PLATFORM-AFFORDED TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY: YOUTH AND NARRATIVE STRATEGY OF THE #STOPWILLOW CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

This study introduces and empirically grounds the concept of *Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy* (PATA) to explain how youth activists operationalize strategic narratives across digital platforms to influence transnational environmental discourse. Focusing on the #StopWillow campaign—a youth-led digital resistance to the Willow oil drilling project in Alaska—this research analyzes 11,499 public comments and platform content from six prominent climate influencers on TikTok and Twitter/X. Departing from traditional Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) models, the study reinterprets the four core advocacy mechanisms (information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics) through the lens of platform affordances such as algorithmic amplification, emotional resonance, and short-form storytelling. Using qualitative content analysis and semiotic coding, the findings demonstrate how influencer-activists construct platform-calibrated narratives that convert affect into algorithmic visibility and visibility into reputational pressure. Emotional storytelling—anchored in eco-anxiety, moral urgency, and intergenerational grievance—proved more effective in mobilizing publics than data-driven content alone. This digital repertoire reconfigures TAN dynamics by shifting the source of legitimacy from institutional proximity to discursive performance. By theorizing and evidencing PATA, the study contributes to environmental politics and digital activism literature by showing how digitally native youth are emerging as central agents of transnational pressure, shaping global climate discourse not through formal participation, but through narrative orchestration in emotionally and visually saturated media ecologies.

Keywords**:** Platform-Afforded Advocacy, Transnational Environmental Discourse, Youth Climate Activism, #StopWillow, Strategic Narratives

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Youth have emerged as influential agents actively reshaping transnational environmental politics through digital means. In the face of escalating climate threats and political inertia, youth actors have increasingly turned to digital platforms to assert agency, generate public legitimacy, and exert moral pressure across borders. This shift reflects a broader transformation in global advocacy, where influence is exercised through narrative, visibility, and emotional resonance rather than institutional authority (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Hadden and Jasny 2019). The #StopWillow campaign illustrates this transformation vividly. Sparked by the U.S. government's approval of the Willow oil drilling project in Alaska, the campaign saw youth activists—most notably Greta Thunberg, Alex Haraus, and Alaina Wood—mobilize global publics through platforms like TikTok and Twitter. By framing the project as a betrayal of the Paris Agreement and a symbol of intergenerational injustice, they shifted a localized decision into a global flashpoint (Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley 2023).

However, this newfound digital visibility does not necessarily translate into institutional power. Despite the global reach and performative potency of their narratives, youth remain structurally marginalized within formal climate policy arenas. Their roles are often symbolic, confined to speaking slots at high-level summits or youth pavilions, without meaningful influence on negotiation outcomes or agenda-setting processes (Scandurra et al. 2022; Hadden and Jasny 2019) This exclusion reflects deeper hierarchies within international environmental governance, where decision-making authority is still concentrated among states, established NGOs, and multilateral institutions (Elsässer et al. 2022) . For example, while youth-led protests surged during COP26 and COP27, most youth demands—such as ending fossil fuel subsidies or ensuring climate finance equity—were sidelined in final agreements (UN Climate Change News 2023; Climate Communications 2022). The disconnect between public mobilization and institutional response underscores a legitimacy gap in climate diplomacy. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond tokenistic participation and recognizing youth not merely as messengers, but as political actors with agenda-setting capacities and discursive power.

Greta Thunberg exemplifies this discursive disruption; her emotionally charged speeches featuring phrases like "How dare you?" and "Our house is on fire" have pierced the technocratic lexicon of climate diplomacy and shifted the emotional parameters of global environmental discourse, paving the way for a more affect-driven model of narrative activism (de Moor et al., 2021; Bergman, 2021). This form of narrative-driven activism reveals how youth leverage emotional appeal and strategic storytelling as tools for political engagement—particularly in online spaces optimized for affective content. Unlike traditional advocacy rooted in institutional discourse or legal norms, youth-led campaigns rely on emotionally resonant storytelling tailored to platform-specific dynamics. These narratives—centered on betrayal, urgency, and moral clarity—serve as mobilizing structures that translate complex environmental issues into viral, affective content (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2014; Cammaerts 2015). In #StopWillow, young activists employed frames such as "climate betrayal," "intergenerational theft," and "eco-anxiety" to construct a sense of moral crisis. Through emotionally charged videos, voiceovers,

and visual metaphors, influencers like Haraus and Teran amplified youth-centered grievances in ways calibrated for TikTok's algorithmic logic (Cernison 2019; George and Leidner 2019). These narrative forms were not incidental—they were strategic performances of political urgency designed for mass diffusion.

Such strategic uses of digital media suggest a reconfiguration of influence within Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs). Youth-led digital activism marks a significant evolution in the architecture of TANs, requiring a reconceptualization of how influence is exerted in the digital age. Originally theorized by Keck and Sikkink (1998), TANs emphasize four mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—that explain how non-state actors pressure global institutions. However, these mechanisms, once reliant on NGOs, international forums, and formal media, are now reshaped by platform logics that allow youth activists to bypass institutions and directly engage publics. Within the #StopWillow campaign, youth influencers deployed platform-specific tactics that reflect a digitally-mediated revival of the boomerang pattern (Hadden and Jasny 2019). Their activism retools traditional TAN strategies using algorithmic visibility, emotional resonance, and viral engagement as political tools.

Anchoring itself in this theoretical transition, the present study seeks to fill a critical gap in both empirical and conceptual scholarship. This study situates itself within this theoretical shift and addresses a crucial empirical and conceptual gap: how are youth activists operationalizing strategic narratives across digital platforms to influence transnational environmental discourse? Specifically, it asks: (1) How do youth influencers construct platform-calibrated narratives that mobilize climate publics? (2) In what ways do these narratives enact the four TAN mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—within TikTok and Twitter? (3) What forms of legitimacy and pressure are generated through these digital performances, and how do they challenge traditional advocacy hierarchies? By answering these questions, the study introduces the concept of "platform-afforded transnational advocacy" to capture how youth actors blend storytelling, visibility, and emotional urgency to reconfigure global environmental campaigning.

Although previous studies have examined digital activism and TAN theory in isolation, few have integrated the two within the context of youth-led environmental campaigns. While existing literature has explored the mechanics of digital activism (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Cammaerts 2015) and the evolution of TANs (Margaret and Kathryn 1998; Hadden and Jasny 2019), few studies have critically interrogated how youth actors operationalize these dynamics through platform-mediated strategic narratives. This gap is especially evident in the context of environmental campaigns, where youth increasingly function as both communicators and agenda-setters. Using the #StopWillow campaign as a case study, this research analyzes the narrative strategies, platform-specific tactics, and political framings employed by six prominent youth influencers across TikTok and Twitter. Drawing on thematic discourse analysis and guided by frameworks from TAN theory and strategic narrative theory, it demonstrates how legitimacy and pressure are now enacted through algorithmic engagement rather than institutional diplomacy (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2014; Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley 2023).

In a global context where climate diplomacy often falters under institutional inertia, the urgency of this research lies in its attempt to understand how youth—excluded from traditional corridors of power—are nonetheless reshaping the terms of environmental engagement. The #StopWillow campaign is not just a media phenomenon; it is a political intervention that signals a broader shift in how legitimacy, influence, and resistance are performed in the digital age. As ecological tipping points approach and the credibility of formal negotiations wanes, youth-led digital mobilizations may offer a critical counterweight to elite-dominated climate politics. Yet, scholarly inquiry has not kept pace with this transformation. Existing frameworks such as Transnational Advocacy Network theory and strategic narrative theory provide useful entry points but require conceptual updates to capture platform-specific dynamics and influencer-driven activism. It is within this theoretical imperative—and the empirical urgency of youth exclusion and digital innovation—that this study intervenes. The following literature review traces these intellectual foundations while identifying key gaps that this research aims to address.

1.2. Research Question

How are youth activists operationalizing strategic narratives across digital platforms to influence transnational environmental discourse?

1.3. Purpose and objective

a) To examine how youth climate activists strategically use digital platforms to influence transnational environmental discourse.
b) To analyze how influencer-driven narratives mobilize publics and exert pressure in the absence of formal institutional access.
c) To explore the transformation of advocacy logics (information, symbolic, leverage, accountability politics) under conditions shaped by platform affordances.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Transnational Advocacy Networks & Strategic Narratives

Transnational environmental campaigns driven by youth increasingly operate within a hybrid space shaped by digital affordances and affective storytelling. To understand this shift, it is crucial to revisit two complementary frameworks: the Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) theory and strategic narrative theory, both of which offer insights into the mechanisms of legitimacy, influence, and norm diffusion beyond traditional state-centric diplomacy.

TAN theory, originally conceptualized by Keck and Sikkink (1998), emphasized four core mechanisms of influence—information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics—through which non-state actors bypass domestic constraints by forming international alliances. These mechanisms have been validated in domains such as human rights and environmental justice. Yet, since 2019, scholars have pushed for an update to TAN's conceptual architecture to incorporate platform-based political action. Hadden and Jasny (2019) argue that digital networks not only accelerate norm

diffusion but also decentralize the sources of authority, making individuals—particularly youth influencers—key agents in transnational mobilization. Digital affordances, such as virality and algorithmic amplification, reconfigure how each TAN mechanism is enacted in real-time online.

Simultaneously, strategic narrative theory provides a lens for understanding how political actors construct legitimacy and mobilize publics through shared stories, particularly in international affairs. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2014) first introduced this concept to explain how global actors build coherent storylines to shape perceptions of international order and identity. Recent work by Roselle et al. (2014) extends this logic to climate politics, where actors engage in narrative competition—framing ecological crisis as either systemic failure or opportunity for transformation. In digital spaces, these narratives gain traction not through formal speeches but through emotionally resonant and platform-specific storytelling.

Within youth-led climate advocacy, these two theories converge. Greta Thunberg's reframing of climate change as an act of intergenerational betrayal, and Alex Haraus' use of emotional TikTok videos to expose the Willow Project, exemplify how TAN mechanisms and strategic narrative combine. Thunberg invokes accountability politics by referencing broken climate pledges, while Haraus uses symbolic politics via animal imagery and personal outrage. Both narratives rely not on formal institutional channels, but on aesthetic performance calibrated for digital platforms—a logic that recent scholarship identifies as central to contemporary environmental movements (Bergman 2021; Cronin, Mao, and Menchen-Trevino 2022).

Moreover, this integration reflects the rise of what van Dijck et al. (2023) call "platformized activism," where social media architectures shape the flow of narratives, gatekeep visibility, and modulate legitimacy. Influencers adapt narrative strategies based on algorithmic incentives: brevity, emotional polarity, and visual storytelling dominate. Here, strategic narrative is no longer just about content—it's about *performing legitimacy* in algorithmically governed spaces, a shift that reshapes how TANs operate in the digital age.

While the convergence of Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) theory and strategic narrative theory offers a robust analytical lens to interpret youth-led climate activism, their integration remains underexplored in empirical scholarship. Most studies tend to examine either the communicative dynamics of digital activism or the structural mechanisms of advocacy networks in isolation, rarely synthesizing the two. This fragmentation is particularly problematic given that youth climate mobilizations operate at the intersection of storytelling, platform logics, and transnational pressure. In these contexts, digital narratives are not merely vehicles of expression—they function as political instruments capable of challenging institutional hierarchies. To critically assess how youth influencers assert discursive power and construct legitimacy in global environmental campaigns, it is essential to map the conceptual blind spots in the current literature. The following section identifies these gaps and articulates this study's contribution to reimagining advocacy and influence in the age of platformized mobilization.

2.2. Literature Gaps and Contribution: Rethinking Advocacy Power in the Platform Age

While the convergence of Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) theory and strategic narrative theory offers a robust analytical lens to interpret youth-led climate activism, their integration remains underexplored in empirical scholarship. Most studies tend to examine either the communicative dynamics of digital activism or the structural mechanisms of advocacy networks in isolation, rarely synthesizing the two. This fragmentation is particularly problematic given that youth climate mobilizations operate at the intersection of storytelling, platform logics, and transnational pressure. In these contexts, digital narratives are not merely vehicles of expression—they function as political instruments capable of challenging institutional hierarchies. To critically assess how youth influencers assert discursive power and construct legitimacy in global environmental campaigns, it is essential to map the conceptual blind spots in the current literature. The following section identifies these gaps and articulates this study's contribution to reimagining advocacy and influence in the age of platformized mobilization.

Recent studies have acknowledged the increasing relevance of digital influencers in climate discourse. For example, Cronin et al. (2022) explore how influencer activists foster "networked care" and mobilize online empathy during environmental crises. Similarly, Greijdanus et al. (2020) demonstrate how online engagement can facilitate offline action, yet their focus remains behavioral rather than discursive. These works, while valuable, tend to treat influencers as communicative actors, not as political agents engaged in norm diffusion. In parallel, the literature on TANs has started to grapple with digital transitions (Hadden and Jasny 2019), but few studies go beyond acknowledging digital tools to interrogate how platform-specific features shape the *strategic logic* of advocacy.

Meanwhile, climate communication research has taken strides in analyzing emotional narratives and social media storytelling (Bergman 2021; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2014) However, it often lacks the theoretical scaffolding to explain power relations, such as how strategic storytelling influences institutional legitimacy or policy responses. This leads to a conceptual disconnect: while strategic narratives are seen as tools of public persuasion, their function within transnational political architectures is under-theorized. Especially absent are frameworks that treat influencers as *legitimacy entrepreneurs* who challenge formal hierarchies through discursive performance.

The #StopWillow campaign underscores this gap. Influencers like Mariana Teran and Alex Haraus did more than raise awareness—they enacted all four TAN mechanisms through platform-specific techniques. Teran used symbolic metaphors of ecological grief and emotional appeals to mobilize eco-anxious audiences on TikTok, while Haraus combined leverage and accountability politics by directing followers to petitions and publicly tagging U.S. officials. Yet no existing framework fully explains how these actions

simultaneously serve to build credibility, mobilize publics, and pressure institutions outside formal diplomatic arenas. Existing studies either analyze influencers as cultural phenomena (Cernison 2019) or advocacy as a bureaucratic process. The synthesis is missing.

Moreover, there is a stark underrepresentation of youth-centered perspectives in Global IR and climate diplomacy scholarship. Youth participation is often framed as symbolic or supplementary (Scandurra et al. 2022), rather than as discursive interventions with agenda-setting power. This reproduces a legitimacy gap between formal institutions and emergent publics, a tension rarely addressed in advocacy theory. In response, this study foregrounds youth not as subjects of institutional participation, but as agents of transnational disruption, working through digital scripts and emotional resonance to restructure environmental discourse.

Building on these theoretical insights and literature gaps, this study adopts a qualitative methodological approach to empirically investigate how youth influencers operationalize transnational advocacy through platform-specific strategic narratives. Given the absence of integrated frameworks that capture both the performative and structural dimensions of digital environmental mobilization, it becomes essential to design a research strategy that foregrounds narrative content, platform affordances, and audience resonance. The #StopWillow campaign provides an ideal case for this purpose: it features a constellation of youth actors navigating transnational discourse through emotionally calibrated, algorithmically optimized storytelling. To capture these dynamics, the following methodology section outlines the case selection, data sources, and analytical procedures used to examine the interplay between digital narrative strategies and the four mechanisms of Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) theory, supplemented by insights from strategic narrative analysis.

3. Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine how youth-led digital advocacy operates within the #StopWillow campaign. The aim is to analyze how strategic narratives are constructed by youth influencers and how these narratives are received, contested, or amplified by audiences on social media platforms. This approach is particularly appropriate for unpacking the discursive and emotional dynamics of environmental activism in algorithmic spaces, focusing on meaning-making rather than variable prediction.

3.1. Data Sources and Scope

The study draws upon 11,499 public comments gathered from the TikTok and Twitter/X accounts of six youth climate influencers: Greta Thunberg, Alex Haraus, Alaina Wood, Jamie Margolin, Mariana Teran, and Vincent Sius. These influencers were purposively selected based on their direct and sustained engagement with the #StopWillow campaign during its peak digital visibility between February and April 2023. Comments were collected from public posts explicitly referencing the Willow Project.

The dataset includes multilingual comments. All non-English comments were translated manually into English by the research team to ensure comprehensive representation of transnational discourse. No private content (likes, DMs, or follower metrics) was used. The analysis is strictly limited to user-generated public comments, with full documentation and traceability maintained during data collection.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The study applies Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) theory (Keck & Sikkink, 1998) as the central analytical framework, focusing on how four core mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—are enacted within digital discourse. These mechanisms are operationalized as follows:

a. Information Politics: Comments that refer to data, scientific facts, or policy frameworks.
b. Symbolic Politics: Emotionally charged language, metaphors, or symbols (e.g., "eco-anxiety", "betrayal").
c. Leverage Politics: Calls to action such as signing petitions, tagging politicians, or coordinated pressure tactics.
d. Accountability Politics: Critiques invoking failed promises, hypocrisy, or institutional betrayal.

Each of the 11,499 comments was manually coded by the research team using axial coding procedures. Coding was performed by multiple coders, with consistency ensured through repeated calibration meetings, cross-checking, and interpretive memoing. This full-population approach ensures that the analysis captures the breadth of responses across influencers, platforms, and languages, rather than relying on sampling-based inference.

Table 1. Validation Strategies for Methodological Rigor

Validation Aspect	Strategy Implemented	Methodological Purpose
Inter-Coder Reliability	Double-blind coding for a sample of comments across two platforms	Ensure consistency of interpretation and reliability of thematic codes
Thematic Framework	Initial codebook constructed based on TAN theory and literature	Ensure traceability and reduce subjective bias in the coding process
Thematic Audit	Calibration and discussion among coders to refine coding scheme	Minimize interpretive errors and strengthen thematic validity

Data Visualization	Word frequency, tree maps, matrix queries	Examine thematic patterns and the validity of narrative structures across platforms
Media Context Analysis	Identification of political affiliations and framing patterns per platform	Map potential structural bias in narrative production and public interpretation
Triangulation of Findings	Cross-comparison of data, platforms, and narratives	Provide a critical and in-depth reading of legitimacy and narrative resistance

Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2025

3.3. Narrative Mapping and Platform Affordances

Beyond the TAN mechanisms, comments and influencer content were also analyzed using thematic discourse analysis to identify narrative typologies (e.g., climate betrayal, intergenerational grief, symbolic resistance). This layer of analysis helped map the relationship between platform affordances and narrative form. TikTok content was characterized by emotional intensity, audiovisual symbolism, and short-form storytelling, while Twitter/X content enabled more discursive framing, data sharing, and public accountability appeals.

4. Results and Discussions

This section addresses the core research question: How are youth activists operationalizing strategic narratives across digital platforms to influence transnational environmental discourse? Through an integrated analysis of discourse and sentiment across 11,499 public comments and influencer narratives, we answer three sub-questions: (1) How do youth influencers construct platform-calibrated narratives that mobilize climate publics? (2) How are the four TAN mechanisms enacted across TikTok and Twitter? (3) What forms of legitimacy and pressure emerge from these digital performances, and how do they challenge traditional advocacy hierarchies?

4.1. Constructing Platform-Calibrated Narratives to Mobilize Climate Publics

Building on the analytical framework, the findings reveal that youth activists do not merely express opinions online—they strategically curate emotionally resonant narratives to fit the affordances of TikTok and Twitter. These narratives serve as tools of digital advocacy, capable of converting affect into algorithmic traction, and visibility into transnational pressure. This supports Miskimmon et al.'s (2014) concept of strategic narratives as instruments of influence, where coherence, resonance, and repetition construct legitimacy within contested discursive fields.

Youth influencers employed four distinct narrative typologies, each meticulously tailored to the affordances and logics of the platforms they utilized:

1. **Betrayal and Intergenerational Accountability**: Greta Thunberg and Jamie Margolin framed the Willow Project not as a mere policy misstep, but as a profound moral transgression against future generations. Thunberg's declaration—"The Willow Project is a death sentence in disguise"—encapsulated a strategic narrative that linked institutional inaction to ethical betrayal. This narrative effectively recontextualized a technocratic energy decision into a symbolic rupture of the intergenerational social contract. The moral framing galvanized a wide range of publics, especially youth, by transforming abstract climate policy into a visceral ethical crisis. In line with strategic narrative theory, this narrative structure consolidates a clear antagonist (state actors), a victim (youth/future generations), and a moral imperative (climate justice), creating affective clarity that enhances narrative uptake.

2. **Eco-Anxiety and Emotional Mobilization**: Mariana Teran and Alaina Wood engaged audiences through emotionally saturated narratives. Teran's TikTok video, combining sobbing visuals with the caption "Our future is collateral damage," functioned as an affective trigger—channeling personal distress into collective urgency. Rather than merely expressing emotion, these influencers operationalized vulnerability as a form of discursive authority. By dramatizing eco-anxiety, they reframed emotional suffering as a legitimate political register, inviting solidarity rather than pity. These narratives aligned closely with platform dynamics that reward affective expressivity and visual intensity. They also reflect the logic of symbolic politics within TAN theory, wherein emotionally evocative acts and images serve as powerful catalysts for mobilization (Margaret and Kathryn 1998).

3. **Hopeful Resistance and Nonhuman Solidarity**: Alex Haraus articulated ecological grief through interspecies empathy, drawing symbolic parallels between human precarity and animal displacement. His narratives—featuring polar bears, melting ice, and displaced communities—juxtaposed personal storytelling with visual metaphors, fostering identification across species boundaries. By linking emotional resonance with calls to action (e.g., petitions, political tagging), Haraus demonstrated how symbolic storytelling can both mobilize publics and exert strategic pressure. His use of aesthetic performance as political instrument reflects what Bergmann (2021) calls the "performative force of eco-affect." This dual function—symbolic resonance and strategic activation—maps directly onto TAN's symbolic and leverage politics, illustrating how influencers embody networked advocacy roles traditionally held by NGOs.

4. **Informational Neutrality and Platform Constraints**: In contrast, Vincent Sius adopted a data-centered strategy, disseminating IPCC findings, emission statistics, and policy timelines. While methodologically rigorous, this approach garnered significantly lower

engagement. The empirical gap underscores a key platform reality: content that aligns with scientific rationality often lacks viral traction in emotionally saturated digital environments. This suggests that while informational narratives may enhance epistemic legitimacy, they must be fused with emotional resonance to sustain visibility and mobilization. This finding affirms Hadden and Jasny's (Hadden and Jasny 2019) argument that algorithmic platforms recalibrate traditional forms of information politics—prioritizing emotional intelligibility over data density.

Each of these narrative typologies was not merely a communication style, but a calibrated performance of legitimacy and urgency, embedded within platform-specific affordances. TikTok's algorithmic bias toward emotional visuals, and Twitter's architecture favoring discursive compression, shaped how youth influencers adapted their messaging. Importantly, these narratives were not just expressive—they were instrumental, designed to trigger algorithmic visibility, foster collective identification, and translate sentiment into advocacy. They illustrate how contemporary TAN actors deploy "boomerang" tactics not via institutional intermediaries, but through platform architectures that rewire advocacy flows (Margaret and Kathryn 1998; Hadden and Jasny 2019) While highly effective in mobilizing publics, such narratives also risk oversimplifying complex policy dynamics and polarizing discourse—a limitation that warrants critical reflection in future work.

4.2. Enacting TAN Mechanisms through Digital Performance

In translating Keck and Sikkink's (1998) Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) mechanisms into the language of digital platforms, youth influencers do not merely adapt existing tools—they reconfigure the infrastructure of advocacy itself. Through algorithmic storytelling and affective participation, these actors mobilize publics not by appealing to institutional allies, but by performing legitimacy and urgency in real time. Their digital performances reconstitute the four core TAN mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—into practices that are distinctly shaped by platform affordances, user interactions, and emotional velocity.

Information politics manifests not just through the dissemination of facts, but through the curation of scientific authority as a strategic signal of credibility. Greta Thunberg and Alaina Wood frequently referenced IPCC reports and invoked treaty commitments like the Paris Agreement to ground their appeals in global legitimacy. However, their empirically rigorous content consistently underperformed in comparison to emotionally saturated narratives. This platform asymmetry supports Hadden and Jasny's (2019) contention that informational density is often penalized in algorithmic systems geared toward emotional engagement. Thus, while data remains vital, it must be embedded within affective framing to sustain visibility—a hybrid form of what might be termed "emotional empiricism."

Symbolic politics finds its strongest articulation in emotionally charged performances that dramatize ecological grief and moral injury. Mariana Teran's viral TikTok—featuring sobbing visuals and the phrase "Our future is collateral damage"—is emblematic of this mechanism's evolution. Rather than merely express emotion, Teran strategically transforms vulnerability into authority. Her use of eco-anxiety, personalized grief, and nonverbal distress constructs a symbolic lexicon that compels affective identification. This aligns with Keck and Sikkink's framework while extending it into the realm of performance theory, where affect becomes not a symptom but a strategy. In platformized spaces, symbols are no longer static images; they are embodied, iterated, and algorithmically amplified scripts of resistance.

Leverage politics is enacted through coordinated digital mobilizations that convert audience attention into pressure campaigns. Alex Haraus, for instance, repeatedly instructed followers to sign petitions, tag U.S. officials, and share specific hashtags—thereby mobilizing visibility loops that function as proxy sanctions. These tactics parallel the "boomerang pattern" described in classic TAN theory, but with a crucial twist: they no longer depend on institutional mediators. Instead, Haraus leverages the reputational economy of social media to generate cost for political inaction. The performative circulation of hashtags becomes a form of soft coercion, where moral pressure is exerted not through diplomatic channels, but through public shame and digital virality.

Accountability politics was most prominently enacted by Jamie Margolin and Greta Thunberg, who consistently juxtaposed past climate promises with present betrayals. Margolin's posts often featured side-by-side visuals of government statements and policy outcomes, creating a semiotic structure of institutional hypocrisy. Twitter/X enabled this mode of engagement through its threading function, allowing influencers to construct timelines of failure and build cumulative critiques. This mode of digital accountability reframes advocacy as a participatory audit process, where publics become witnesses and judges of institutional conduct. It also shifts the arena of legitimacy from the negotiation table to the comment section, where performative scrutiny functions as democratic oversight.

These dynamics can be further clarified by mapping the relationship between each TAN mechanism and the specific digital tactics employed by youth influencers. The table below operationalizes how each mechanism— originally theorized for institutional advocacy—has been recalibrated for digital environments. By aligning influencers' performative choices with TAN's four mechanisms, we demonstrate how strategic narratives are enacted not abstractly, but through concrete, platform-mediated actions.

Table 2. Digital Rearticulation of TAN Mechanism: Operationalization and Influencer Examples in The #StopWillow Campaign

TAN Mechanism	Operationalization	Influencer Example

Information Politics	Sharing scientific data, IPCC references	Thunberg, Wood
Symbolic Politics	Emotional visuals, metaphors, affective scripts	Teran, Haraus
Leverage Politics	Call-to-actions, petitions, political tagging	Haraus, Margolin
Accountability Politics	Naming institutions, exposing policy failures	Thunberg, Margolin

Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2025

Collectively, these digitally mediated mechanisms constitute a rearticulation of transnational advocacy—one where power is no longer concentrated in NGOs or international forums, but distributed across networks of visibility, emotional intensity, and algorithmic design. Youth influencers do not merely channel preexisting TAN strategies; they reinvent them by embedding each mechanism within platform-specific forms of participation. The result is a new advocacy grammar that combines strategic narrative with digital performance, enabling youth actors to contest environmental injustices from the margins of institutional power.

This recalibration reveals both the potential and the limits of digital activism. While these performances enhance reach, they also risk simplification and emotional fatigue. Yet, they remain crucial interventions in an era where formal diplomacy often lags behind ecological urgency. As such, understanding how youth activists enact TAN mechanisms through digital performance is not merely an analytical exercise—it is a necessary step in reimagining global environmental governance from the ground up.

Yet while these platformized performances of advocacy have undeniably expanded the reach and immediacy of transnational mobilization, they also raise important ethical considerations. The emotional intensity that fuels symbolic and leverage politics in digital environments may simultaneously produce unintended consequences for both audiences and movements.

While affective saturation has proven to be a powerful tool for mobilizing attention and visibility within digital activism, it also raises significant ethical concerns that remain underexplored in the current literature. The continuous reliance on emotionally intense content risks generating emotional fatigue among audiences, especially youth who are both primary actors and targets of these campaigns. Moreover, the imperative to optimize content for virality on platforms like TikTok and Twitter often leads to oversimplified narratives that obscure policy complexity and open pathways for misinformation or emotional manipulation. Bergman (2021) cautions that excessive exposure to emotionally saturated crisis narratives may result in desensitization, dulling public empathy and undermining long-term mobilization. In the case of #StopWillow, the

prevalence of despair-laden comments such as "this is so sad, how did we let the world go this bad" illustrates how affective overdrive can elicit paralysis rather than political engagement. These risks suggest the need for a more ethically calibrated narrative strategy—one that balances emotional urgency with epistemic responsibility. As youth activists reconfigure transnational advocacy through digital performance, safeguarding the emotional sustainability of publics becomes a vital consideration for long-term movement resilience and credibility.

4.3. Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy (PATA): Theoretical Synthesis

The operationalization of Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) mechanisms in the #StopWillow campaign requires a conceptual update to account for their reconfiguration within digital platforms. The proposed framework, Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy (PATA), retains TAN's core mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—but reinterprets them in the context of algorithmic visibility, emotional resonance, and performative legitimacy. Rather than operating through formal institutional access or NGO alliances, youth activists engage in advocacy through curated digital performances calibrated for audience engagement. Their legitimacy derives from symbolic capital, narrative coherence, and platform traction; their advocacy medium is emotional and visual rather than textual and bureaucratic; and their pressure mechanisms function through reputational loops and algorithmic amplification. Each influencer examined in this study enacts these dynamics in distinct yet structurally consistent ways.

Greta Thunberg exemplifies the transformation of legitimacy in digital advocacy. Her authority is not rooted in institutional credentials or formal climate negotiation roles but in her symbolic clarity and perceived authenticity. Thunberg's consistency in framing climate action as an intergenerational moral imperative, combined with her refusal to conform to diplomatic niceties, positions her as a figure of moral urgency. Her legitimacy is further reinforced by transnational recognition and widespread media coverage, but these are secondary to the narrative coherence she projects through repeated use of stark ethical dichotomies—such as justice versus betrayal, action versus hypocrisy. Thunberg embodies the PATA principle of performed legitimacy, where trust is not institutionally granted but discursively constructed and sustained through continuous moral framing.

Her advocacy medium is tightly aligned with the affordances of Twitter/X, where short-form, emotionally charged statements serve as potent narrative vehicles. Thunberg frequently integrates data from scientific authorities, particularly IPCC reports, into concise statements that resonate with the public. For example, framing the Willow Project as a "death sentence in disguise" fuses empirical reference with rhetorical alarm. These expressions are not casual provocations; they are strategic constructions aimed at generating emotional and cognitive dissonance in the audience. Thunberg's use of platform

architecture—threaded posts, retweets of activist content, and visual juxtapositions—amplifies her messaging and allows for multi-layered discourse. The integration of technical credibility into affective messaging exemplifies what this study terms emotional empiricism, a hybrid form of content that balances epistemic authority with moral appeal.

The pressure mechanism Thunberg employs aligns most closely with accountability politics, as theorized by Keck and Sikkink. However, unlike the classical model that relies on NGO reports or legal documentation, Thunberg's accountability tactics are embedded in public timelines. By juxtaposing government pledges with their subsequent actions—such as approving new fossil fuel projects—she constructs visible contradictions that function as digital archives of betrayal. These performative timelines do not merely inform; they invite public judgment, enabling collective evaluation of institutional credibility. The logic here is not procedural but symbolic: the comment section and quote tweet become spaces of discursive audit, where publics are mobilized not just as observers but as moral arbiters. In Thunberg's case, pressure is not institutional but reputational, leveraging the symbolic capital of her following to enforce normative compliance through visibility.

Comments: You're a great religious leader!", "That'll show the climate who's boss!", "Thank you Greta and FFF, Always fighting with you"

Alex Haraus represents a distinct model of legitimacy grounded in horizontal identification and digital proximity rather than elite recognition or institutional affiliation. His authority is not derived from prior activist credentials or formal climate negotiation roles but from his consistent presence as a relatable peer communicator within the climate advocacy ecosystem. Haraus' performative persona—calm, direct, and emotionally engaged— allows him to inhabit a discursive space between activist and educator. Unlike Greta Thunberg, whose legitimacy stems from symbolic universality and moral starkness, Haraus' legitimacy is more contextual and audience-specific. He is effective not because he projects universal values, but because he bridges the abstractness of environmental crisis with the concreteness of individual moral response. His videos often begin in informal tones, positioning him as an ordinary young person confronting extraordinary environmental betrayal, which enhances perceived authenticity and cultivates trust.

In terms of advocacy medium, Haraus leverages TikTok's audiovisual affordances to craft highly affective, emotionally calibrated narratives. His content is visually symbolic, featuring recurring motifs such as melting glaciers, threatened species, and disrupted ecosystems. These are not generic illustrations but curated emotional triggers that link environmental degradation with personal grief and communal loss. Haraus often overlays these visuals with direct-to-camera appeals or emotionally modulated voiceovers, constructing a hybrid narrative format that combines visual symbolism with personalized narration. The narrative architecture is deliberate: he moves from visual metaphor to moral urgency and then to civic invitation, structuring each

video as a progression from emotion to engagement. His storytelling technique exemplifies symbolic politics under PATA—where narrative coherence, visual intensity, and platform-optimized pacing coalesce into affective micro-performances of resistance.

Haraus's pressure mechanism operates primarily through leverage politics, but in a platform-mediated form. He frequently issues explicit calls to action within his videos, instructing viewers to sign petitions, repost content, tag government officials, or comment en masse on official pages. These instructions are not merely rhetorical; they are performative scripts designed to activate the audience's algorithmic agency. By framing these actions as urgent and morally necessary, Haraus transforms passive viewership into participatory pressure. His use of hashtags and action links creates digital feedback loops that amplify visibility while generating reputational cost for inaction. Unlike classical leverage politics, which depends on intergovernmental lobbying or NGO coordination, Haraus employs reputational leverage: he mobilizes the collective visibility of his follower base to compel responses from decision-makers. In doing so, he operationalizes a new mode of digital soft coercion, where algorithmic attention is converted into political salience.

Comments: "My heart aches today. How can they just destroy everything? I'm so sad. I wish we didn't have to fight so hard to protect them." , "this is so sad, how did we let the world go this bad." , "greed, money, power. Everything is ruined bc a select few want bigger, better and richer. It's heartbreaking and disgusting."

Mariana Teran embodies a model of digital advocacy in which legitimacy is established not through prior activist credentials or scientific authority, but through the strategic performance of emotional vulnerability. Her TikTok presence is marked by high-intensity affective displays, particularly those foregrounding ecological grief and existential despair. Teran does not claim legitimacy through expertise or political positioning; instead, she builds moral authority by dramatizing the psychic toll of climate inaction on youth. This performative vulnerability functions as a source of political authenticity within the digital ecosystem. By positioning herself as emotionally exposed and personally impacted, Teran invites identification from viewers who recognize in her distress their own suppressed anxieties. Her influence thus derives from a form of affective mirroring, where legitimacy emerges through shared emotional experience rather than propositional content.

The advocacy medium employed by Teran is tightly calibrated to the visual and affective logics of TikTok. Her most widely circulated videos center on minimalistic but powerful visual storytelling: a tearful face, a darkened background, textual overlays with statements such as "Our future is collateral damage," and mournful audio cues. These aesthetic choices are not incidental—they are crafted to amplify symbolic resonance. Teran's videos rarely include data, citations, or institutional references; instead, they serve as emotive capsules that condense complex environmental injustice into visceral

expression. Her deployment of symbolic metaphors, such as childhood being stolen or futures being erased, aligns with the symbolic politics dimension of TAN theory, but in an updated, digitally performative format. In PATA terms, Teran's content exemplifies symbolic compression: the distillation of broad structural critiques into emotionally legible, short-form visual content optimized for viral engagement.

Teran's approach to pressure does not follow the classical logic of leverage politics, where audiences are mobilized toward specific institutional demands. Instead, her pressure mechanism operates through symbolic saturation. The aim is not to direct audiences to policy instruments, but to generate a moral atmosphere dense with emotional urgency. Her repeated performance of grief becomes a communicative strategy in itself—normalizing eco-anxiety and foregrounding emotional suffering as politically legitimate discourse. This form of symbolic pressure contributes to shifting the emotional terrain of climate debate, creating what can be termed ambient pressure: an affective environment in which the cost of inaction is not measured in sanctions or formal consequences, but in accumulating public unease and reputational discomfort. Teran's mode of engagement demonstrates how symbolic politics can be intensified through performative repetition, achieving affective impact without relying on institutional intermediaries or formal mobilization structures.

Comments: "thank you for spreading awareness!" , "Yes! Glad to see more content on this" , "good just did:) i wish your state luck"

Jamie Margolin represents a hybrid form of activist legitimacy that blends conventional movement-based authority with digitally cultivated discursive presence. Unlike Greta Thunberg or Mariana Teran, whose legitimacy is respectively grounded in moral symbolism or affective vulnerability, Margolin draws upon her institutional history as co-founder of Zero Hour while simultaneously engaging digital publics through platform-native discourse. This dual positioning grants her a unique form of legitimacy—partially derived from her organizational credibility, and partially constructed through her continued, active visibility in climate justice dialogues online. However, rather than emphasizing hierarchical credentials, she asserts her legitimacy through consistency in holding institutions accountable and framing climate politics as a space of intergenerational betrayal. Her authority stems from narrative continuity and political clarity, not technocratic expertise.

Margolin's advocacy medium is primarily based on visual critique and strategic juxtaposition. On Twitter/X, she frequently posts comparative visuals—such as government statements pledging climate action placed alongside policy decisions that directly contradict those pledges. These visual constructions function as semiotic interventions: they render abstract contradictions concrete and publicly legible. Her stylistic approach reflects a tactical use of the platform's affordances, particularly its threading and quote-tweet functionalities, to build layered critiques. Unlike influencers who rely on

emotional display, Margolin's aesthetic is one of assertive textuality—deploying concise moral statements, screenshot evidence, and visual timelines to narrate institutional hypocrisy. Her advocacy medium illustrates how symbolic politics can be executed not through metaphorical imagery but through evidentiary montage, a form of visual discourse that compresses political memory into digestible digital form.

The pressure mechanism Margolin enacts is a clear extension of accountability politics, but updated for the logics of algorithmic circulation. She does not simply point out failures; she constructs public-facing narratives that invite collective judgment and discourse-based sanctioning. Her posts often tag institutions or public officials directly, not as appeals but as exposures—forcing them into the public arena of digital deliberation. The repetition of broken promises across posts constructs a cumulative narrative of betrayal, where audiences are not passive recipients but participants in ongoing evaluative processes. This participatory audit framework situates pressure not in the realm of state linkage, as in classical TAN, but in digital public witnessing. Margolin's content transforms platforms like Twitter into quasi-accountability chambers, where visibility, coherence, and repetition function as levers of normative enforcement.

Comments: "Everyone knows he is a habitual liar. Did you think you were special, and exempt from those lies?", "I wonder how many millions of dollars K St. threw at senators and congressmen for their reelection to get this approved", "This is going to have a negative impact on the bottom line of every climate change husker on the planet!"

Alaina Wood represents a model of legitimacy grounded in epistemic accessibility and affective reliability. Unlike figures such as Greta Thunberg, who assert authority through moral confrontation, or Jamie Margolin, who leverages institutional credibility, Wood derives legitimacy from her ability to translate complex climate knowledge into emotionally resonant, easily understandable forms. Her background in environmental science and science communication contributes to her perceived credibility, but what distinguishes her is not expertise alone—it is the tone and format of her communication. She deliberately avoids alarmist language while still conveying urgency, positioning herself as a trustworthy intermediary between technical knowledge and public concern. This performative balance—between authority and relatability—is central to her digital legitimacy and exemplifies the PATA principle that credibility must be both affectively and cognitively sustainable in platform-mediated contexts.

Wood's advocacy medium primarily consists of short-form explanatory videos on TikTok, structured to fit the platform's temporal and visual constraints while retaining substantive content. She uses clear speech, minimalist visuals, and structured narration to guide viewers through topics such as the Paris Agreement, the IPCC reports, or carbon budgeting. However, these are not dry recitations of facts; they are infused with tonal warmth and

subtle emotional cues. Her choice of language is inclusive and emotionally supportive, often acknowledging climate anxiety and validating concern while proposing constructive engagement. This combination of narrative structure and emotional accessibility exemplifies what this study identifies as affective empiricism—the capacity to render knowledge not just legible but livable. Her medium sits at the intersection of information politics and symbolic politics, blending credibility and care to foster informed identification.

In terms of pressure mechanism, Wood's approach is more diffuse than direct. She rarely calls for petitions, tagging, or protest but instead contributes to a discursive environment in which public understanding becomes the substrate for collective expectation. Her pressure is embedded in narrative normalization: by repeatedly framing climate action as necessary, reasonable, and scientifically grounded, she reinforces the legitimacy of pro-climate positions and delegitimizes inaction as irresponsible or irrational. While she does not engage in confrontational tactics, her content contributes to the construction of a narrative commons—one that subtly reorients audience expectations around policy, corporate behavior, and institutional accountability. In PATA terms, she exemplifies legitimacy diffusion rather than confrontation, enabling pressure through sustained discursive presence and the normalization of informed concern. Her contribution to the campaign lies in making the movement intellectually coherent and emotionally sustainable, thereby strengthening the broader scaffolding of digital environmental advocacy.

Comments: "gracias por explicar, informar y mantener la fe." , "amo tus videos con el corazón, es gratificante escuchar algo claro y honesto." , "gracias por tu información"

Vincent Sius exemplifies a distinctive form of informational legitimacy within platform-native activism, using Instagram and TikTok to disseminate empirically grounded content in ways that maintain credibility while adapting to the aesthetics of social media. Unlike Greta Thunberg or Mariana Teran, who draw legitimacy from symbolic intensity or emotional vulnerability, Sius builds authority through his sustained commitment to factual accuracy, policy literacy, and environmental consistency. His legitimacy stems from his dual identity as a climate communicator and a data-savvy youth actor who visually interprets climate policies and national carbon trajectories for general audiences. Rather than perform emotional extremity, he curates a persona of rational urgency: informed, composed, and pedagogically oriented. This grants him a specialized place in the influencer ecosystem, appealing to audiences seeking clarity and orientation in a saturated digital climate discourse.

His advocacy medium adapts classical information politics into platform-calibrated formats, particularly through Instagram carousels and short-form TikTok explainers. He regularly produces visually minimalistic, fact-heavy slides that break down topics like climate financing gaps, carbon budgets, or fossil fuel subsidies in Southeast Asia. On TikTok, he sometimes uses

voiceovers or text-over-video formats to explain policy developments with a steady narrative pace, avoiding dramatic visual effects or emotionally charged music. These are not attempts to go viral through spectacle, but rather deliberate efforts to preserve the integrity of information within digestible, algorithm-friendly formats. He departs from the dominant symbolic or emotive register of environmental TikTok by inserting cognitive friction—offering viewers an opportunity to pause, think, and reflect. His style demonstrates an attempt to adapt informational legitimacy to digital attention economies without abandoning epistemic rigor.

In terms of pressure mechanisms, Sius enacts a limited but stabilizing form of discursive reinforcement. He does not call his audience to tag officials or engage in visible reputational campaigns. Instead, his pressure operates by fortifying the evidentiary base of the campaign—arming viewers with knowledge that can support more emotive or mobilizational narratives advanced by others in the influencer network. His mode of advocacy can be understood as a form of backend legitimacy: though not confrontational or performatively urgent, his presence contributes to the normative coherence of the movement. However, this strategy has trade-offs. Without affective expressivity or direct mobilization cues, his content underperforms in terms of algorithmic virality. Within the PATA framework, Sius illustrates a hybrid approach to informational politics—updated in format but constrained in relational activation. His role underscores that effective climate communication on platforms today must not only inform but also emotionally orient and invite publics into discursive participation.

Comments: "infoo link petisinya" , "cara menandatangani petisinya gmn caranya? kalopun udh ditandatangani memenuhi target apa bisa berhenti the willow project itu??" , "menurutku sih bukan hal positif kalo cuma lapangan kerja jangka panjangnya kek gitu kluar uang banyak juga resiko, kan mending buat proyek lain wkwk" , "menurut ku kayak 17M dollar kan cuma buat us "doang" dan itu gaakan bisa ngerubah iklim global, kalau willow project dilanjutkan dunia gaakan bener si"

Table 3. Comparative Table: Operationalizing PATA Dimensions by Influencer

| Influencer	Legitimacy Source	Advocacy Medium	Pressure Mechanism
Thunberg	Moral authority + epistemic legitimacy	Short-form moral frames + policy citations (Twitter)	Accountability via timeline critique
Haraus	Peer resonance + visual coherence	Symbolic TikTok narratives with strong affective cues	Petition links + coordinated tagging

Teran	Emotional vulnerability as authenticity	Crying videos + grief-centered TikTok content	Symbolic activation (no direct calls to action)
Margolin	Institutional activist credibility	Visual evidence of betrayal (e.g., screenshots)	Timeline-based accountability
Wood	Knowledge communicator + emotional nuance	Bite-sized policy explanations with emotional overlay	Reinforcement of discursive legitimacy
Sius	Data-centered expertise	Policy charts and statistics (Twitter text)	Minimal traction; ineffective informational pressure

Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2025

Taken together, the cases of Thunberg, Haraus, Teran, Margolin, Wood, and Sius reveal the operational contours of Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy as an emergent logic of influence in transnational environmental discourse. Each influencer reconfigures the core TAN mechanisms—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—through distinct combinations of legitimacy performance, narrative medium, and digital pressure. Thunberg and Margolin exemplify accountability logics through public archival critique; Haraus and Teran rearticulate symbolic and leverage politics through emotional saturation and mobilization scripts; Wood and Sius pursue informational legitimacy adapted to the constraints and expectations of visual-digital culture. Across these variations, advocacy is no longer mediated by institutional proximity or procedural access but enacted through algorithmically conditioned visibility, affective clarity, and narrative repetition. PATA thus offers a refined conceptual framework that captures how youth actors, excluded from formal climate governance, nonetheless shape the moral and discursive terrain of environmental politics. It repositions them not as peripheral communicators, but as central agents of transnational pressure operating through platform-calibrated repertoires of legitimacy and resistance.

Figure 1. Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy (PATA)
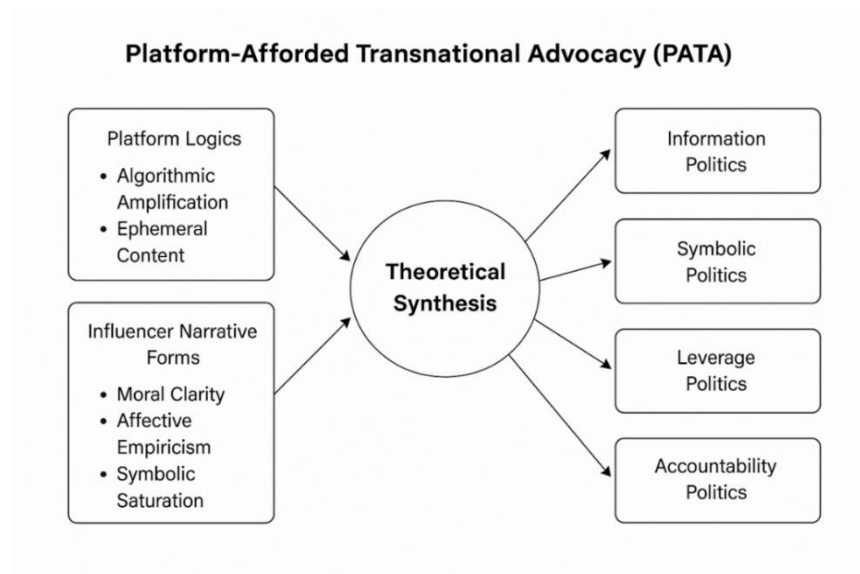
Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2025

The analytical utility of the Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy (PATA) framework extends beyond the realm of climate digital activism and holds broader relevance for understanding various transnational social movements operating in today's platform-mediated environment. This is because the narrative configurations enabled by platform affordances, specifically, the entanglement of algorithmic logic, emotional resonance, and symbolic performance, are not unique to climate-related campaigns. Rather, they increasingly define the communicative architecture of contemporary advocacy movements across sectors (Tufekci, 2017). Strategies of emotional storytelling and viral mobilization have become central to building loose-knit, decentralized communities of engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Platforms like TikTok and Twitter do not merely enhance the visibility of activist messages; they also enable participatory micro-actions such as reposting, stitching, and emotionally-charged call-outs, all of which serve as mechanisms for collectively generating reputational pressure and signaling political urgency.

This dynamic is evident in campaigns such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. In the case of #MeToo, survivors of gender-based violence utilized testimonial-driven storytelling in short, emotionally intense formats to challenge institutionalized power structures and catalyze transnational solidarity (Gill, 2016). Similarly, #BlackLivesMatter deployed visual content, especially graphic video footage of racialized state violence, to construct moral clarity and mobilize global audiences across geographic and cultural boundaries (Freelon et al., 2016). In both movements, the interplay between platform affordances, public emotion, and narrative agency reflects the same strategic logic embedded in the PATA framework.

Thus, PATA can be seen not merely as a model tailored to environmental discourse, but as a cross-cutting analytical tool for examining how platform affordances recalibrate the structure, strategy, and impact of transnational advocacy. Recognizing this broader applicability contributes to the refinement of digital activism theory within international relations and enhances our understanding of advocacy logics in a media ecosystem increasingly driven by affective saturation and symbolic visibility.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations
5.1. Conclusions

This study examined how youth-led digital influencers operationalized transnational advocacy in the #StopWillow campaign by weaving strategic narratives across TikTok and Twitter. Drawing on the framework of Transnational Advocacy Networks (Margaret and Kathryn 1998) and strategic narrative theory (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2014), we found that digital activism is no longer peripheral to global climate politics—it is constitutive of how legitimacy, urgency, and resistance are constructed in real time.

The findings demonstrate that influencer-activists enact all four TAN logics—information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics—yet do so within the constraints and affordances of algorithmic platforms. The narratives of betrayal, eco-anxiety, and intergenerational urgency mobilized mass sentiment and global visibility. However, emotionally intense storytelling proved far more effective in generating audience engagement than balanced or purely informational content. This suggests that legitimacy in the digital age is not derived solely from epistemic authority or legal norms, but from the ability to perform moral clarity and emotional resonance under platform conditions.

Moreover, the study introduced the concept of **Platform-Afforded Transnational Advocacy (PATA)** as an analytical bridge between traditional advocacy theory and contemporary digital mobilization. PATA highlights how the strategic use of platform affordances enables youth actors to create transnational pressure loops without relying on formal institutional structures. It also surfaces the risks of visibility-based politics: oversimplification, polarization, and performativity.

5.2. Recommendations
1. **For Environmental Advocates and Civil Society**
   a) Invest in narrative design training for youth activists to better balance emotional appeal with factual integrity. Emotional storytelling mobilizes, but evidence sustains credibility.
   b) Form cross-platform coalitions that strategically diversify content across media ecosystems—using TikTok for emotional engagement and Twitter for policy-oriented discourse.

2. **For Policy Makers and International Institutions**

    a) Recognize digital influencers as de facto diplomatic actors in environmental governance. Their narrative reach often surpasses traditional NGOs or state messaging in public legitimacy.

    b) Integrate youth digital voices into formal policy consultations (e.g., UNFCCC COPs), especially when legitimacy crises arise around extractive or carbon-intensive projects.

3. For Scholars and Theorists

    a) Extend TAN and social movement theory to incorporate platform algorithms, virality dynamics, and influencer culture as new variables in norm diffusion and policy pressure.

    b) Encourage comparative research on regional digital advocacy ecologies, particularly across the Global South where emerging influencer-activists remain under-examined.

This study reaffirms that strategic narrative is not only a tool of statecraft, but a powerful weapon of resistance when wielded by digitally connected youth in the Anthropocene. Future climate diplomacy will increasingly be fought—not only in summits—but in comment sections, hashtags, and 60-second videos that demand justice with urgency and clarity.

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