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The Synergy of Randomness and Strategy: Fueling Socio-Political Movements in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Social media has become an undeniable force shaping socio-political movements. This paper explores the interplay between random and strategic social media use, arguing that the most effective approach lies in a synergy between these two forces. The research differentiates between random (casual browsing, sharing) and strategic (targeted content, influencer outreach) social media use, analyzing their advantages and disadvantages for movements. Random user engagement, while seemingly inconsequential, can fuel a movement's reach and visibility. Strategic use, on the other hand, allows movements to set the agenda through targeted messaging and

narrative control. The paper examines the 2019 Lebanese uprising as a case study, demonstrating how movements harnessed the power of both random amplification and strategic content creation to achieve their goals, while using examples for real world cases such as the #BlackLivesMatter and the #MeToo movements. This research contributes to the field by proposing a framework for understanding random and strategic social media use in socio-political movements, highlighting the importance of synergy between these approaches for maximizing reach and impact, and encouraging further research on how this framework interacts with established models like agenda-setting theory.

Keywords: Social media, Activism, Agenda-setting theory, Digital mobilization.

*** Introduction**

*** Background of the Study**

In today's digital era, social media has become integral to socio-political movements, reshaping traditional modes of activism (Bari, 2015). Platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram offer real-time communication, expansive reach, and decentralized engagement, enabling both mass mobilization and grassroots participation (Leong et al., 2019). Earl and Kimport (2011) emphasize that this digital transformation enhances the speed, connectivity, and impact of activism, shifting the landscape from physical rallies to virtual networks of resistance and solidarity.

Random social media use refers to unplanned, casual engagement such as spontaneous posts, hashtag usage, or content sharing. Though seemingly disorganized, this form of engagement can organically elevate a movement's visibility, creating viral momentum. The #BlackLivesMatter movement, for example, thrived on random user participation, as individuals shared stories and content under the hashtag without formal coordination (Franklin, 2020).

However, Bakshy et al. (2019) caution that such randomness can also lead to the spread of misinformation and superficial engagement. In contrast, strategic social media use involves calculated actions with specific objectives, such as curated messaging, influencer collaborations, and content planning (Jayasinghe, 2021). This approach allows movements to control narratives, prioritize issues, and shape public opinion. McCombs and Shaw's (2017) agenda-setting theory reinforces the idea that media—when used strategically—can influence public discourse by spotlighting selected themes. Nevertheless, Vegh (2013) warns that over-reliance on strategy may lead to echo chambers and reduced exposure to diverse perspectives, potentially narrowing the movement's reach and weakening its authenticity.

Two prominent examples illustrate this dynamic. The #BlackLivesMatter movement combined the organic power of viral content with coordinated messaging, partnerships, and media campaigns to influence national and international discourse (Franklin, 2020). Similarly, the 2019 Lebanese uprising used social media to mobilize citizens against state corruption and economic decline. Khamis, Lüdtke, and

Wagner (2020) document how both spontaneous user engagement and deliberate digital activism, including influencer participation and organized messaging, contributed to the movement's endurance and effectiveness.

*** Study Aim**

This paper aims to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding and applying the synergy between random and strategic social media use. Recognizing and leveraging this interplay can significantly enhance digital mobilization, providing activists and policymakers with actionable insights into how to sustain movements, build coalitions, and generate real-world impact. By embracing both authenticity and intention, socio-political campaigns can better adapt to the fast-paced, decentralized nature of today's digital public sphere. Therefore, this paper explores the nuanced distinction—and essential synergy—between random and strategic social media use in activism.

*** Main Research Question**

To address the aim, the following research question is crafted: -

How does the interplay between random and strategic social media use enhance the effectiveness

of socio-political movements in the digital age?

*** Research Hypothesis**

To answer the research question, the following hypothesis is established: -

1- H: The most effective form of online activism emerges from the synergy between spontaneous (random) and deliberate (strategic) uses of social media, as this combination enhances a movement's reach, visibility, credibility, and overall impact.

*** Literature Review**

The digital age has revolutionized the way socio-political movements operate, with social media emerging as a pivotal tool for mobilization and advocacy. This literature review investigates the dual facets of social media use—random and strategic—and examines their roles, advantages, limitations, and interplay in shaping socio-political movements. By synthesizing findings from various studies, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how random and strategic social media use contribute to the visibility, reach, and impact of these movements.

1- Random Social Media Use: Random social media use is characterized by casual browsing, spontaneous content sharing, and

organic interactions. This type of engagement is typically unplanned and driven by individual users' interests and behaviors. According to Earl and Kimport (2011), random user engagement, although seemingly inconsequential, can significantly amplify a movement's message. The spontaneity of random engagement often leads to the viral dissemination of information, enhancing the movement's reach and visibility.

*** Amplification and Virality of Random Engagement**

Random social media use plays a crucial role in increasing the visibility of socio-political movements. The spontaneous sharing of content by users can lead to exponential growth in the movement's online presence. Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that the decentralized nature of random engagement allows for a more organic spread of information, reaching audiences that might not be targeted through strategic efforts. This grassroots amplification is essential for movements seeking to gain widespread attention and support.

One of the key benefits of random social media use is its ability to create viral moments. Virality occurs when content is shared widely

and rapidly, often reaching users beyond the immediate network of the original poster (Mishnick & Wise, 2024). This phenomenon can be particularly beneficial for socio-political movements, as it allows them to reach a broader audience. For example, the #MeToo movement experienced significant growth through the random sharing of personal stories and experiences, which resonated with a global audience and led to widespread media coverage (Beckett & Chandler, 2019).

*** Risks of Random and Strategic Engagement**

Despite its advantages, random social media use also has notable drawbacks. One major concern is the potential spread of misinformation. Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2019) highlight that the unstructured nature of random engagement can lead to the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information, which can undermine the credibility of the movement. Furthermore, the fleeting nature of random engagement means that users may interact with content briefly and then move on, resulting in temporary spikes in attention that do not translate into sustained support or action. However, a purely strategic approach to social media use is not without its limitations. One major

concern is the creation of echo chambers, where information is circulated within a closed group of like-minded individuals. Vegh (2013) argues that echo chambers can limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and create a homogenized narrative that fails to resonate with a broader audience. This insularity can hinder the movement's ability to attract new supporters and engage with different perspectives.

2- Strategic Social Media Use: Strategic social media use involves deliberate and targeted actions aimed at achieving specific objectives. This includes creating tailored content, engaging in influencer outreach, and exercising narrative control. McCombs and Shaw (2017) highlight that strategic use allows movements to set the agenda and influence public discourse by prioritizing certain topics and framing them in a particular manner.

*** Strategic Agenda-Setting and Mobilization**

One of the primary advantages of strategic social media use is its ability to shape public perception and discourse. The agenda-setting theory, as proposed by McCombs and Shaw (2017), suggests that media outlets have significant power in determining which issues are considered important by the public.

By strategically utilizing social media, socio-political movements can ensure that their key messages are prominently featured and drive public debate. This deliberate framing of issues can help to build a coherent narrative and align supporters around specific goals (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Strategic social media use is also effective in mobilizing supporters and coordinating actions. Targeted messaging and influencer partnerships can help to rally individuals around a common cause and encourage participation in events and activities (Lou et al., 2024). For instance, the #BlackLivesMatter movement has successfully leveraged strategic social media efforts to organize protests, raise awareness, and advocate for policy changes (Strickland, 2022). By partnering with high-profile influencers and utilizing targeted campaigns, the movement has been able to maintain momentum and drive significant social and political change (Franklin, 2020).

3- Synergy between Random and Strategic Social Media Use: The synergy between random and strategic social media use is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of socio-political movements. While each approach has distinct

advantages, their integration allows movements to broaden their reach, enhance credibility, and strengthen overall impact. Random engagement—characterized by spontaneous sharing, personal storytelling, and organic interaction—amplifies a movement's message and fosters a sense of authenticity. In contrast, strategic use involves deliberate, goal-oriented actions such as content planning, influencer outreach, and narrative framing, ensuring focused messaging and agenda control.

Khamis, Lüdtke, and Wagner (2020) demonstrate how the 2019 Lebanese uprising effectively combined both forms of engagement to mobilize widespread support and clearly articulate its demands. Random participation helped generate grassroots energy, while strategic coordination sustained momentum and communicated the movement's goals with clarity. This balance between spontaneity and structure helps movements maintain public trust by appearing both authentic and organized.

Furthermore, blending random and strategic use mitigates the limitations of each approach. While random engagement can lead to misinformation or short-lived interest, strategic engagement may

create echo chambers and limit outreach to new or diverse audiences. The combined approach allows for wide dissemination and organic growth, while also ensuring that messaging remains aligned with core values and objectives.

Therefore, understanding this synergy helps activists create engaging, coherent campaigns, and enables policymakers to design socially responsible digital frameworks.

*** Theoretical Framework**

1- Agenda-Setting Theory: First and Second Levels: The agenda-setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw in the 1970s, suggests that media influences public focus by prioritizing certain issues (McCombs & Shaw, 2017). This shapes public discourse and societal priorities. The theory has two levels: the first highlights issue salience, and the second focuses on how issues are perceived through emphasized attributes (McCombs, 2005). Socio-political movements can use both levels strategically on social media to influence public opinion and policy.

The first level addresses how media elevates specific issues by consistently covering them. Movements use strategic social media to achieve similar visibility. For example, #BlackLivesMatter

spotlighted police brutality and racism by using social media strategically (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). Tactics included crafting compelling narratives, using visuals, and engaging influencers to sustain public focus and inspire change. Second-level agenda-setting—or attribute framing—shapes public perception by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue. Movements use social media to frame issues deliberately. The 2019 Lebanese uprising, for instance, framed protests around corruption and economic failure, shaping public understanding and gaining support (Khamis, Lüdtke, & Wagner, 2020). Consistent framing helped sustain momentum and international visibility.

2- The Role of Synergy: While agenda-setting theory provides a robust framework for understanding the impact of strategic social media use, the integration of random social media use adds another layer of complexity and effectiveness to socio-political movements. This paper proposes a framework that combines both random and strategic social media use, emphasizing the importance of their synergy in maximizing a movement's reach and impact.

Random use—such as spontaneous sharing and personal stories—drives viral spread and organic awareness. Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that such user engagement amplifies messages. During #MeToo, widespread spontaneous sharing under the hashtag brought global attention to sexual harassment (Beckett & Chandler, 2019), showing how random use builds awareness and sparks movements. Strategic efforts—like coordinated content, influencer partnerships, and message framing—ensure consistency and sustained support. These efforts shape public narratives. In the 2019 Lebanese uprising, strategic social media helped clarify demands and maintained global interest (Khamis, Lüdtke, & Wagner, 2020), proving that coherent strategy sustains movements.

*** Methodology**

*** Research Design**

To comprehensively analyze the synergy between random and strategic social media use in socio-political movements, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach. This methodology integrates quantitative analysis of social media data with qualitative interviews of activists and policymakers. By combining these methods, the

research aims to provide a holistic understanding of how random and strategic social media engagement influences the reach, visibility, and impact on movements such as the 2019 Lebanese uprising.

This research employs a grounded theory approach underpinned by an abductive logic of inquiry, aiming to construct theory from empirical observations within the context of the October 2019 Lebanese Uprising. The study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative social media analytics and qualitative content, discourse, and interview analyses, to explore the interplay between random and strategic social media use in shaping socio-political mobilization.

*** Quantitative Approach**

*** Survey Research**

A targeted public survey will engage participants who were active during the uprising. The sample selection ensures representation across gender, age, religion, region, and political affiliation, with a specific emphasis on youth and women—key demographics in the mobilization. The survey investigates preferred media channels during the uprising, the reliance on traditional versus digital sources, trust in various news platforms, and the impact of

media coverage on the decision to participate in demonstrations.

*** Qualitative Approach**

*** Interviews**

To understand strategic messaging, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with editors-in-chief and frontline journalists from three key TV stations—MTV, LBCI, and Al Jadeed—alongside influential reporters and digital content creators identified through Twitter data. These include Maryam Al Bassam, Walid Abboud, Lara Zalloum, Riad Kobeissy, Yazbeck Wehbe, Rachel Karam, and others who emerged as prominent voices during the uprising. Interviews will explore the professional use of institutional platforms and personal digital accounts, examining the strategic interplay between mainstream media and individual influence.

*** Content and Discourse Analysis**

The qualitative arm of the study also employs thematic, content, and discourse analyses to examine how socio-political messages were framed across platforms. Content analysis follows established phases: data collection, coding scheme design, thematic coding, validation, and synthesis. Summative content analysis to assess frequency, context, and implied meanings.

*** Synergy Evaluation**

A central component of this methodology is the measurement of synergy between random user participation and strategic media framing. This includes: -

- 1- Quantitative overlap between journalist/TV-initiated content and public response
- 2- Patterns of content recirculation between TV platforms and digital media
- 3- Evidence of agenda-setting through hashtag alignment and influencer narratives

Particular attention is paid to the absence of traditional leadership in the movement, replaced by media personalities acting as *de facto* leaders—demonstrated through mass engagement with their calls to action.

*** Theory Development**

The integrated findings contribute to the development of a theoretical framework that explains how the interplay between random and strategic social media use enhances the effectiveness of socio-political movements. This framework can be used to inform future research and practical applications in the field of digital activism.

*** Research Findings**

- 1- Survey Analysis: Media, Public Engagement, and Perception during the October 2019 Uprising in

Lebanon

This analysis is based on a comprehensive survey conducted to examine the intersection of media consumption, political engagement, and public perception during the October 2019 Uprising in Lebanon. The survey gathered responses from 1,048 participants representing a diverse cross-section of Lebanese society in terms of gender, geographic location, educational background, and professional status. Designed to assess how individuals accessed, interacted with, and trusted various media sources—both traditional and digital—the survey also explored respondents' levels of political involvement, particularly in the context of the revolution. The participants' high levels of education and near-universal access to mobile technology and social media platforms provided a rich dataset for analyzing the evolving role of media in shaping public discourse and civic mobilization during a period of national upheaval.

The comprehensive five-part analysis of the survey responses to Questions 1 to 40 provides a rich and multifaceted understanding of Lebanese citizens' demographic profiles, media consumption habits, digital engagement, and perceptions of media's role during the October

2019 Uprising. The data spans a wide spectrum of themes, from technological accessibility to political affiliation, and from traditional media trust to the power of social media in mobilizing the public.

*** Demographics and Technological Landscape**

The demographic data reveals a highly educated and technologically connected population. With nearly 67% of the respondents identifying as female, and a high percentage (over 90%) holding at least a bachelor's degree, the survey sample represents a progressive, informed, and digitally literate group. Geographically, participation was concentrated in urban and suburban areas like Keserouan-Jbeil, Metn, and Beirut, ensuring diverse regional representation. Technological access is nearly universal, with all respondents owning mobile phones and having social media accounts, and 98.86% accessing the internet on their mobile devices. This digital saturation sets the stage for high levels of media interaction, particularly through social platforms. The findings affirm the central role of digital devices and social media in shaping everyday life and public discourse.

*** Media Consumption and Shifts during the Uprising**

Media consumption patterns saw significant shifts during the revolution. While traditional TV viewership decreased in general life, it resurged during the uprising as 56% reported increased consumption. MTV and LBC emerged as the leading trusted channels, although many respondents preferred combining multiple sources for more balanced perspectives. Simultaneously, social media usage increased for 59% of respondents, indicating the dual role of both traditional and digital media in information dissemination.

Instagram and Twitter (X) were the dominant platforms, with many users seeking real-time updates and alternative narratives from activists and independent pages like Jad Ghosn, Dima Sadek, "Political Pen," and "Daleel Thawra." This behavior highlights a deep mistrust or dissatisfaction with single-source media, revealing a demand for pluralism and real-time, uncensored reporting.

Despite the high access and usage of digital platforms, the trust in mobile apps and TV channel hashtags remained relatively low. Only 21% of users reported adopting hashtags or slogans promoted by TV channels,

indicating a preference for grassroots or organic movements over institutional messaging.

Engagement during the Uprising: Participation, Roles, and Political Identity

Almost half of the respondents (46%) actively participated in the October 2019 demonstrations, with Beirut being the epicenter, followed by other active zones such as Jal El Dib, Zouk Mosbeh, and Tripoli. Roles varied—277 respondents self-identified as protestors, 143 as social media activists, and 436 remained neutral. This range underscores a spectrum of engagement from physical presence to digital activism and passive observation. In addition, political affiliation data is particularly revealing. Over 80% claimed no party affiliation, suggesting a politically independent movement fueled by collective socio-economic discontent rather than partisan ideologies. Although some respondents admitted affiliations—most notably with the Lebanese Forces—many refused to disclose political leanings, reflecting the sensitive nature of political identity in Lebanon.

* Media Trust and Perceived Convergence

A striking theme is the perceived convergence between

social media and traditional media. Over 60% saw similarities in their content, indicating a harmonization of narratives or mutual influence between platforms. This could suggest that mainstream media adapted to grassroots discourses or vice versa, resulting in aligned messaging during the uprising. Nevertheless, trust in media remains fragmented. While some respondents rated TV news as moderately trustworthy (most frequent rating: 3/5), the sheer number of missing responses on this question (908) suggests skepticism, disengagement, or reluctance to assess trustworthiness—possibly due to fear, apathy, or media fatigue.

* The Role of Media Synergy in Mobilization and Decision-Making

The final segment of the analysis underscores the widespread belief in the power of media convergence. An overwhelming 97.5% of respondents credited the bridging of social media and traditional media with helping mobilize people. Furthermore, over 80% acknowledged the synergistic effect of this convergence on the revolution's effectiveness. However, when it came to personal organization or decision-making, responses were more varied. While 64.4% felt media convergence

influenced their actions, a sizable group marked these questions as not applicable—suggesting diverse levels of individual involvement and the need for more nuanced assessments of personal-media interactions.

2- Interviews: Analytical Summary of Chief Editors' and Journalists' Interviews during the Lebanon October 2019 Uprising: The collective analysis of the interviews with four chief editors—Walid Abboud, Mariam Al Bassam, Lara Zalloum, and Jerry Maher—and five frontline journalists—Yazbeck Wehbe, Rachel Karam, Jad Ghosn, Riad Kobeissy, and Nawal Berri—provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how traditional and digital media functioned during the October 17, 2019 Uprising in Lebanon. Together, these testimonies reveal the layered dynamics of media practice, its evolving relationship with activism, and its pivotal role in shaping public discourse, mobilizing citizens, and validating key media theories.

*** The Role and Transformation of Traditional Media**

Both groups of interviewees emphasized the continued importance of traditional media as a source of verified, credible information, especially during

moments of chaos and misinformation. Chief editors like Walid Abboud and Mariam Al Bassam highlighted how traditional TV coverage—through MTV and Al Jadeed—played an essential role in legitimizing the revolution, giving voice to public grievances, and setting the agenda. On the ground, Yazbeck Wehbe and Rachel Karam underscored how traditional outlets amplified the protests and reached broader audiences, maintaining trust where social media often fell short. However, this trust came with limitations. Journalists like Jad Ghosn and Riad Kobeissy criticized traditional media for its occasional superficiality and lack of deep political critique, suggesting that economic motives sometimes drove editorial choices more than ideological commitments. This tension highlights the dual identity of traditional media—as both a mirror and filter of public sentiment.

*** The Integration and Synergy with Digital Media**

A key theme across all interviews is the synergistic relationship between traditional and digital media. This integration was most effectively illustrated by Jerry Maher's digital-first strategy at SBI, which used social media as its primary tool for narrative-shaping

and mobilization. Similarly, Al Bassam and Abboud acknowledged the critical role of platforms like Twitter (X) in real-time news delivery and in fighting misinformation. From the journalists' perspective, Rachel Karam, Nawal Berri, and Yazbeck Wehbe all described how digital media complemented their work—either through engaging public sentiment, disseminating short impactful videos, or blending citizen journalism with professional reporting. Yet, Lara Zalloum's admission that LBCI did not fully utilize digital platforms suggests institutional hesitancy and a missed opportunity for broader engagement. Importantly, this hybrid media ecosystem allowed movements to simultaneously tap into strategic communication (through organized newsrooms and known figures) and randomized grassroots content (through spontaneous user posts and hashtags), supporting the broader hypothesis that media synergy is key to maximizing a movement's reach and impact.

*** Challenges: Professional, Political, and Personal**

The interviews illuminate the pressures and dangers journalists faced—ranging from long hours and live reporting under duress to direct

physical threats and social media harassment. Al Bassam and Berri described dealing with misinformation and bullying online. Kobeissy confronted blurred lines between journalism and activism, while Wehbe and Karam navigated professional demands in volatile environments. Furthermore, the politicized nature of Lebanon's media landscape forced journalists to walk a fine line between reporting and advocacy, with some using their personal social media platforms to challenge institutions or call for accountability, and others opting for a more neutral or professional posture.

*** Validation of Media Theories**

Across the board, the interviews validate the Agenda Setting Theory—traditional media clearly influenced public discourse by spotlighting specific issues, framing narratives, and driving attention to key revolution-related themes. Each media outlet, whether through in-depth coverage, symbolic programming, or sensational reporting, played a role in shaping the national conversation. In parallel, Sandor Vegh's Activism Classification Model is strongly affirmed through the journalists' digital practices: -

1- Awareness and Advocacy were driven by consistent reporting and wide social media dissemination.

2- Organization and Mobilization emerged through live updates, video clips, and online calls to protest.

3- Action and Reaction were supported by interactive engagement and real-time responsiveness, especially on platforms like Twitter (X) and Instagram.

*** Impact on Public Discourse and the Broader Media Landscape**

All interviewees contributed to a media environment that amplified public sentiment, kept the revolution in the national consciousness, and, in some cases, pressured political actors to respond. While some like Ghosn and Kobeissy critiqued the lack of structural depth in the media's political framing, others, such as Wehbe and Karam, pointed to measurable increases in viewership and civic participation spurred by comprehensive media coverage. Importantly, this collective media engagement helped bridge the traditional-digital divide, establishing a new model for media practice during socio-political crises—where collaboration between structured newsrooms and decentralized social media networks becomes essential.

3- Content Analysis Analytical Summary: Twitter (X) Influence

during the Lebanese Uprising of October 2019

The extensive analysis of Twitter (X) activity during the Lebanese Uprising of October–November 2019 highlights the transformative role of social media in shaping public discourse, mobilizing protestors, and sustaining revolutionary momentum. The discourse analysis, content review, and theoretical application of both the Agenda Setting Theory and Vegh's Model of Digital Activism demonstrate that Twitter (X) was not merely a platform for commentary but a central mechanism for action, organization, and influence during this critical moment in Lebanese history.

*** Influencer Roles: Setting the Agenda and Driving Public Sentiment**

Key Lebanese media personalities and journalists—including Dima Sadek, Jerry Maher, Diana Moukalled, Joe Maalouf, Hicham Haddad, Riad Kobaissi, and others—used Twitter (X) to shape public opinion and push revolutionary narratives. Their tweets directly addressed issues of corruption, accountability, economic collapse, sectarianism, and government failure, echoing the core grievances of the uprising.

1- Dima Sadek and Diana Moukalled stood out for their bold critiques and emotionally charged messages that garnered thousands of retweets and likes. Their tweets frequently topped engagement metrics and reinforced revolutionary themes, especially through attacks on established political figures like Hassan Nasrallah and Fouad Siniora.

2- Jerry Maher's provocative tone, consistently anti-Hezbollah and anti-corruption, helped galvanize public anger. His high-engagement tweets often served as rallying cries, particularly in moments following major political speeches or government announcements.

3- Joe Maalouf and Hicham Haddad brought humor, investigative angles, or simplified critiques that appealed to broader demographics, sustaining inclusivity within the digital discourse.

These influencers exemplified Agenda Setting Theory, as their consistent framing of issues (e.g., #يسقط_يسقط_حكم_المصرف) determined what the public focused on, regardless of individual political preferences.

*** Twitter (X) as a Tool of the Vegh Model: From Awareness to Action**

When applied to Sandor Vegh's six-stage digital activism model—Awareness, Advocacy,

Organization, Mobilization, Action, and Reaction—the influencers' tweets spanned across the full spectrum of digital activism: -

1- Awareness was primarily achieved through critiques of political leaders and the highlighting of systemic corruption (e.g., Sadek's posts on sectarianism and Moukalled's visual narratives of the protests).

2- Advocacy emerged as influencers actively promoted reforms, early elections, and accountability (e.g., Sadek's call for banking sector reform or Maher's demand for government resignations).

3- Organization and Mobilization were clearly present in tweets that informed the public about protest locations, times, and strategies—effectively acting as real-time logistical updates.

4- Action was incited by forceful calls to protest or resist (e.g., Maher's viral calls to topple corrupt rulers), and

5- Reaction was evident in the mass engagement, dialogue, and sustained echoing of these messages through retweets and hashtags.

This full-cycle presence of influencer tweets within Vegh's model shows that Twitter (X) did more than inform—it became a driver of civic behavior and real-world outcomes.

*** Hashtags: Organizing and Amplifying the Movement**

Hashtags like #LebanonProtests, #Thawra, #LebanonRevolution, and #كلن_يعني_كلن functioned as digital scaffolding, organizing information and linking individual voices into a collective narrative. They served four key functions: -

- 1- Organizing Content for ease of access.
- 2- Amplifying Messages for visibility across networks.
- 3- Creating Community and solidarity among protestors.
- 4- Mobilizing Participation by sharing logistics and boosting morale.

Engagement metrics (e.g., 5000 tweets and 50,000 likes for #LebanonProtests) demonstrate the viral power of hashtags to structure discourse, foster cohesion, and disseminate real-time updates.

*** Peak Moments and Real-Time Engagement**

Activity surged around key revolutionary milestones such as: -

- 1- Political speeches by Nasrallah or Hariri,
- 2- Government resignations or violent incidents at protest sites,
- 3- Strategic wins or challenges for the movement.

Tweets from influencers during these moments functioned as counter-narratives to official discourse and mainstream media, reflecting a grassroots, decentralized communication model that outpaced traditional media in speed, relatability, and impact.

*** Strategic and Random Use: Synergy at Its Best**

The dataset underscores the synergy between strategic (planned, message-driven) and random (organic, user-generated) content. Influencers used deliberate framing, expert analysis, and high-profile commentary, while ordinary users contributed raw footage, firsthand testimony, and emotional appeals.

This synergy: -

- 1- Maximized reach and visibility by targeting both informed and casual users,
- 2- Enhanced credibility by mixing institutional authority with personal authenticity,
- 3- Sustained impact through constant interaction, sharing, and reframing of revolutionary goals.

This confirms the broader hypothesis that the most effective approach to digital activism lies in the interplay between strategic and spontaneous social media use.

*** Discussion and Implications for Activists and Policymakers**

*** Discussion**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach—survey analysis, semi-structured interviews, and Twitter (X) discourse and engagement analysis—to investigate the role of media during the October 2019 Lebanese Uprising. When triangulated, the findings from all three methods converge to strongly validate the hypothesis. Each research method—surveys (macro perception), interviews (media strategy), and Twitter data (real-time engagement)—confirms and reinforces the core hypothesis. The synergy between random and strategic social media use during the Lebanese Uprising was not only evident but essential. It: -

- 1- Maximized reach by engaging wide and varied audiences,
- 2- Sustained visibility through continuous multi-platform content,
- 3- Enhanced credibility by combining authoritative voices with authentic personal narratives,
- 4- Amplified impact by converting online discourse into offline action.

This triangulated validation demonstrates that modern digital activism is most powerful when top-down communication from media professionals aligns with bottom-up

momentum from users, forming an ecosystem where participation, influence, and mobilization are co-produced.

*** Implications**

For Activists: Maximizing Effectiveness in the Digital Age

Recent socio-political movements, notably the Lebanese Uprising, reveal that the most effective activism blends strategy with spontaneity. Planned content—like infographics, expert videos, and clear messaging—must coexist with organic expressions such as personal stories, memes, and protest footage (Rogers, 2021). Strategic messaging offers structure, while grassroots engagement brings energy and authenticity. Influencer content gained real traction only when echoed and reshaped by ordinary users (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019).

Hashtags played a pivotal role as more than labels—they became digital gathering points, structuring discourse, mobilizing action, and shaping collective identity. Emotionally resonant and inclusive hashtags helped unify diverse voices and maintain visibility (Laucuka, 2018).

A multi-platform approach proved essential. Twitter (X) served as a hub for real-time debate, Instagram for visual storytelling, and

traditional media for validation. Each platform offered unique strengths, and effective campaigns tailored their content accordingly.

Credibility emerged through a hybrid model that combined verified information with lived experience. Movements built trust by blending expert analysis with first-person narratives and collaborating with journalists and fact-checkers. This approach fostered a sense of both authority and authenticity—critical for mobilizing broad support and sustaining momentum.

For Policymakers: Understanding and Engaging with Digital Movements

The digital age has redefined how revolutions unfold—no longer confined to streets or parliaments, they now take shape in real-time through converged media ecosystems led by influencers, citizens, and news platforms. To grasp public sentiment, policymakers must adopt real-time monitoring tools that go beyond traditional media, analyzing social media trends, hashtags, and digital discourse.

Empowering citizens through digital literacy is equally vital. Movements gain momentum when people are equipped to engage critically online. Introducing media literacy and digital citizenship

programs can help individuals navigate activism, detect misinformation, and participate responsibly in digital spaces (Hussain & Phulpoto, 2024).

The Lebanese Uprising also highlighted a growing distrust in traditional institutions, pushing citizens to seek truth and representation from influencers and digital figures. To bridge this gap, governments should establish transparent two-way digital communication—through verified platforms, open consultations, and accessible data—to rebuild trust and foster direct public engagement (Jopang et al., 2024).

Finally, while regulation is necessary, it must avoid silencing dissent. Repressive measures often backfire, especially when exposed by citizen journalists. A balanced regulatory framework should combat hate speech and disinformation while upholding freedom of expression (Banchio, 2024). Supporting independent journalism and protecting digital rights is essential for democratic resilience in today's media-driven public sphere.

*** Conclusion**

*** Summary of Key Findings**

The findings from this research highlight the distinct advantages and limitations of both random and

strategic social media use in socio-political movements. Random engagement significantly increases visibility and fosters grassroots mobilization, but it also carries the risks of misinformation and fleeting support. Strategic social media use effectively shapes public discourse and mobilizes supporters but can lead to echo chambers if not balanced with organic engagement.

The synergy between random and strategic social media use is essential for maximizing a movement's reach, credibility, and impact. By integrating these approaches, socio-political movements can leverage the broad dissemination and authenticity of random engagement while maintaining the focus and coherence provided by strategic efforts. This balance is crucial for building diverse and inclusive support bases, sustaining long-term activism, and driving meaningful social and political change.

*** Advantages and Limitations**

The quantitative analysis of social media activity during movements like #BlackLivesMatter and the 2019 Lebanese uprising highlights the critical role of random social media use in boosting visibility and reach. Spontaneous content sharing, often accompanied by viral

hashtags, enables widespread dissemination without formal coordination (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016; Khamis, Lüdtke, & Wagner, 2020).

Random engagement fosters grassroots mobilization, enabling individuals to participate organically, building a sense of collective identity. Viral posts and protest videos helped create broad-based solidarity (Sakr, 2018). However, this unstructured nature also allows for the rapid spread of misinformation, which can undermine credibility and create confusion. Both the #BlackLivesMatter and Lebanese movements experienced such issues, where rumors and misleading content spread quickly (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015).

Another limitation is the ephemeral nature of random engagement. While it can generate viral moments and short-term spikes in attention, sustaining momentum over time often requires more deliberate, focused strategies (Earl & Kimport, 2011). This is where strategic social media use becomes essential. By creating targeted content and collaborating with influencers, movements can control the narrative and ensure consistent messaging.

Strategic use also supports organizational coordination. During the Lebanese uprising, social media was instrumental in organizing protests, human chains, and other mass mobilizations that kept pressure on the government and maintained public visibility (Khamis et al., 2020). Yet, excessive reliance on strategy may result in echo chambers, where information circulates within like-minded groups, limiting outreach and exposure to differing views (Sunstein, 2001).

*** Future Research Directions**

While this research provides a foundational framework for understanding the synergy between random and strategic social media use, further studies are needed to explore how this framework interacts with established models like agenda-setting theory. Investigating the interplay between these models can deepen our understanding of digital mobilization and its impact on public opinion and policy. Future research should also examine the role of emerging technologies and platforms in shaping socio-political movements. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, new tools and strategies will emerge, presenting both opportunities and challenges for activists and policymakers. By staying attuned to these

developments, researchers can provide timely and relevant insights that support effective digital activism.

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