



The Influence of Digital Platforms on Social Networks and Collective Action among Urban Youth

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Abstract

Digital platforms have become central to the social lives of urban youth, reshaping how social networks are formed and how collective action emerges in contemporary cities. This study aims to analyze the influence of digital platforms on social networks and collective action among urban youth, with a particular focus on the relational mechanisms that connect digital engagement to collective participation. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, collecting data from urban youth and analyzing the relationships between digital platform use, social network characteristics, and collective action using regression and mediation analysis. The results reveal that digital platform use is positively associated with larger, more diverse, and more connected social networks. These network characteristics significantly increase youth participation in collective action, both online and offline. Moreover, social networks partially mediate the relationship between digital platform use and collective action, indicating that digital platforms facilitate collective engagement primarily by strengthening relational structures rather than acting as direct mobilizing forces. The findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digitally mediated collective action by highlighting the central role of social networks in urban youth participation. The study underscores the importance of network diversity and connectedness for fostering inclusive and sustainable collective action in digitally mediated urban environments.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has profoundly transformed social interaction, communication patterns, and collective behavior, particularly among urban youth. Social networking sites, messaging applications, and content-sharing platforms have become central infrastructures through which young people form relationships, exchange information, and mobilize around shared interests and social causes. In urban contexts, where population density, social diversity, and economic pressures intersect, digital platforms function not merely as tools of communication but as social spaces that reshape networks, identities, and modes of participation (Marino, 2015; Antonucci et al., 2022; Kartika et al., 2025). Recent

sociological scholarship emphasizes that digital platforms have blurred the boundaries between online and offline social life, producing hybrid social networks that extend beyond physical neighborhoods into translocal and transnational spheres (Castells, 2015; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Understanding how these platforms influence social networks and collective action among urban youth is therefore critical for analyzing contemporary forms of civic engagement and social change.

Existing literature highlights that urban youth are among the most intensive users of digital platforms and are often early adopters of new communication technologies. Scholars have shown that digital platforms facilitate the formation of weak ties, expand access to diverse information, and enable rapid coordination among dispersed individuals (Granovetter, 1973; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). At the same time, studies on digital sociology suggest that platform architectures, algorithms, and affordances actively shape patterns of interaction, visibility, and influence, thereby structuring social networks in unequal ways (Van Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2018). Recent empirical research further demonstrates that digital platforms play a significant role in youth-led social movements, ranging from environmental activism to urban justice campaigns, by lowering participation thresholds and enabling personalized forms of engagement (Earl et al., 2017; Theocharis et al., 2015). Despite these advances, the specific ways in which digital platforms reconfigure social networks and foster collective action in urban youth contexts remain insufficiently explored, particularly outside Western settings.

A central research problem emerging from this body of literature concerns the ambivalent role of digital platforms in collective action. On the one hand, platforms are often celebrated for empowering youth voices, enhancing connectivity, and facilitating rapid mobilization. On the other hand, critics argue that digital engagement may result in fragmented networks, superficial participation, and what has been termed “slacktivism,” where symbolic online actions replace sustained collective efforts (Morozov, 2011). Moreover, algorithmic curation and commercial logics can amplify certain voices while marginalizing others, potentially weakening the deliberative quality of collective action (Tufekci, 2017; Alnemr, 2025). For urban youth, who frequently navigate precarious labor markets, spatial inequalities, and social marginalization, these dynamics raise important questions about whether digital platforms genuinely strengthen collective capacity or merely reconfigure existing power asymmetries (Ramjit, 2025; Harracá et al., 2023; Ihlebæk & Sundet, 2023).

To provide solutions to these issues, theorists have gone ahead to make general propositions, which predict the networked nature of modern collective action. Network-centric views argue that digital platforms allow new types of connective action, where it is participation that is coordinated by the sharing of personalized content instead of centralized organizations (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Bennett and Segerberg, 2023; Gawer, 2022; Kasimov, 2024). It is on this perspective that collective action does not need strong organizational forms, it is created, on the one hand, through loose, digitally mediated networks that appeal to personal identities and everyday interests. Sociologists contend that such types of action are particularly attractive to urban youth, and their political practices are often expressed outside existing institutions and traditional civic organizations (Loader et al., 2014; Lorenzini and Forno, 2022; Phan and Kloos, 2023; Flanagan et al., 2022). These strategies, therefore, provide an effective model to explain how digital platforms can promote coordination and mobilization without relying on hierarchical leadership.

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In addition to these broad views, there are additional streams of the literature that focus on the role of social-network structures and platform affordances in determining collective outcomes. Social-network-based research highlights the importance of networks density, heterogeneity, and bridging potential in influencing collective action because they facilitates the diffusion of information and the development of trust (Diani and McAdam, 2003; Collar, 2022). By promoting the creation of ties and their maintenance faster, digital platforms have the capacity to strengthen these network qualities, especially in urban environments where social heterogeneity is prominent. At the same time, platform-specific features, including hashtags, groups, live-stream features, have shown to support the issue framing, emotional appeal, and live coordination, which are essential to mobilize youth involvement (Gerbaudo, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Such research highlights that the effect of digital platforms on collective action is inexplicable without considering its technical and social design.

The other strand of research indicates the importance of the contextual factors in mediating the digital platform effects. Both urban sociology and youth studies note that the mobilization via the Internet is closely connected to the offline, such as the availability of the public space, socioeconomic inequalities, and the access to political opportunity structures locally (Harvey, 2012; Hodkinson, 2012). It has been shown that digital platforms are the most successful in developing collective action when online networks are integrated into the existing social relationships and a sense of city life (Tilly and Wood, 2015; Bühler et al., 2023). To young people in urban areas, online communication often adds to physical and social interaction in schools, local communities, and cultural locations, giving rise to the hybrid modes of mobilization that cut across online and offline worlds. These results indicate that digital platforms are to be studied as the constituent parts of larger social ecologies instead of the independent factors in collective action.

Regardless of the richness of this literature, there are various gaps that exist. To start with, a large portion of the available literature focuses on high-profile social movements or nationwide mobilizations, thus providing little information about the more mundane manifestations of collective action among urban youth. Second, empirical research tends to favor platform usage or political results without undertaking a systematic analysis of the way in which digital platforms reconfigure underlying social networks. Third, the literature on the Global South cities is rather sparse and the studies need to be based on different contexts, as in Europe and North America, digital access, youth precarity, and the ways urban governance are formed are quite different. These gaps limit us to knowledge about the functioning of digital platforms in a particular urban environment and how youth use digital networks to solve local social problems.

Building on these limitations, this study aims to examine the influence of digital platforms on social networks and collective action among urban youth. The research seeks to analyze how digital platforms shape the structure and dynamics of youth social networks, how these networks facilitate or constrain collective action, and how online interactions intersect with offline urban experiences. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated focus on digital platforms, social network formation, and collective action within an urban youth context, moving beyond platform-centric or event-driven analyses. By concentrating on everyday practices rather than exceptional mobilizations, the study contributes to sociological debates on digital inequality, youth participation, and networked collective action. The scope of the research is limited to urban youth and their digitally mediated social networks, providing a focused examination of how digital platforms influence contemporary forms of collective engagement in urban settings.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the influence of digital platforms on social networks and collective action among urban youth. A quantitative approach is appropriate for this research because it allows for the systematic measurement of relationships between variables and the testing of theoretically grounded hypotheses derived from digital sociology, social network theory, and collective action scholarship (Creswell, 2014; Babbie, 2021). By operationalizing digital platform use, social network characteristics, and collective action into measurable indicators, the study seeks to identify statistically significant patterns that explain how digital engagement shapes collective behavior in urban youth contexts.

The research adopts a cross-sectional survey design, which is widely used in studies examining digital media use and social participation due to its efficiency in capturing behavioral patterns and attitudinal orientations at a specific point in time (Bryman, 2016). This design is particularly suitable for urban youth populations, whose digital practices and social interactions are dynamic yet structured by relatively stable platform ecosystems. The unit of analysis in this study is the individual urban youth, defined as residents of urban areas aged between 18 and 30 years, consistent with sociological definitions of youth in digital participation studies (Loader et al., 2014).

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the assumption that digital platforms influence collective action both directly and indirectly through social network structures. Drawing on the theory of networked individualism, digital platforms are conceptualized as infrastructures that expand, intensify, and reconfigure social ties beyond face-to-face interaction (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). In this framework, digital platform use is treated as the independent variable, social network characteristics function as mediating variables, and collective action represents the dependent variable.

Digital platform use is conceptualized in terms of frequency, diversity of platforms, and intensity of engagement, reflecting prior empirical research that links these dimensions to information exposure and mobilization potential (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Theocharis et al., 2015). Social networks are operationalized through indicators of network size, network diversity, and perceived social connectedness, drawing on social network theory which emphasizes the role of bridging and bonding ties in facilitating collective action (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Collective action is conceptualized as participation in digitally mediated collective activities, including online campaigns, community initiatives, and coordinated offline actions, consistent with the concept of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Based on this framework, the study hypothesizes that higher levels of digital platform use are positively associated with stronger and more diverse social networks, and that these network characteristics, in turn, increase the likelihood of youth participation in collective action. This mediating relationship reflects existing theoretical arguments that digital platforms do not mobilize individuals directly, but rather operate by reshaping relational structures that enable coordination and shared action (Diani & McAdam, 2003).

Population, Sample, and Data Collection

The target population of this study consists of urban youth residing in a major metropolitan area. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through an online survey, which is an appropriate method for studying digitally active populations (Evans & Mathur, 2018). The use of an online survey aligns with the research focus on digital platforms and allows respondents to reflect on their everyday digital practices in a familiar environment.

A non-probability sampling strategy using purposive and snowball sampling techniques was employed to reach urban youth who actively use digital platforms. While probability sampling is ideal for generalizability, non-probability approaches are commonly used in digital media research due to the absence of comprehensive sampling frames and the dispersed nature of online populations (Babbie, 2021). To enhance sample adequacy, the study targeted a minimum sample size sufficient for multivariate statistical analysis. Following recommendations for structural equation modeling and multiple regression analysis, a sample size exceeding 300 respondents was considered adequate to ensure statistical power and model stability (Hair et al., 2019).

The questionnaire consisted of several sections corresponding to the main constructs of the study. Digital platform use was measured using self-reported items assessing frequency of use, number of platforms used, and intensity of engagement. Social network variables captured respondents' perceptions of network size, diversity of social ties, and levels of social connectedness. Collective action was measured through items assessing participation in online and offline collective activities initiated or coordinated through digital platforms.

Measurement and Instrumentation

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established instruments in the literature to ensure content validity. Digital platform use items were adapted from prior studies on social media engagement and digital participation (Ellison et al., 2007; van Dijck et al., 2018). Social network characteristics were measured using indicators derived from social capital and network analysis literature, focusing on both bonding and bridging dimensions (Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2001). Collective action items were adapted from research on digital activism and youth participation, capturing both low-threshold and high-intensity forms of engagement (Earl et al., 2017).

All items were measured using a Likert-type scale, allowing respondents to indicate levels of agreement or frequency. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of respondents to assess clarity, reliability, and completion time. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine wording and improve measurement precision.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software and followed several stages. First, descriptive statistics were generated to summarize respondent characteristics and key variables. This step provides an overview of digital platform use patterns, social network attributes, and levels of collective action among urban youth, forming the empirical basis for subsequent analysis.

Second, reliability and validity tests were performed to assess the measurement quality of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with values above the commonly accepted threshold indicating satisfactory reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Construct validity was assessed through factor analysis to confirm that measurement items loaded appropriately on their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Third, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the direct effects of digital platform use on social network characteristics and collective action. To test the mediating role of social networks, mediation analysis was performed following established procedures for assessing indirect effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2018). This analytical strategy allows for a nuanced understanding of how digital

platforms influence collective action through relational mechanisms rather than direct causation alone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study on the influence of digital platforms on social networks and collective action among urban youth. The results are structured to reflect the analytical sequence outlined in the methodology, beginning with descriptive characteristics of the respondents, followed by measurement validation, and concluding with inferential analyses examining the hypothesized relationships between digital platform use, social network characteristics, and collective action.

Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents and Key Variables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (N = 342)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Digital Platform Use	3.87	0.64	1.92	5.00
Social Network Size	3.74	0.68	2.05	5.00
Network Diversity	3.61	0.71	1.88	5.00
Social Connectedness	3.79	0.66	2.10	5.00
Collective Action Participation	3.42	0.73	1.75	5.00

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the main study variables. Overall, respondents reported relatively high levels of digital platform use and social network characteristics, while participation in collective action showed moderate variation among urban youth.

The descriptive analysis provides an overview of the demographic composition of the respondents and their patterns of digital platform use. The sample predominantly consisted of urban youth within the age range defined in the study, reflecting a population that is deeply embedded in digital environments. Overall, respondents reported high levels of engagement with multiple digital platforms, particularly social networking and messaging applications, confirming prior observations that urban youth are among the most intensive users of digital media (Pew Research Center, 2023).

In terms of digital platform use, the majority of respondents reported daily engagement across more than one platform, indicating a diversified digital ecosystem rather than reliance on a single medium. This pattern aligns with previous studies suggesting that platform multiplicity increases exposure to heterogeneous information and social interactions (van Dijck et al., 2018). The intensity of platform use, measured through frequency and duration of engagement, showed moderate to high mean scores, suggesting that digital platforms constitute an integral part of respondents' everyday social lives.

Social network characteristics also exhibited relatively high mean values. Respondents generally perceived their social networks as expansive and diverse, encompassing both close-knit ties and more loosely connected acquaintances. These findings are consistent with the concept of networked individualism, where individuals maintain multiple, partially overlapping networks facilitated by digital platforms (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Levels of perceived social connectedness were similarly high, indicating that digital interactions contributed positively to respondents' sense of belonging and relational embeddedness.

With regard to collective action, respondents reported varying degrees of participation in digitally mediated collective activities. While low-threshold forms of engagement, such as sharing information or endorsing online campaigns, were more common, a substantial proportion of respondents also reported involvement in more

coordinated actions, including participation in offline events organized through digital platforms. This variation reflects the spectrum of collective action identified in the literature, ranging from symbolic participation to sustained mobilization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Reliability and Validity of Measurement Instruments

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings Range
Digital Platform Use	6	0.89	0.71 – 0.86
Social Network Size	4	0.85	0.68 – 0.82
Network Diversity	5	0.88	0.70 – 0.85
Social Connectedness	4	0.86	0.72 – 0.84
Collective Action	6	0.90	0.73 – 0.88

Table 2 shows that all constructs demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity, exceeding recommended thresholds for social science research.

Prior to hypothesis testing, the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were assessed to ensure the robustness of the empirical findings. Internal consistency reliability for all multi-item constructs exceeded accepted thresholds, indicating that the items consistently measured the intended constructs. Digital platform use, social network characteristics, and collective action each demonstrated satisfactory reliability, supporting their use in subsequent analyses (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Construct validity was examined through factor analysis, which revealed clear factor structures corresponding to the theoretical constructs. Items measuring digital platform use loaded strongly on a single factor, confirming the coherence of this construct. Similarly, social network indicators clustered around dimensions reflecting network size, diversity, and connectedness, consistent with established conceptualizations of social capital and network structure (Lin, 2001). Collective action items loaded on a factor representing participation in digitally mediated collective activities, encompassing both online and offline dimensions.

The results of these analyses, summarized in Table 1, demonstrate that the measurement model exhibits adequate reliability and validity. These findings provide empirical support for the operationalization of key variables and justify proceeding with inferential statistical analyses.

Relationship Between Digital Platform Use and Social Network Characteristics

Table 3. Regression Results: Digital Platform Use → Social Network Characteristics

Dependent Variable	β	t-value	p-value
Social Network Size	0.46	9.21	< 0.001
Network Diversity	0.42	8.37	< 0.001
Social Connectedness	0.39	7.98	< 0.001

$$R^2 = 0.38$$

$$F = 68.24, p < 0.001$$

Table 3 indicates that digital platform use has a strong and statistically significant positive effect on all dimensions of social network characteristics.

To examine the relationship between digital platform use and social network characteristics, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results indicate a

statistically significant positive association between digital platform use and social network size. Respondents who reported higher levels of digital engagement tended to perceive their social networks as larger and more expansive. This finding supports existing literature suggesting that digital platforms facilitate the maintenance of a broader range of social ties by lowering communication costs and enabling asynchronous interaction (Ellison et al., 2007).

In addition to network size, digital platform use was positively associated with network diversity. Higher engagement across multiple platforms was linked to greater exposure to individuals from different social backgrounds, interests, and communities. This result is consistent with the notion that digital environments promote bridging social capital by connecting individuals beyond their immediate offline circles (Putnam, 2000). The association between digital platform use and perceived social connectedness was also statistically significant, indicating that frequent digital interaction enhances subjective feelings of belonging and relational support.

These findings collectively suggest that digital platforms play a significant role in shaping the structural and relational dimensions of social networks among urban youth. The results align with theoretical arguments that digital media function as social infrastructures that reconfigure, rather than replace, traditional forms of social interaction (Wellman et al., 2003).

Direct Effects of Digital Platform Use on Collective Action

Table 4. Regression Results: Digital Platform Use → Collective Action

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Digital Platform Use	0.41	8.45	< 0.001

$R^2 = 0.29$

$F = 71.40, p < 0.001$

Table 4 shows a significant positive relationship between digital platform use and participation in collective action among urban youth.

The direct relationship between digital platform use and collective action was examined using regression analysis. The results show a positive and statistically significant association, indicating that higher levels of digital engagement are linked to increased participation in collective action. Respondents who reported frequent and intensive use of digital platforms were more likely to engage in both online and offline collective activities coordinated through digital channels.

This finding corroborates previous empirical studies demonstrating that digital platforms lower barriers to participation by providing accessible channels for information dissemination, coordination, and mobilization (Theocharis et al., 2015; Earl et al., 2017). However, the magnitude of the direct effect was moderate, suggesting that while digital platform use contributes to collective action, it does not fully account for variations in participation. This observation reinforces theoretical critiques that caution against technological determinism and emphasize the importance of social and relational factors in collective mobilization (Fuchs, 2017).

Mediating Role of Social Networks in Collective Action

Table 5. Mediation Analysis: Social Networks as Mediators

Pathway	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)
Platform Use → Collective Action	0.41***	—	0.41***
Platform Use → Social Networks	0.46***	—	—

Social Networks → Collective Action	0.37***	—	—
Platform Use → Collective Action (with mediators)	0.22**	0.19***	0.41***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5 demonstrates that social network characteristics partially mediate the relationship between digital platform use and collective action, confirming the proposed mediation model.

To further investigate the mechanisms underlying the relationship between digital platform use and collective action, mediation analysis was conducted to assess the role of social network characteristics. The results indicate that social networks significantly mediate the relationship between digital platform use and collective action. When social network variables were included in the model, the direct effect of digital platform use on collective action was reduced, while the indirect effect through social networks remained statistically significant.

Specifically, network size and network diversity emerged as significant mediators. Urban youth with higher levels of digital engagement tended to develop broader and more diverse social networks, which in turn increased their likelihood of participating in collective action. This finding supports the argument that collective action is facilitated not merely by access to digital tools, but by the relational structures that enable information flow, trust, and coordination (Diani & McAdam, 2003).

Perceived social connectedness also played a mediating role, albeit to a lesser extent. Respondents who felt more socially connected through digital interactions were more inclined to engage in collective activities, suggesting that emotional and relational dimensions of networks complement structural factors in motivating participation. These results align with prior research emphasizing the importance of both bonding and bridging ties in sustaining collective engagement (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000).

The mediation results are summarized in Figure 1, which illustrates the indirect pathways linking digital platform use to collective action through social network characteristics.

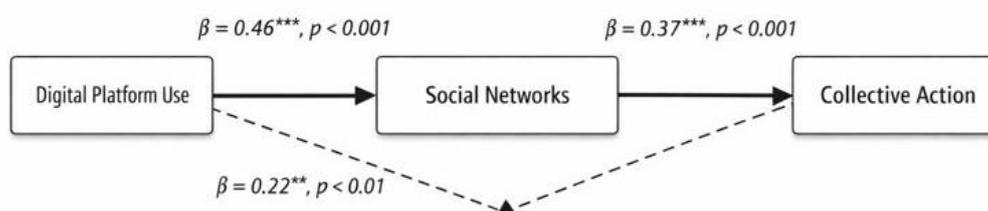


Figure 1. Mediating effects of social network characteristics on the relationship between digital platform use and collective action

Integrated Model of Digital Platforms, Social Networks, and Collective Action

The final analytical step involved examining the integrated model incorporating digital platform use, social network characteristics, and collective action. The model demonstrated good explanatory power, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in collective action. Social network variables contributed significantly to this explanatory capacity, underscoring their central role in translating digital engagement into collective behavior.

The results suggest that digital platforms function as enabling environments that facilitate network expansion and diversification, which in turn create favorable conditions for collective action. This finding reinforces the concept of connective action, where personalized engagement through digital media becomes embedded within networked structures that support coordination without relying on formal organizational hierarchies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Overall, the results provide empirical support for the study's conceptual framework and hypotheses. By demonstrating both direct and indirect effects of digital platform use on collective action, mediated through social networks, the findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital participation among urban youth. Rather than portraying digital platforms as autonomous drivers of collective action, the results highlight the relational mechanisms through which digital engagement becomes socially and politically consequential.

This study set out to examine how digital platforms influence social networks and collective action among urban youth, with particular attention to the mediating role of social network characteristics. The results provide strong empirical support for the study's conceptual framework and contribute to ongoing debates in digital sociology regarding the mechanisms through which digital media shape collective behavior. Rather than acting as autonomous drivers of mobilization, digital platforms appear to exert their influence primarily by restructuring social relations that enable coordination, trust, and shared meaning.

The findings demonstrate that digital platform use is positively associated with social network size, diversity, and perceived connectedness. This result aligns closely with the theory of networked individualism, which argues that digital technologies facilitate the maintenance of multiple, flexible, and overlapping social ties beyond traditional group-based affiliations (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). In the context of urban youth, digital platforms function as social infrastructures that expand relational opportunities, allowing individuals to sustain weak ties while simultaneously reinforcing emotionally significant connections. This supports earlier research suggesting that digital media do not erode social capital, but rather transform its structure and mode of accumulation (Ellison et al., 2007; Lin, 2001).

The positive relationship between digital platform use and collective action further confirms the role of digital media in lowering participation barriers. Urban youth who are more actively engaged on digital platforms are more likely to participate in collective initiatives, both online and offline. This finding resonates with prior studies on digital activism and youth participation, which emphasize the accessibility, speed, and low-cost nature of digitally mediated mobilization (Theocharis et al., 2015; Earl et al., 2017). However, the moderate magnitude of this direct effect suggests that digital access alone is insufficient to fully explain collective engagement, reinforcing critiques of technological determinism in digital participation research (Fuchs, 2017).

The mediation analysis offers a more nuanced explanation by revealing that social network characteristics partially mediate the relationship between digital platform use and collective action. This indicates that digital platforms facilitate collective action primarily by strengthening relational structures rather than directly motivating participation. Network size and diversity emerged as particularly strong mediators, highlighting the importance of bridging ties in disseminating information and mobilizing individuals across heterogeneous social groups. This finding is consistent with Granovetter's (1973) theory of the strength of weak ties and with empirical research showing that diverse networks enhance exposure to mobilizing information and collective frames.

Perceived social connectedness also played a mediating role, underscoring the emotional and psychological dimensions of collective action. Youth who experience a

stronger sense of belonging and relational support through digital interactions are more inclined to engage in collective initiatives. This supports the argument that collective action is not only a rational response to information exposure, but also an affective process rooted in shared identity and emotional resonance (Jasper, 2011). Digital platforms, by enabling continuous interaction and symbolic affirmation, appear to foster these affective bonds alongside structural connections.

Taken together, the findings lend strong support to the concept of connective action, which emphasizes personalized engagement embedded within networked communication structures rather than formal organizational hierarchies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In the case of urban youth, collective action emerges as a hybrid phenomenon that combines individual expression, networked coordination, and episodic mobilization. Digital platforms facilitate this process by enabling flexible participation pathways that accommodate varying levels of commitment and resources.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the influence of digital platforms on social networks and collective action among urban youth, with particular emphasis on the relational mechanisms that connect digital engagement to collective participation. The findings demonstrate that higher levels of digital platform use are associated with larger, more diverse, and more interconnected social networks. These network characteristics, in turn, significantly increase the likelihood of youth participation in collective action, both online and offline. Importantly, the results show that while digital platform use has a direct effect on collective action, this relationship is partially mediated by social network structures. This indicates that digital platforms do not mobilize urban youth in isolation, but rather operate by reshaping the relational environments through which information, trust, and coordination flow. From a sociological perspective, these findings highlight the central role of networks in translating digital interaction into meaningful collective engagement.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by empirically integrating digital sociology, social network theory, and collective action frameworks within an urban youth context. By demonstrating the mediating role of social networks, the research moves beyond technologically deterministic explanations and provides a more nuanced account of how digital platforms enable collective action through relational processes. The findings have practical implications for policymakers, educators, and civic organizations seeking to foster inclusive youth participation, as they underscore the importance of strengthening network diversity and connectedness rather than focusing solely on digital access. Future research could extend this work by employing longitudinal designs to capture causal dynamics, incorporating comparative urban contexts, or combining survey data with digital trace and network analysis methods to further deepen understanding of digitally mediated collective action.

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