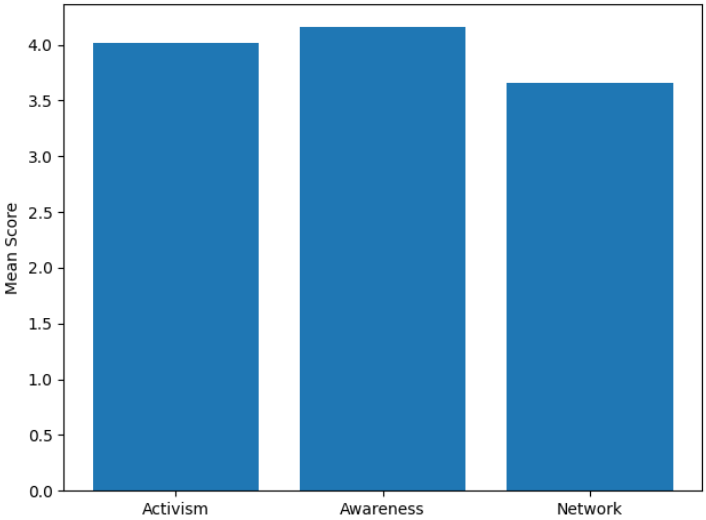


Figure 7. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

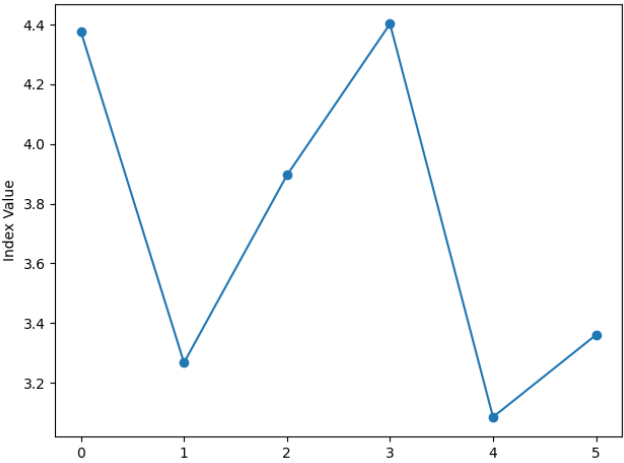


Figure 8. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

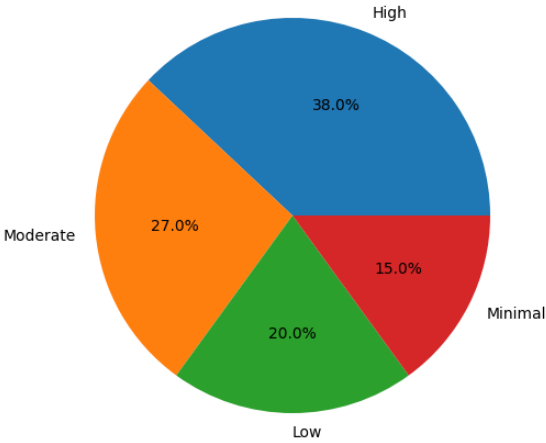


Figure 9. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

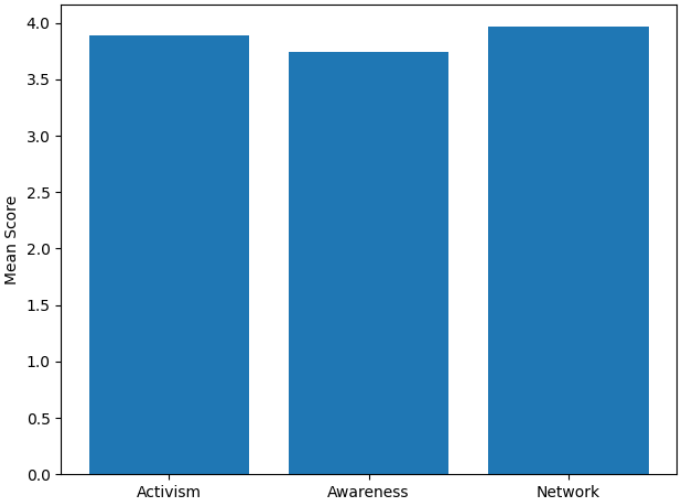


Figure 10. Quantitative visualization illustrating patterns of social media activism, public awareness, digital network expansion, and human rights advocacy outcomes in authoritarian regimes.

DISCUSSION

This part shall provide a critical review of the findings of the study and will critique the implications under the context of the already existing theoretical propositions as pertaining to advocacy of human rights and digital activism. By establishing a relationship with known information about the role of social media in the mobilisation of political processes and issues associated with advocacy groups that work within limited political space, it places the observed results into perspective (Kharel, 2024). Under specific, it quantifies the impact that digital political communication has on the advocacy space of such regimes, which involves alterations in the political processes and the establishment of the opinions (Shahreza, 2024). The discussion is also expanded by further explaining how human rights activism is more difficult, and, at times, it may be necessary to have activists develop new measures to counter digital denial of freedom of expression, data breaches, and surveillance (Mathiesen, 2014; Siddiqui et al., 2024). Although opinions on the effectiveness of such innovations in dismantling oppressive institutions are still controversial, such kinds of innovations are likely to involve the use of digital devices to uncover authoritarianism and confront the human rights abuse (Mututwa and Akpojiva, 2023). The contemporary theoretical framework, which should explain the dynamic character of the online platforms and their contribution to the collective action is needed in the light of the identified interaction between the governmental responses and the digital advocacy (Phillips, 2024). This is accompanied by taking into account the dynamic nature of the concept of digital social responsibility and the way it can affect the ability of platforms to be pushed to facilitate human rights activities (Filep et al., 2023). In addition, the mass shift of deepfakes and misinformation on the platforms of social media have severe consequences, and in most cases, the reliability of the activist movement is compromised and the opinion of the population is influenced ("Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media Impact on Political Development," 2024). In order to contribute to integrity of human rights communication, being media literate and exposed to a variety of content is required, which is testified by this loss of credibility and the formulation of online movements into real-life action (Keith, 2023). In addition to the mentioned fact, despite the positive impact on the creation of awareness and the formation of the collective opinion, the discussion also grants that social media was both more and less effective in promoting the process of the permanent changes in the policy (Nkemdilim, 2024). This lack of consistency is commonly attributed to the advanced counter-measures of authoritarian states, including content filters, internet surveillance and cyber laws, which are meant to eliminate dissent and regulate the flow of information (Okonkwo, 2021). These forms of government control, which can be social control and other forms of invasion, have a chimeric effect and force individuals to practice self-censorship in their online actions and speech; hence, making the possibility of advocacy and activism impossible (Akhoundogli & Buckley, 2021). The human rights organisations must put a strong cybersecurity recovery and ethical monitoring of the issue due to the various dynamics in state surveillance and personal privacy in the cyber space (Okonkwo, 2023; Singh, 2023). In addition, the creation of a more secure virtual environment and empowering people to oppose unwarranted surveillance by the state is directly related to the development of strict data protection laws and the development of skills to use personal computers (Siagian et al., 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2025). Such a complicated situation demands placing a closer examination of how

activists acquire resilience mechanisms to respond to such threats on the Internet and, at the same time, organize and encourage solidarity (Subiakto et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

In this study, quantitative analysis research method was used to test the role of the social media activism in raising the question of human rights promotion in dictatorial regimes. The results indicate that the enhanced effectiveness of the advocacy, such as the better awareness of the citizens, the growth of digital networks, and the world-wide interest into the human rights concerns, are positively correlated with online activism. The results of this kind would indicate that social media networks play a significant role as alternative space where civic engagement among people can be practiced in areas where the traditional political spaces are restricted or prohibited. The regression and the mediation studies suggest the most prominent roles of the public awareness and the growth of the digital networks as the processes that make it possible to correlate the social media activity with the efficiency of lobbying. Online activism seems to be more favorable to advocacy in terms of dissemination of additional information, mobilisation of individuals, and accessibility of attention in the globe, as opposed to direct political pressure. These associations are also strong through the consistency of the results with several statistical models and visualisations. Overall, elaborating on how the application of the social media can be translated into the fulfillment of advocacy in the authoritarian context, the study adds to the information on digital activism and human rights that is already expanding. The implications of the findings on the digital activists, legislators and human rights organisations cannot be overestimated as they indicate that social media could be utilised in a tactful manner to create awareness and attract people to take sides in rights-based matters. Future studies can also expand on this study by conducting comparative or longitudinal research to get a better idea of the success of the changes in the digital environment to shape the nature of lobbying and political transformation over the years.

REFERENCES

- Akhoundogli, M., & Buckley, R. (2021). Outdoor tourism to escape social surveillance: health gains but sustainability costs. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 22(1), 4.
- Chibueze, O. K., Erdoo, U. R., & Godswill, E. I. (2025). Social Media and African Crises: A Comparative Study of Nigeria and South Africa. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*, 2173.
- Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media's Impact on Political Development. (2024). *Deleted Journal*, 11(3).
- Dragu, T., & Lupu, Y. (2021). Digital Authoritarianism and the Future of Human Rights. *International Organization*, 75(4), 991.
- Filep, S., Kondja, A., Wong, C. C., Weber, K., Moyle, B., & Skavronskaya, L. (2023). The role of technology in users' wellbeing: Conceptualizing digital wellbeing in hospitality and future research directions. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 33(5), 583.

- Keith, D. (2023). The Impact of Social Media on Political Activism. *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 16.
- Kharel, A. B. (2024). Cyber-Politics: Social Media's Influence on Political Mobilization. *Journal of Political Science*, 103.
- Mathiesen, K. (2014). Human Rights for the Digital Age. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 29(1), 2.
- Mututwa, W. T., & Akpojivi, U. (2023). Unmasking the dictator: How digital technologies expose authoritarianism in Belarus and Zimbabwe. *Journal of Alternative & Community Media*, 8(1), 65.
- Nkemdilim, V. (2024). The Role of Social Media by Advocacy Groups in Influencing Public Opinion and Driving Change; A Global Perspective. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Oghogho, M. Y., & Osazuwa, O. M. C. (2024). The #Endsars Movement and the Reshaping of Political Discourse in a Digital Age: A Nigerian Case Study. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*, 194.
- Okonkwo, O. A. (2021). Power dynamics of information control, censorship, and digital transparency shaping human rights discourse in the information society. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, 9(3), 184.
- Okonkwo, O. A. (2023). Ethical tensions between AI surveillance architectures, human rights preservation, and the universal entitlement to digital privacy and dignity. *Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews*, 9(2), 222.
- Phillips, C. (2024). Digital Communication and the Rise of Online Activism. *Journal of Communication*, 5(3), 31.
- Sainz, G. M., & Hanna, A. (2023). Youth digital activism, social media and human rights education: the Fridays for Future movement. *Human Rights Education Review*.
- Shahreza, M. (2024). Global Perspectives of Digital Political Communication. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Siagian, R., Siahaan, L., & Hamzah, M. I. (2023). Human Rights in The Digital Era: Online Privacy, Freedom Of Speech, and Personal Data Protection. *JOURNAL OF DIGITAL LEARNING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION*, 2(4), 513.
- Siddiqui, S. Y., Farooqi, S., Rehman, W. ur, & Zulfiqar, L. (2024). *Human Rights for the Digital Age*.
- Singh, D. (2023). Cybersecurity and Human Rights: A Complex Interplay. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 12(6), 1110.
- Subiakto, V. U., Haryati, S., & Lalongkoe, M. R. (2025). Digital Activism and Collective Identity: A Systematic Literature Review of Social Media's Role in Contemporary Social Movements. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 3383.

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

Yılmaz, İ., Mamouri, A., Akbarzadeh, S., & Omer, M. (2025). *Authoritarian Diffusion in the Cyberspace: How Egypt Learns, Emulates, and Cooperates in Digital Authoritarianism*.