

Navigating the Intersection of Disability Rights and Online Political Participation in Nepal



ABSTRACT

In September 2025, social media users, mostly Gen-Z, organized a protest against government corruption. This eventually brought down the then-government and led Gen-Z to choose their own interim government, with the Prime Minister elected through the app called Discord. Although it has been established as a “youth revolution” with support from media and civil society members, youth with disabilities were completely excluded. Physical modes of transportation were inaccessible and unsafe; there were no real-time warnings and assessments related to physical mobility, and so most young persons with disabilities (PWDs) were structurally locked in their homes. The digital world, on the other hand, had taller walls that kept PWDs from entering this political space. In this extremely online movement, viral videos and news lacked sign language interpreters, picture-heavy content went around, Discord was difficult to navigate, and documents circulated up until the elections of the federal parliament had inaccessible formats.

Whether the processes adopted, decisions made, and negotiations concluded in this process were truly representative of the aspirations and demands of the entire Gen-Z population is a question that perhaps no single member of this demographic can answer. Throughout this process, marginalized youth with little to no access to the internet, and persons with disabilities, were specifically excluded from this digital “revolution”.

Against this context, this research undertakes inclusion and representation as the core framework to assess the movement, from its inception to its conclusion. It assesses how PWDs perceived and navigated the technocratic Gen-Z revolution to equip us with the tools required to navigate such crises more inclusively and meaningfully in the future. Hence, this paper anchors the status of political participation in the experiences and strategies used by PWDs to navigate the September movement and its aftermath.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	4
Objectives	6
Methodology	6
Limitations	7
Lack Of Psychosocial And Neurodivergent Perspectives.....	7
Platform-Specific Limitations	7
Language Barriers.....	7
Sample Size.....	7
Literature Review	8
Disability And Platform Design	8
Relevant Policy Frameworks	9
Movement-Specific Gaps	10
Experiences Of PWDs In The Movement And Its Aftermath	11
Pre-Movement: Access To Information And Initial Reception	11
In-Movement: Participation And Ownership.....	12
Post-Movement: Voter Literacy And Electoral Processes	14
Role Of OPDs	15
Lack Of Coordinated Efforts	15
Lack Of Prioritization Of Accessible Digital Infrastructure	15
Lack Of Flexible And Adaptive Resources.....	15
Lack Of Young PWD Political Leadership Efforts	15
Conclusion	16
Recommendations	16
Recommendations For The State.....	16
Recommendations For The Election Commission	17
Recommendations For Digital Platforms And Intermediaries.....	17
Recommendations To Organizations Of Persons With Disabilities	17
References	18

BACKGROUND

For a decade, Nepal has navigated a political landscape constantly shifting paradigms due to ideological incompatibilities, short-lived and unstable coalitions, constant reshuffling of cabinets, and fragile leadership. The resulting instability made systems and institutions volatile, and incompetent to resolve issues such as corruption, unemployment, poverty, under-development, and youth migration. Therefore, trust was eroding, frustration building up, and deep dissatisfaction toward the government seeding, in the past decade.

Consequently, the youth of the nation, mostly residing in urban spaces, began projecting their grievances through mediums most familiar and accessible to them, social media. Towards the end of August 2025, people began calling out the extraordinarily lavish and corrupt lifestyles of political elites and their children through hashtags such as #NepoBaby and #NepoKids. Resentment and rage resonated with users, and this trend gained widespread popularity across social network platforms. Then, on the fourth of September, the government banned 26 major social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X, WhatsApp and YouTube, for failing to register in Nepal under the Directives for Managing the Use of Social Media 2023, halting the social media movement.

Through loose digital networks, a leaderless campaign against corruption was launched under the banner of Gen-Z. On the morning of September 8, thousands of Gen-Zs poured into the streets across the country, chanting against widespread systemic corruption, elite capture, arbitrary

censorship, and nepotism. The initially and officially peaceful protest, however, quickly turned wayward, when attempts of demonstrators to enter the federal parliament were met with deadly violence from the state. The security forces used water cannons, tear gas, rubber bullets and finally, live ammunition, killing 19 people on the very day, 75 people in ensuing weeks and injuring more than 2000. On September 9, many joined the Gen-Z in storming, burning, and looting buildings that had brought disdain in the people, that citizens believed to be most corrupt- buildings housed parts of parliament, executive, judiciary, police stations, and residence of political leaders.

The Prime Minister resigned on the second day, and the federal parliament was resolved. As a political and executive vacuum was being formed in the nation, the army took charge of initiating conversations with Gen-Z leaders and the President decided that peace and normalcy would be re-established by forming an interim government by exceeding constitutional parameters. The Gen-Zs agreed and took it upon themselves to come up with a neutral and trustworthy interim prime minister for the country, who would lead the state justly in that moment of extraordinary crisis. Over two days, and the days that followed, constant unending calls, flash-speed discussions, dialogs, and negotiations began across online platforms.

The Gen-Z organized meetings, proposed potential candidates, contacted individuals, weighed options, compared advantages, held polls and tirelessly conversed, from inside their homes using online platforms such as Discord and Meet, among others. Online groups and channels were used to discuss the fate of the constitution,

parliament and other contemporary structures in place. Walls of Facebook, Instagram and X pages were filled with reactions and opinions about what is happening and what ought to happen. Platforms were soon stormed by groups forming to draft negotiations and demands of their own to the president and the head of the army. In a matter of days, the movement went from having no leader to being laden with a multiplicity of leaders and fragmented groups with their own hastily drafted demands for the nation. Developments in these spaces were happening at an unprecedentedly rapid pace among those with the privilege of internet access, connectivity, and social/political capital. Finally, a discord poll was proposed to decide who would become the Prime Minister leading the interim government. With the discord votes of around 7600 urban youths, who do not even represent a quarter of a fraction of the young population, the former female chief justice Sushila Karki became the Prime Minister on September 12. The digitally driven youth uprising overturned the government, parliament and to some extent, constitutional legitimacy in a matter of days, all via the seemingly brilliant weaponization of social media.

The methods of the Gen-Z movement, including an unrelenting pace of conversation, heated discussions, digital activism and mobilization through posters, reels and means, internet polls, discord server-based negotiations, were virtually exclusive of any forms of accessibility needs of PWDs. None of these methods used sign language, all text/captioned posts, documentations in easy-to-read and screen-reader-friendly formats. In a context where most PWDs lack access to assistive devices (even mobile phones and

computers), during the crisis, accessibility was impossible to find, let alone participation of PWDs in these spaces.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this paper is to understand and document the perspectives and positionality of youth with disabilities within and outside of the September movement- from its beginnings to its aftermath. Limiting the temporal scope of this research from early September 2025 (beginning of Gen-Z Movement) to March 2026 (federal parliament elections), the specific objectives of this research are as follows:

To map sources and networks used by PWDs to navigate the political landscape and gauge the accessibility of those sources;

To identify if there were any barriers that youth with disabilities faced when engaging in technology-facilitated political processes;

To assess if efforts were made by political parties and the Election Commission of Nepal to increase the political participation and engagement of PWDs in the federal parliament;

To understand if OPDs undertook any efforts to facilitate understanding and participation of PWDs in political and electoral processes; and

To propose required reforms to increase access to online political participation and democratic engagement of PWDs.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and reflexive research design to explore the lived experiences and navigational tactics of Youths with Disabilities in the online political sphere from September 2025 to

March 2026 (the movement period and the aftermath). The researcher uses their experience as a person with disability (cerebral palsy and dyslexia) to formulate the research framework and anchor the piece in the lived experiences of community members.

The primary data comprises the perceptions of two key informants and one focus group regarding their online presence, their role in the September 2025 movement, the challenges to access political literature and core platforms and the way forward to making online political spaces more disability friendly. Relevant books, research papers, articles, social media pages, and online materials comprised the secondary data used to substantiate the research.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants, using seven of the ten distinct categories of disability identified under the Act Relating to The Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017) of Nepal. Individuals who were already active in online and offline political spheres were identified and invited to capture the perspectives of those directly attempting to engage with the movement. With the help of various Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), individuals with a demonstrated interest in political discourse, specifically those following the aftermath of the September 2025 movement, were contacted.

The focus group was organized with ten individuals with seven types of disabilities, and the key informant interviews were conducted with the heads of two OPDs. The final sample consisted of a broad demographic of youth, with ages ranging from 15 to 35 years. These participants represented a diverse array of professional

backgrounds, providing a comprehensive view of how the technocratic revolution impacted the socio-political inclusion of young people with disabilities across different sectors of society.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the depth of the qualitative data collected, this research has the following limitations:

Lack of Psychosocial and Neurodivergent Perspectives

The focus groups and key informant interviews conducted did not have any participants/informants with psychosocial disabilities or intellectual disabilities (other than those with Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy). As such, this research does not fully capture specific cognitive and sensory barriers, such as the psychological impact of "information overload" or the need for "Easy-to-Read" formats during the period.

Platform-Specific Limitations

Since pivotal political decisions were made on Discord, a platform that proved largely incompatible with screen readers and lacked sign language support, the research could only document the exclusion from these spaces rather than the interaction within them.

Language Barriers

The study primarily analyzed digital content in Nepali and English. It did not account for the accessibility of information in local dialects or indigenous languages, which may have further marginalized PWDs from non-Nepali-speaking backgrounds.

Sample Size

As a qualitative research, the findings are indicative of the barriers faced by the community but may not be statistically generalizable to the entire population of PWDs in Nepal (estimated at 2.2% per the 2021 census).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of digital accessibility, political mobilization, and disability rights is a critical yet under-researched domain of contemporary political sociology. To frame these interacting dynamics, existing literature has been integrated across three layers: the consideration of disability in platform design globally, existing policy frameworks for PWDs, and the specific failures of the state to comply with applicable frameworks to ensure access and political participation.

Disability and Platform Design

The social model of disability, first articulated by Oliver (1983) and built on activist work from the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation in the 1970s, understands disability as a socially imposed set of barriers instead of an individual impairment- lending the meaning that disability is a design problem. Based on Oliver's theory, Vera (2022) argues that everyday design and technology choices carry the same disabling or enabling weight online as offline choices-a missing alternative texts, unlabeled images, and inaccessible interface functions.

Platforms are often tempered by a 'standard user' bias wherein the lived experiences of persons with disabilities are often neglected in the design of digital tools. Generally, for social networks, the standard user is one with access to smartphones, full sensory perception, physical dexterity, and neurotypicality. When compounded with algorithmic biases against content that questions mainstream narratives, power, exclusion, and systemic inequalities, this

lack of accessibility by design translates into active exclusion (Centeno, 2025).

Seven recurring barriers to platform access have been identified based on a review of disability peer-support networks: stigma, inaccessible interfaces, the digital divide, biased or opaque content moderation, privacy and security concerns, assistive-technology gaps, and fragmented communities (Islam, 2026). This typology distinguishes between technical gaps (inaccessible interfaces, assistive-technology gaps) from those that are social or governance-related (stigma, moderation, fragmentation). Specific types of barriers were identified in case of cognitive and psychosocial disabilities, such as sensory overload, memory impairments, misreading of social cues, and diminished confidence to engage actively (Zhao, 2022).

Studies of Facebook and X find that visual content such as images and memes often lacks alternative text, rendering it incomprehensible to screen readers, and that these failures disproportionately affect users with visual impairments (Hosamane, 2025). Platforms are not designed to be universally accessible and are, at best, retrofitted to account for accessibility after the fact. As Trevisan (2013) puts it, accessibility is treated as an "afterthought" by both technology developers and policymakers.

These barriers are also compounded by lack of access to devices, insufficient support from carers, lack of training, and physical/cognitive challenges (Sohal, 2025). Lack of appropriate support systems thus adds on to the existing standard user bias baked into platforms. The foundational gap is also access to internet, connectivity, and devices among users with disability, with

accessibility and design literature as secondary issues for many (Trevisan, 2013).

These biases create what researchers call digital inequality, which refers both to how existing social inequalities influence the adoption and use of digital technologies as well as how differential uses of the internet itself may influence social stratification (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013). As digital technologies are now becoming crucial to human rights, Goggin argues that yet the frameworks used to understand digital inequality often fail to engage disability in any serious or sophisticated sense (Goggin, 2019). Goggin explains that even when governments or tech companies talk about digital inclusion, they rarely think about usability for a person who has motor, neurological, intellectual or other kinds of disabilities.

Relevant Policy Frameworks

The Constitution of Nepal firmly protects the fundamental rights of PWDs through a rights-based framework that guarantees equality, inclusion, and state support. Under Article 18 (Right to Equality), the state strictly prohibits any form of discrimination based on physical or mental conditions, ensuring equal protection under the law. This protection extends across multiple facets of public life, providing the right to free education up to higher levels (Article 31), giving distinct care and special security to disabled children (Article 39), and providing a safety net through state-funded social security (Article 43). Article 42 (Right to Social Justice) ensures that individuals with disabilities have the right to actively participate in state bodies and public services based on the principle of inclusive proportional representation. These

constitutional guarantees are legally reinforced by the Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017), which aligns Nepal's domestic laws with international standards like the UNCRPD to enforce accessibility and employment rights.

The Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017) provides dedicated guarantees to the right to information by requiring that telecommunications services and internet service providers ensure that their platforms are accessible within the allotted time limit under Section 17(4). However, no such time limits have been enforced, so accessibility failures persist on part of providers and negligence on part of the state to enforce this law.

Section 17(1) and (2) lay out obligations of the state to ensure that all public information is accessible, along with the Right to Information Act (2007). Except for broadcasted parliamentary sessions, speeches of key executives, and some national news outlets, public information and government websites themselves remain to be made accessible for all. Private entities or individual users have no actual (sanctioned) responsibility to ensure that their digital content is accessible.

In addition to this, the Act furthers the right to political participation in Section 11, stating that PWDs have the right to submit candidacies for political office, the right to vote with required support, and the entitlement to accessible and informed voting. This is in line with Article 84 (3) of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), which requires that PWDs be included in proportional representation lists for parliamentary elections in the country. This provision was affirmed by the Supreme

Court in January 2026, issued an order to the Election Commission requiring that parties mandatorily enlist PWDs in closed proportional representation lists (Kathmandu Post, 2026).

As for binding laws regulating online spaces, the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 wholly fails to address PWDs or oblige platforms to ensure accessibility by design. Even the Directives for Managing the Use of Social Networks 2023, while mentioning many obligations of network operators to ensure that “awareness and educational” content are promoted for user protection on their platforms, fails to oblige them to ensure accessibility in Clause 8. Globally accepted standards and repositories such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), Mobile Web Best Practices (MWBP), and Mobile Web Application Best Practices (MWABP) have not been mentioned, let alone integrated into digital public or private infrastructures.

Movement-Specific Gaps

The 2025 Gen-Z movement in Nepal was driven by youth coordinating through encrypted and community-based digital tools, notably Discord, TikTok, and Instagram, to organize urban demonstrations without traditional political hierarchy (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2025). Within less than 48 hours, the parliament had been dissolved, nominations for an interim Prime Minister proposed, and within the next 48 hours, an interim government had taken shape. While some political maneuvering may have corresponded with online political mobilization across multiple platforms, the pace was definitely extraordinary, overwhelming, and quite exclusive of age and access. The pace at which these

developments occurred required compatible hardware and high digital literacy. As noted by Gairapipli (2025), the exclusive participation and stewardship of urban youth without disabilities failed to account for systemic barriers to access for persons with disabilities.

In addition to existing gaps in the integration and implementation of the WCAG, MWBP, and MWAP, the disproportionate increase in mis/disinformation among other information disorders made online space more polluted and chaotic to navigate, affecting information integrity and informed political participation (Acharya, 2025). For PWDs who rely on screen readers, simplified text, other assistive technologies, or the support of carers, information disorders further distances them from actual events as they unfold in online spaces (Pittack, 2021).

Against these contexts, this research was undertaken to understand the positionality of PWDs against platform inaccessibility, a state and policy infrastructure that forgo the sociotechnical conditions of disability, and a national political rupture (followed by national elections) founded on urban digital political maneuvering.

EXPERIENCES OF PWD

This section presents the findings of the focus groups and interviews, examining how persons with disabilities navigated the technocratic revolution and the extent to which OPDs were able to facilitate this process. The findings are read against the frameworks established above: the standard-user bias embedded in platform design (Vera, 2022), the typology of technical and social/governance barriers to access (Islam, 2026), and the persistent gap between Nepal's legal guarantees and their enforcement.

Pre-Movement: Access to Information and Initial Reception

The September movement, characterized by rapid political shifts at an unimaginable pace, posed immense challenges to persons with disabilities. Their attempts to stay informed and navigate digital platforms were riddled with complexities. This was largely due to oversight by platform designers, as well as political leaders and the interim government, who missed crucial opportunities to mandate digital accessibility. To accurately comprehend the extent of these barriers, the primary information sources of the research participants were identified first.

Major Source Platforms

Facebook was the most common platform for information, alongside TikTok, YouTube, X, and digital news portals such as Kantipur and Onlinekhabar. However, the government's ban on 26 social media platforms for non-compliance with the 2023 social media registration guidelines disrupted these information flows. Participants substituted banned platforms

with alternatives such as Viber or circumvented the ban through VPNs, demonstrating a level of digital literacy that complicates any assumption that PWDs' exclusion from the movement stemmed from a first-level digital divide in access or skill alone; the barriers documented below were substantially about design, not capacity.

Variance in Platform Utility

The utility of these platforms varied considerably by impairment type. Participants with physical disabilities generally found platforms such as TikTok and Facebook navigable for browsing and viewing content, while participants with hearing, visual, and intellectual disabilities encountered barriers rooted directly in platform design. This divergence illustrates the "standard user" bias identified by Vera (2022), wherein platforms are calibrated to a default user profile of full sensory perception and physical dexterity, such that accessibility for one type of disability does not extend to others.

Contradictory Utility of AI

The use of AI in news consumption and interpretation produced a similar contradiction. Visually impaired participants found AI-summarized content transformative and time-efficient, simplifying complex information; deaf participants, by contrast, reported that AI-generated images produced profound confusion, blurring the line between documented events and fabricated visuals. Taken together, these findings support Goggin's (2019) argument that digital-inclusion frameworks rarely engage the full range of disability seriously. A single tool intended to aid accessibility can simultaneously mitigate the barriers

faced by one PWD and compound another's.

Information Incomprehensibility

Most participants first learned of the protests through their social media feeds; however, visibility did not translate into comprehension. Several participants with visual and intellectual disabilities reported perceiving only fragments of the unfolding events (footage of large, noisy crowds, or the “#NepoBaby” hashtag) without registering the substantive demand driving the movement: accountable, corruption-free governance.

This gap is directly attributable to the absence of alt text and sign-language interpretation across the images, videos, and memes that carried the bulk of movement-related content, corroborating Hosamane's (2025) finding that visual content on platforms such as Facebook and X is routinely inaccessible to screen-reader users.

In the absence of these accommodations, a substantial share of participants with visual and hearing disabilities were left without a working understanding of what the protest was about.

This finding qualifies the assumption that broad online visibility is equivalent to broad political awareness. Consistent with Trevisan's (2013) characterization of accessibility as an “afterthought” in platform and content design, the movement's most visible content (videos of confrontation and crowds) circulated widely, while the substantive political message did not, because the digital tools mediating it were not built with the assistive-technology and interface needs identified in Islam's (2026) typology of access barriers.

Inaccessible Platforms and Navigation Challenges

Beyond individual platforms, the pervasive use of images, videos, and memes without alt text, audio description, sign language, or easy-to-read formats over the course of the movement left many PWDs without a working account of its intent, progression, and developments. The inaccessible design of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok compounded this gap, reflecting the broader inadequacy (documented throughout the literature above) of digital campaigns built without accessibility as a design requirement rather than a retrofit.

In-Movement: Participation and Ownership

The September movement is widely regarded as a nationwide youth revolution uniting participants around common agendas irrespective of background, and marked, for the first time in Nepal's political history, a moment in which young people held direct power to shape the state's leadership and legitimacy. Whether its initiators, protestors, and bargaining groups genuinely represented the country's diverse and marginalized youth populations remains a frequently asked but largely unanswered question, as does whether these groups experienced a shared sense of ownership over the movement's outcomes. This research examines that question from the vantage point of one excluded marginalized community- PWDs.

Absence in Protests

No research participants attended the September protests, and the leaders of the disability organizations consulted for this study confirmed that none of their members did either.

Participants attributed this to genuine concerns about their safety. The streets were dangerous, filled with chaotic crowds, tear gas, and police clashes. For someone who cannot see the danger coming or running away quickly, going outside could have been life-threatening. And without proper, structured, organizing, required support systems in place of mapped exit points, the protests were not designed to include or facilitate the participation of PWDs.

Information Chaos

Participants reported constant confusion arising from severe misinformation and overreporting, consistent with Acharya's (2025) documentation of information disorder during the movement. Lacking accessible means of verifying claims, many struggled to distinguish credible content from fabricated content. As furthered by Pittack (2021), for those reliant on screen readers, simplified text, or carer support to access information at all, navigation becomes almost impossible amid information disorders.

Exclusion from Post-Movement Processes

The most consequential exclusion concerned the formation of the interim government. Negotiations over the interim premiership took place on Discord, a platform that demands high digital literacy from its participants. These were conditions that structurally favored quick, tech-savvy urban youth. Visually impaired participants reported that Discord was incompatible with their screen readers; deaf participants were excluded by the complete absence of sign-language interpretation. It was within these inaccessible channels that participants ultimately reached consensus on Sushila Karki, the former chief justice, as the most

suitable candidate to lead the interim government.

These discussions unfolded across numerous servers and channels facilitated by different youth groups, with speaking opportunities allocated by facilitators according to perceived merit – in practice, a proxy for speed and technical fluency. Participants who required sign language, captions, subtitles, screen-reader navigation, or other reasonable accommodation to follow the pace of conversation found no space within this fast-moving, technically mediated democratic process.

None of the KII or FGD participants took part in the conversations surrounding the Prime Minister's selection or the determination of constitutional authority and next steps. Visually impaired participants again cited incompatibility with screen readers; participants with cerebral palsy and Down syndrome reported having never previously heard of Discord. Deaf participants reported the most complete exclusion: while other participants could piece together some understanding through familiar social networks and live-streamed video, the absence of sign-language interpretation across all of these mediums left deaf participants without access to any of them.

The post-protest period was similarly dominated by a rapid, high-volume flow of activity: a multiplicity of youth groups advanced diverse and often contradictory demands, populating social and news platforms with continuously updating information. Layered onto this pace, the absence of accessibility features rendered the information environment incomprehensible to many participants, who

reported having no guidance or literacy resources for distinguishing credible information from misinformation. On the basis of these accounts, and in participants' own words, this research concludes that while PWDs supported the movement's agenda of accountable, corruption-free governance, they felt neither ownership over the movement, which they characterized as a powerful youth mobilization ultimately weakened in its implementation, nor considered themselves to have been part of it in any meaningful sense.

Taken together, these accounts point to an uncomfortable conclusion: the "youth revolution," widely described in mainstream coverage as a nationwide mobilization uniting all young people, was in practice built around a non-disabled default revolutionary narrative. Because neither the built environment nor the information infrastructure surrounding the movement was designed for universal access, PWDs were structurally excluded from a defining moment in their country's history. They shared the movement's demand for accountable governance, but the unsafe and inaccessible conditions confined them to the role of silent onlookers within their own homes.

Post-Movement: Voter Literacy and Electoral Processes

Following the announcement of election deadlines, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued an interim order of 2026, directing the Election Commission to ensure that political parties include PWDs on their closed lists of candidates under the Proportional Representation (PR) system, in line with Article 84(3) of the Constitution. This research examines the extent to which

that order and Section 11 of the Act related to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities translated into greater prioritization of accessibility needs in voter literacy initiatives, political campaigning, and communications from political parties, the Election Commission, and individual candidates.

Voter Literacy Failures

Participants reported witnessing no separate or specific attempts at voter literacy initiatives dedicated to PWDs. When participants were specifically asked about any noticeable changes in the consideration of accessibility needs following the court ruling, they reported no differences. Many indicated that they still had no understanding of how the ballot paper looks, feels, or where to cast their vote. The literacy videos produced by candidates did not incorporate any accessibility features. Although further research is needed to confirm these observations, some participants noted that accessibility situations may have worsened during the pre-election phase.

For instance, a visually impaired participant mentioned that documents such as manifestos and other political materials are extremely inaccessible because they are in PDF format, often unscanned/not in readable formats, and made with fonts that are incompatible with screen readers. Documents were also notably not downloaded, making access all the more difficult.

In addition to this, visually impaired participants reported that government and political party websites were not designed with their needs in mind, as sign-language interpretation was not available, small fonts were used without due contrast settings,

and captions were also mostly unavailable for any audio-visual material included.

Participants also noted that access to information became markedly more difficult in the period immediately preceding the election.

ROLE OF OPDS

Despite there being over 400 registered organizations for PWDs, their interventions during the rapid movement were minimal. OPD leaders acknowledged they could not keep up with the fast-paced events to help their members understand the movement.

Blind Youth Association Nepal was a notable exception, collaborating with the Election Commission to produce interactive, accessible digital content for voter literacy.

They organized a national-level OPD, organized a mock election with Election Commission officials present to facilitate, oversee, and answer questions. However, none of the research participants had heard of or participated in this initiative. This is an indication of the limited reach of the accessibility measures undertaken by the Government and the Election Commission.

Lack of Coordinated Efforts

Despite more than 400 registered PWD organizations operating across Nepal, inter-organizational communication remains minimal and largely dependent on slow, traditional channels such as physical meetings, correspondence, and infrequent coordination. This left OPDs unprepared for a protest movement that was organized rapidly and entirely online, leaving PWDs isolated at home without access to fast, reliable news. Strengthened coordination

across OPDs could alleviate the burden such ruptures place on PWD individuals.

Lack of Prioritization of Accessible Digital Infrastructure

Nepal's disability rights movement has historically prioritized physical accessibility—wheelchair ramps, accessible buses, building lifts. Digital accessibility was largely absent from this agenda. OPDs did not push for systematic integration of screen-reader-compatible websites or sign-language interpretation and captioning in video content across public and private platforms. This longstanding omission left the movement unprepared when national political discourse shifted almost entirely into digital space.

Lack of Flexible and Adaptive Resources

Since these organizations often rely on specific donor mandates, they lack independence, flexibility, and resources to act quickly during a sudden political rupture.

Lack of Young PWD Political Leadership Efforts

Owing to a larger pattern of depoliticization across the nation, young PWDs were largely absent in political spaces. This meant that there were no nodes for PWDs to enter into these political spaces at a time of unstructured political mobilizations. Until accessibility by design is accounted for in all facets of life, the absence of nodes will continue to mean the effective exclusion of PWDs and their issues, particularly at times when there is no “state” or adjacent actor to demand accountability from.

CONCLUSION

The September 2025 movement demonstrated the capacity of digital tools to demand political accountability, but it also produced a new form of digital elitism. By relocating national negotiations onto rapid, encrypted platforms such as Discord, the movement reproduced at an accelerated pace, the standard-user bias documented throughout the literature on disability and platform design (Vera, 2022; Centeno, 2025). Consistent with the pattern that crises intensify pre-existing systemic barriers where effective guardrails are absent, PWDs in this study were left in a state of isolation, caught between unverified online information and delayed real-world confirmation.

The combination of inaccessible interfaces and an overwhelming pace of unverified content converted a moment of national political awakening into a digital vacuum for persons with disabilities. Nepal's legal framework, spanning constitutional guarantees, the Act Relating to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2074), and the 2026 Supreme Court order on proportional representation, remains a paper tiger. It is substantive on paper but largely unenforced in the platforms and processes that now mediate political life. Unless accessibility is designed into the tools of governance from the outset, rather than added retroactively, the pace of Nepal's digital-political evolution will continue to outstrip the inclusion of its marginalized populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the State

Mandate a time-bound transition to Universal Design and WCAG 2.2 AA/AAA compliance across all digital state infrastructure and electoral portals, closing the enforcement gap left by statutory law.

Replace image-based PDFs with screen-reader-compatible formats as the default for all public-facing government and political communications, not only electoral materials.

Ensure fully functional, screen-reader-compatible audio alternatives for CAPTCHA systems.

Enforce mandatory Nepali Sign Language (NSL) interpretation and captioning for all political broadcasts and extend this explicitly to crisis and emergency communications (security updates, curfew notices, transition announcements), where this research found accessibility was abandoned entirely rather than merely delayed.

Establish a digital-accessibility emergency protocol requiring any crisis-related government communication to be released in accessible format within a fixed window (e.g., 24 hours), so accessibility is not the first casualty of a fast-moving political event.

Amend Article 47 of the Electronic Transactions Act to classify online ableist harassment as a cybercrime.

Recommendations for the Election Commission

Collaborate with OPDs to produce touch-based ballot guides and sign-language-interpreted voter education videos.

Formalize and fund partnerships with OPDs such as Blind Youth Association Nepal for future mock elections and voter literacy campaigns, rather than leaving these as unpublicized, one-off initiatives.

Publicize accessibility-related civic initiatives through accessible official channels, addressing the finding that poor communication compounded – rather than merely coincided with – inaccessible design.

Audit political parties' compliance with Article 84(3) substantively, verifying that PWD candidates on PR lists are genuinely resourced and positioned to run and not tokenistic in nature.

Recommendations for Digital Platforms and Intermediaries

Platforms used for civic and political organizing (e.g., Discord) should provide accessible parallel channels – screen-reader-compatible interfaces and live captioning for voice-based decision-making spaces – recognizing that such platforms now function as de facto political infrastructure.

Enforce existing alt-text and captioning tools as requirements rather than optional features for content reaching a defined virality or civic-engagement threshold.

Test AI-based content tools (summarization, image generation) for differential impact across disability types before deployment in fast-moving news

contexts, given this research's finding that the same tool simplified information for visually impaired users while generating confusion for deaf users.

Recommendations to Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)

Establish a shared, low-latency communication protocol across Nepal's 400+ registered OPDs and a rapid-alert network capable of activating within hours of a political rupture, instead of relying solely on physical meetings and correspondence cycles.

Formally integrate digital accessibility into OPD advocacy agendas alongside long-standing physical accessibility demands, making screen-reader compatibility, captioning, and sign-language interpretation explicit, standing asks of government, parties, and platforms alike.

Negotiate with donors for a ring-fenced share of funding to be unrestricted and rapid-response eligible, so OPDs can mobilize during emergencies without waiting on standard compliance and approval cycles.

Build leadership pipelines and mentorship structures to cultivate young PWD political organizers, ensuring PWDs already hold "nodes" within youth political networks before the next crisis, not after one has already excluded them.

Establish rapid-response digital teams that can independently monitor political developments and translate crucial information into easy-to-read, accessible formats during national crises.

REFERENCES

Acharya, U. (2025). Misinformation during the Gen Z uprising in Nepal: Trends and lessons learned for interventions. Center for Media Research.

Centeno, S. (2025). Visibility isn't access: How platforms erase disabled creators. Repro Uncensored.

<https://www.reprouncensored.org/research-overview/visibility-isnt-access>

Gairapipli, P. (2025, December 3). Toward a truly inclusive Nepal. The Annapurna Express. <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/60383/>

Goggin, G., Ellis, K., & Hawkins, W. (2019). Disability at the centre of digital inclusion: Assessing a new moment in technology and rights. *Communication Research and Practice*, 5(3), 290-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1641061>

Hargittai, E., & Hsieh, Y. P. (2013). Digital inequality. In W. H. Dutton (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Internet studies* (pp. 129-150). Oxford University Press.

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2025, November 17). The 2025 Gen Z uprising in Nepal: A three-part analysis. Atrocity Prevention Lab.

<https://hsph.harvard.edu/atrocity-prevention-lab/news/the-2025-gen-z-uprising-in-nepal-a-three-part-analysis/>

Hosamane, S., Walter, A., Lyu, Y., & Jhaver, S. (2025). "I thought it was my mistake, but it's really the design": A critical examination of the accessibility of user-enacted moderation tools on Facebook and X. arXiv.

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2509.10789>

Islam, M. I., Ansarullah, S. I., Nisa, K. U., Mufti, S., Dar, A. R., & Salau, A. O. (2026). Social network design for disability peer support: Identifying barriers, applying standards, and implementing measurable solutions. *Open*

Information Science, 10(1), 20250036. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opis-2025-0036>

Kathmandu Post. (2026, January 3). Supreme Court orders Election Commission to ensure disability representation in PR lists.

<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/01/03/supreme-court-orders-election-commission-to-ensure-disability-representation-in-pr-lists>

Oliver, M. (1983). *Social work with disabled people*. Macmillan.

Pittack, C., & Rath, S. (2021). The impact of misinformation and disinformation on people with disabilities. Paper presented at the 2021 TASH Conference, Virtual Edition.

Sohal, H., Peters, A., & Sri, A. (2025). An internet access survey for people with learning disabilities in Wandsworth, London. *BJPsych Open*, 11(Suppl 1), S279.

<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2025.10678>

Trevisan, F. (2013). Connected citizens or digital isolation? Online disability activism in times of crisis [Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow].

Vera, C. L. (2022, February 1). The social model: Do we disable people through our tech? Stark Blog. <https://www.getstark.co/blog/the-social-model-do-we-disable-people-through-our-tech/>

Zhao, F., Lim, H., Morrow, E. L., Turkstra, L. S., Duff, M. C., & Mutlu, B. (2022). Designing evidence-based support aids for social media access for individuals with moderate-severe traumatic brain injury: A preliminary acceptability study. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2022.991814>



Body & Data

www.bodyanddata.org

@bodyanddata



Facebook



Instagram



Bluesky



X

Principal Author: Rewati Karki

Contributing Author & Developmental Editor: Monisha Choudhary

Reviewer: Nuva Rai

Layout: Monisha Choudhary

Published By: Body & Data