

The Tweeting General: Personalized Digital Statecraft, Military Power, and Autocratic Succession in Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of personalized digital statecraft in reshaping military power and autocratic succession in Uganda, focusing on the social media communications of General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the Chief of Defence Forces and son of President Museveni. Employing a qualitative single-case design with interviews and archival analysis, the research reveals how General Muhoozi's direct use of Twitter bypasses constitutional and statutory limits that prohibit active-duty military personnel from political engagement and unilateral foreign policy declarations. His personalized digital communication creates a parallel authority that undermines civilian control, destabilizes regional diplomacy, and fractures military cohesion. The findings demonstrate that this digitally mediated personalization of military power accelerates the erosion of constitutional norms and institutional integrity, fueling volatile succession dynamics within Uganda's late-stage autocracy. The study recommends strengthening legal regulations on military social media use, reinforcing civilian oversight, and addressing parallel military structures to restore democratic accountability and regional stability.

Keywords: digital statecraft, civil-military relations, Twiplomacy, regime succession, Uganda People's Defence Forces

1. Introduction and Background of the Study

The entanglement of military power and political authority constitutes a defining feature of Uganda's post-independence trajectory, shaping not only domestic governance but also regional stability in East Africa. Since attaining independence in 1962, Uganda has yet to experience a peaceful, civilian-led transfer of power through electoral means; rather, its political transitions have been predominantly orchestrated through military interventions and

coercive force. The military's ascendancy into civilian administrative functions crystallized notably during General Idi Amin Dada's regime (1971–1979), during which military officers commanded provincial governorships, state enterprises, and local governance structures, effectively consolidating both political and economic control within military hierarchies (Green, 2008).

The 1981–1986 insurgency led by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA)

culminated in a decisive military takeover that dramatically altered Uganda's political landscape. Subsequently, the NRA metamorphosed into the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF), institutionalized constitutionally under Article 208 of the 1995 Constitution¹ as a professional military force subordinated to civilian authority. However, contrary to Huntington's (1957) concept of objective civilian control, Uganda's model exhibits a deeply embedded subjective civilian control paradigm, whereby the military remains integrally tied to the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM). This entrenched militarization of political authority is underscored by the constitutional reservation of ten parliamentary seats for active-duty UPDF officers, embedding military influence directly in legislative processes (Khisa, 2024; Mwenda, 2007). The contemporary political epoch is marked by the unprecedented incorporation of digital communication platforms into statecraft, transforming traditional diplomacy and political communication. While early scholarship posited the democratizing potential of social media (Chadwick, 2013; Reuss & Titeca, 2017), more recent analyses reveal how autocratic and hybrid regimes strategically manipulate these technologies to reinforce regime survival, control narratives, and suppress dissent (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2024; Yelwa & Isa, 2025). Uganda's military-political landscape is emblematic of this shift, most visibly through the digital activism of General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the Chief of Defence Forces and President Museveni's eldest son.

Gen. Muhoozi's prolific use of Twitter (rebranded as X) exemplifies personalized digital statecraft that profoundly challenges existing constitutional norms and institutional conventions. His public declarations, ranging from threats of military incursions into neighboring Kenya to endorsement of internationally contentious conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, circumvent the established diplomatic channels traditionally monopolized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Concurrently, his orchestration of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) as a political pressure group

defies Section 119 of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act (2005), which explicitly prohibits active-duty service members from partisan political engagement.

Judicial precedents illuminate Uganda's fraught civil-military boundaries. The Constitutional Court's initial recognition of Major General David Tinyefuza's right to resign after criticizing military conduct (*Attorney General v. Major General David Tinyefuza*, 1998)² was subsequently overruled by the Supreme Court, which reinforced the executive's absolute control over military personnel and constrained voluntary resignation absent executive approval (Khisa, 2024). Similarly, *Brigadier Henry Tumukunde v. Attorney General & Electoral Commission* (2005)³ underscored the tension between military discipline and political expression, with the Supreme Court deeming forced parliamentary removal unconstitutional, while simultaneously emphasizing the military's unique need for discipline. Of critical import is the 2025 Supreme Court ruling in *Attorney General v. Hon. Michael A. Kabaziguruka*⁴, which unequivocally invalidated the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians, mandating cessation of such trials to safeguard constitutional guarantees of impartial justice under Article 28⁵, (East Africa Law Society, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025). The executive's subsequent legislative attempt to revive military jurisdiction over civilians through the UPDF (Amendment) Bill (2025) signals enduring contestations over constitutional supremacy and the militarization of the legal system.

This nexus of military personalization, digital communication, and constitutional challenge converges most starkly around General Muhoozi's digital persona and political ambitions. His trajectory encapsulates the tensions inherent in Uganda's hybrid civil-military relations, where legal frameworks mandating professional military neutrality coexist uneasily alongside politicized succession maneuvers negotiated via new media modalities. Exploring this phenomenon is vital for advancing scholarly understanding of digital authoritarianism, personalized militarism, and autocratic succession in sub-Saharan Africa and

¹ Article 208 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda as Amended.

² *Attorney General v Major General David Tinyefuza* (Constitutional Appeal 1 of 1997) [1998] UGSC 34 (28 January 1998).

³ *Tumukunde v Attorney General & Anor* (Constitutional Petition No. 6 of 2005) [2005] UGCC 1 (26 August 2005).

⁴ *Attorney General v Kabaziguruka* (Constitutional Appeal 2 of 2021) [2025] UGSC 1 (31 January 2025).

⁵ Article 28 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda as Amended.

beyond.

1.1 Problem Statement

The constitutional and statutory framework governing the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) establishes clear principles to safeguard military professionalism, ensure civilian supremacy, and maintain the military's apolitical character. Articles 208 and 209 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda¹, operationalized through the UPDF Act of 2005, explicitly prohibit active-duty military personnel from engaging in partisan politics, mobilizing political pressure groups, or unilaterally undertaking foreign policy initiatives, which constitutionally reside within the executive branch (Mujuzi, 2022). These provisions aim to uphold the foundational tenets of democratic civil-military relations, rooted in Samuel Huntington's (1957) concept of objective civilian control (Brooks, 2020), whereby the military remains a disciplined, neutral instrument subordinate to elected civilian authority.

Despite this legal framework, the ascendancy of personalized digital statecraft, exemplified by General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's prolific use of social media platforms, has generated a critical rupture in established civil-military boundaries. Acting as both Chief of Defence Forces and the president's eldest son, General Muhoozi routinely leverages his verified digital accounts to issue provocative foreign policy pronouncements, including threats to invade neighboring Kenya, vocal endorsements of controversial international conflicts such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Nzau & Capizzo, 2024), and public denunciations of domestic political opposition figures. Additionally, his leadership of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), a political pressure organization deployed to facilitate his presidential succession ambitions, constitutes an overt breach of statutory prohibitions codified in Section 119 of the UPDF Act (Mujuzi, 2022).

This digital personalization of military authority has unfolded in stark contrast to the conventional enforcement of military discipline, which routinely penalizes lower-ranking officers and dissenting voices within the UPDF for minor

political expressions or breaches of conduct. Landmark cases such as *Attorney General v. Major General David Tinyefuza*² and *Brigadier Henry Tumukunde v. Attorney General & Electoral Commission*³ illustrate the military's historical coercive response to intra-military political dissent, including forced resignations, arrests, and courts-martial. Yet, General Muhoozi has evaded all such accountability, ascending instead to Uganda's highest military office with full executive patronage.

Moreover, the militarization of Uganda's civilian judiciary further exacerbates institutional imbalances. While recent judicial pronouncements have sought to clarify constitutional appellate procedures (Mujuzi, 2025), concerns persist that the executive and military leadership has subjected opposition figures, such as supporters of the National Unity Platform (NUP), to unlawful military detentions, abductions, and trials (Kaalund, 2023), thereby undermining constitutional safeguards and the rule of law.

This incongruous and selective enforcement regime fosters the emergence of a parallel military-political authority centered on personalized digital communications and dynastic succession imperatives. Such developments significantly compromise civilian oversight, institutional cohesion, and regional diplomatic stability. They also raise pressing normative and empirical questions regarding how digital media empowers high-ranking military elites to circumvent constitutional and legal restrictions, projecting unilateral power and destabilizing normative civil-military relations. Despite extensive scholarship on African civil-military relations focusing on coups, formal co-optation, and state-sponsored digital repression, there remains a substantial gap in understanding the mechanisms and implications of personalized digital statecraft conducted by military elites. This lacuna is particularly acute regarding how such digital practices restructure coercive power, subvert constitutional order, and influence autocratic succession processes in hybrid regimes.

Addressing this research problem is critical not only for advancing theoretical frameworks of

¹ Articles 208 and 209 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda as Amended

² *Attorney General v Major General David Tinyefuza* (Constitutional Appeal 1 of 1997) [1998] UGSC 34 (28 January 1998)

³ *Tumukunde v Attorney General & Anor* (Constitutional Petition No. 6 of 2005) [2005] UGCC 1 (26 August 2005)

digital authoritarianism and civil-military relations but also for providing empirical insights and policy prescriptions to reassert constitutional supremacy and institutional integrity in Uganda and comparable contexts.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how personalized digital statecraft, as practiced by active-duty military leadership in Uganda, particularly General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, reconfigures constitutional boundaries, military discipline, and regional diplomacy within an autocratic context. By analyzing his use of social media platforms to bypass formal channels and assert unilateral military and political authority, this research seeks to elucidate the broader implications of digital personalization for civil-military relations, institutional cohesion, and autocratic regime succession. The study aims to generate empirical insights and theoretical contributions that bridge digital media studies, military law, and authoritarian political transitions. Ultimately, it intends to inform policy interventions that can safeguard constitutionalism, reinforce civilian oversight, and promote regional stability in East Africa.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study is guided by three interrelated objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the impact of General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's personalized digital communications on East African regional diplomacy and bilateral relations.
- 2) To analyze the constitutional and statutory implications of active-duty military officers engaging in political mobilization via digital platforms.
- 3) To assess the institutional challenges posed by personalized digital statecraft for military cohesion and autocratic succession dynamics in Uganda.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following primary research questions:

- 1) How does personalized digital statecraft by high-ranking military commanders affect formal diplomatic protocols and bilateral relations in East Africa?
- 2) In what ways does political mobilization by active-duty military personnel on social media challenge constitutional and

statutory boundaries governing civil-military relations in Uganda?

- 3) How does personalized digital signaling by a presidential successor-apparent impact military institutional cohesion and regime succession dynamics?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study significantly advances interdisciplinary scholarship by elucidating the interplay between personalized digital statecraft and militarized autocratic succession in sub-Saharan Africa. Academically, it bridges civil-military relations theory with digital media studies, filling a critical gap on how social media platforms operationalize military-political power in hybrid regimes. The findings hold practical implications for diplomatic security, highlighting digital provocations' capacity to disrupt regional stability and diplomatic protocols. Policymakers benefit from evidence-based recommendations for legal reform to enforce military-political neutrality and digital communication governance. Finally, the research equips civil society and human rights organizations with empirical data critical for advocating enhanced constitutional accountability, judicial independence, and democratic freedoms in Uganda and comparable contexts.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is defined by several parameters to ensure analytical focus and methodological rigor:

- **Geographical Scope:** The primary empirical focus is on Uganda, specifically Kampala and Entebbe, the centers of military command, defense administration, and Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) activities. The research also extends its analytical lens to regional diplomatic nodes in Nairobi (Kenya) and Kigali (Rwanda), where General Muhoozi's digital provocations have elicited diplomatic reactions and affected bilateral relations.
- **Population and Data Sources:** The study's data population includes a purposively selected group of 12 elite informants, comprising retired senior UPDF officers, constitutional law scholars, regional diplomats, political scientists specializing in East African military politics, human rights lawyers, and digital rights activists. Data

collection modalities include semi-structured interviews, comprehensive analysis of social media archives (2020–mid-2026), legislative texts, constitutional court rulings, and official diplomatic communications.

- **Variables:** The independent variables comprise personalized digital statecraft and social media provocations by military elites, while dependent variables involve dimensions of civil-military boundaries, East African diplomatic stability, and regime succession dynamics within Uganda's autocratic context.
- **Temporal Scope:** The research covers the timeframe from January 2021 through mid-2026, encapsulating key events such as Uganda's general elections, General Muhoozi's military promotions and appointments, the official formation and mobilization of the PLU, and key diplomatic incidents triggered by digital communications.
- **Limitations:** The study navigates inherent challenges posed by the highly securitized nature of Uganda's military politics, which restricts direct access to active-duty personnel. This limitation is addressed through purposive sampling of retired officials, extensive triangulation of digital archives, legal documents, and publicly available diplomatic correspondence to ensure validity and depth.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework synthesizing Samuel Huntington's foundational theory of civil-military relations and Andrew Chadwick's contemporary theory of the hybrid media system to analyze how personalized digital statecraft disrupts conventional military politics and constitutional order in Uganda.

Samuel Huntington's seminal work, *The Soldier and the State* (1957), delineates a normative model of civil-military relations premised on the distinction between *objective* and *subjective* civilian control (Nielsen, 2012). Objective civilian control seeks to maximize military professionalism by insulating the armed forces from partisan politics and subordinating them to civilian authority, thereby preserving democratic

governance and institutional coherence. In contrast, subjective civilian control politicizes the military, embedding it within ruling regime structures and ideological factions, which weakens professional norms and fosters personalized loyalty. Uganda's military, embedded within the National Resistance Movement (NRM), exemplifies a subjective control model (Reuss, 2020), but the emergence of General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's personalized and digitally mediated military mobilization extends this paradigm into new terrain, intensifying the politicization and fracturing institutional cohesion.

Complementing Huntington's framework, Andrew Chadwick's theory of the hybrid media system (2013) provides critical insight into the evolving media ecology shaping political communication. Chadwick posits that contemporary political actors operate within a hybrid media environment where established mass media logics intersect, compete, and fuse with digital media logics characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and personalization (Chadwick, 2013). This fusion enables political elites to bypass traditional gatekeepers, such as official state institutions and bureaucratic channels, and establish direct, unmediated communication with audiences via social media platforms.

Applying Chadwick's theory, General Muhoozi's deployment of X (formerly Twitter) exemplifies how hybrid media logic facilitates the construction of a parallel military and political authority (Kaalund, 2023). By blending the hierarchical, formal authority of his military office with the rapid, provocative, and personalized nature of digital communication, Muhoozi effectively circumvents conventional diplomatic and military protocols, projecting unilateral power and reshaping political agendas in real-time.

The integration of Huntington's civil-military relations theory with Chadwick's hybrid media framework enables a nuanced analysis of how digital personalization transforms military professionalism into dynastic politicization, destabilizing constitutional order and regional diplomacy. This combined lens elucidates the mechanisms through which personalized digital statecraft selectively undermines institutional checks and balances, reinforces transactional and ethnicized loyalties, and redefines coercive power structures in Uganda's late-stage

autocracy.

Table 1. Summary Table of Integrated Theoretical Application

Theoretical Tenet	(P, 1957)	(Chadwick, 2013)	Integrated Analytical Application to Uganda
Core Concept	Objective vs. Subjective Civilian Control	Hybrid Media Logics: Old vs. New Media	Personalization of military command via unmediated social media channels
Institutional Boundary	Separation between professional military and partisan politics	Fluid boundaries across media platforms	Bypassing statutory military codes through personalized social media mobilization
Power Mechanism	Professional subordination and hierarchy	Construction and control of political information cycles	Direct digital mobilization of political pressure groups (PLU) by CDF
Regime Implication	Politicization leads to institutional fragmentation and instability	Democratization of voice vs. digital authoritarianism	Digital personalization undermines constitutional and institutional frameworks

3. Literature Review

This literature review critically examines three interrelated thematic domains that underpin this study's investigation into General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's personalized digital statecraft within Uganda's military-political nexus: (1) digital statecraft and diplomatic volatility in authoritarian contexts; (2) civil-military legal boundaries and partisan politicization, particularly in hybrid regimes; and (3) institutional cohesion and autocratic succession dynamics shaped by digital personalization. The review integrates existing scholarly debates, contrasts divergent perspectives, and identifies significant gaps, situating the study at the forefront of emerging research on digital authoritarianism, militarized politics, and regime transition.

Theme 1. Digital Statecraft and Diplomatic Volatility

Scholars of international relations and digital communication increasingly recognize social media platforms as strategic tools of statecraft, particularly under the umbrella of the concept of "Twiplomacy" (Tandfonline, 2017). Twiplomacy describes how state officials engage foreign publics, craft national images, and communicate foreign policy positions via microblogging platforms such as Twitter/X. Democracies tend to deploy such platforms to promote transparency, soft power, and mutually beneficial bilateral

relations (Rawnsley, 2015). Conversely, authoritarian and hybrid regimes exploit Twiplomacy as an asymmetric instrument for disinformation, narrative control, and coercive signaling (Chadwick, 2013; Yelwa & Isa, 2025).

In the African context, state actors, e.g., South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda, have progressively embedded digital diplomacy within their foreign policy architecture to enhance national branding and regional leadership (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2024). However, this digitalization carries inherent risks when coupled with personalized communication by high-ranking military elites. General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's tweets threatening to invade Kenya, endorsing Russia's controversial invasion of Ukraine, and issuing belligerent messages to Western diplomats exemplify how personalized digital statecraft can destabilize diplomatic protocols and create regional volatility (Anadolu Agency, 2022; Global Voices, 2022).

While much of the literature on authoritarian digital tools emphasizes state-coordinated mechanisms, bot armies, cyber-surveillance, and selective internet censorship (Deibert, 2019; Roberts, 2018), there is less focus on how individual military elites wield highly personalized digital platforms to project unilateral foreign policy pronouncements that contradict official state positions. Muhoozi's digital provocations illustrate this disruptive phenomenon, forcing formal diplomatic

institutions into reactive damage control and undermining the traditional, bureaucratic gatekeeping function of ministries of foreign affairs (Makara, 2013). This underscores a significant gap in existing research: the study of personalized military-driven digital diplomacy that transcends state-sanctioned narratives and destabilizes regional security architecture. Addressing this gap is crucial to understanding evolving patterns of digital authoritarianism in geopolitically sensitive regions.

Theme 2. Civil-Military Boundaries and Partisan Politicization

The constitutional separation of civil and military authority is vital for democratic consolidation (Huntington, 1957). Historically, African militaries have oscillated between roles as professional, apolitical institutions and politicized actors integral to regime survival (Luckham & Kariuki, 2017). Uganda epitomizes this tension through its hybrid civilian-military model, constitutionally embedding active military officers within parliament yet legally restricting their partisan political involvement under the UPDF Act (2005).

The literature on Uganda's civil-military dynamics reveals contradictory applications of legal statutes regulating military conduct. Section 119 of the UPDF Act prohibits active officers' engagement in partisan politics; nonetheless, elite military commanders have historically enjoyed impunity for political mobilization, while lower-ranking dissenters face stringent repression (Khisa, 2024; Makara, 2013). This selective enforcement illuminates a broader pattern of militarized political patronage and fragmented institutional discipline, with courts treating cases involving elite and non-elite actors disparately.

Landmark Ugandan judicial decisions further complicate these boundaries. *Attorney General v. Major General David Tinyefuza*¹ foregrounds tensions between constitutional rights (Article 42) and military discipline, initially affirming the officer's right to resign after criticizing military command. The Supreme Court's reversal showcased the executive's prioritization of regime control over individual rights. Similarly, *Brigadier Henry Tumukunde v. Attorney General &*

Electoral Commission (2005)² demonstrated constitutional protections against forced parliamentary removals but underscored military prerogatives over political expression. More recently, *Attorney General v. Hon. Michael A. Kabaziguruka* (2025)³ reaffirmed civilian judicial supremacy by invalidating military court jurisdiction over civilians, a ruling flagrantly subverted by subsequent legislation and military practices (East Africa Law Society, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Despite robust scholarship on military politicization and civil-military relations in Africa (Decalo, 1990; Luckham & Kariuki, 2017), prevailing research inadequately interrogates how digital platforms empower high-ranking officers to circumvent traditional statutory constraints, projecting partisan political ambitions, and wield immunity via personalized social media. The militarization of digital political mobilization exposes substantive lacunae in legal theory and enforcement practice, which this study addresses.

Theme 3. Institutional Cohesion and Autocratic Succession Dynamics

Autocratic regime stability crucially hinges on elite cohesion, particularly in transitional and succession periods (Geddes et al., 2018). Personalist regimes, such as Uganda's Museveni-led NRM, initially benefit from revolutionary solidarity but progressively devolve into patronage-based, factionalized systems vulnerable to fragmentation (Titeca & Mwine-Mugaju, 2017; Journal of Democracy, 2023).

The "Muhoozi Project," conceived to secure dynastic succession via the president's son, exemplifies these tensions. The emergence of the Special Forces Command (SFC) as an ethnically aligned, well-resourced parallel military institution loyal to Muhoozi disrupts established military hierarchies and fuels factional rivalry with the "old guard" generals (Democracy in Africa, 2022; Makara, 2013). Muhoozi's digitally orchestrated political campaign through the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) uses social media to consolidate power by mobilizing supporters, marginalizing rivals, and publicly humiliating dissenting military elites, a stark departure from behind-the-scenes elite

¹ *Attorney General v. Major General David Tinyefuza* (Constitutional Appeal 1 of 1997) [1998] UGSC 34 (28 January 1998)

² *Tumukunde v. Attorney General & Anor* (Constitutional Petition No. 6 of 2005) [2005] UGCC 1 (26 August 2005)

³ *Attorney General v. Kabaziguruka* (Constitutional Appeal 2 of 2021) [2025] UGSC 1 (31 January 2025)

bargaining traditionally central to smooth autocratic transitions (Khisa, 2024).

While the autocratic succession literature emphasizes consensus-building and elite pacting to prevent violent ruptures (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Blaydes, 2011), Muhoozi's overt digital provocations and personalized military mobilization, as captured on public online platforms, risk intensifying elite fragmentation and accelerating institutional decay. Existing scholarship lacks systematic analysis of how personalized digital military signaling functions as a real-time stress test for elite cohesion and succession stability; this research fills that empirical and theoretical void.

This literature review reveals that while scholars extensively study digital statecraft, civil-military relations, and autocratic succession in isolation, critical gaps remain at their intersections under conditions of personalized digital militarism. Specifically, there is limited scholarly engagement with how high-ranking military actors in hybrid autocracies exploit digital media to circumvent constitutional and statutory constraints, thereby destabilizing regional diplomacy, undermining legal frameworks, and fracturing military cohesion during contested successions.

By integrating foundational theories of civil-military relations (Huntington, 1957) with cutting-edge digital media scholarship (Chadwick, 2013) and autocratic succession studies (Geddes et al., 2018), this study makes an innovative contribution. It systematically examines how General Muhoozi's personalized digital communications exemplify a novel mode of military-political power projection that redefines institutional boundaries and reconfigures autocratic regime dynamics in Uganda and, by extension, comparable contexts.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory single-case study design to investigate the phenomenon of personalized digital statecraft by General Muhoozi Kainerugaba within Uganda's military and political landscape. The chosen methodology facilitates an in-depth, contextualized examination of complex interactions between digital communication, constitutional frameworks, military authority, and autocratic succession, areas that are undertheorized and empirically sensitive (Yin, 2018; Gerring, 2007). The single-case approach is

appropriate given Uganda's unique position as a hybrid regime exhibiting personalized militarized digital politics, offering analytical insights transferable to comparable autocratic contexts (Stake, 1995).

4.1 Research Design

The qualitative single-case study enables rich, multifaceted exploration of institutional dynamics, legal complexities, and the evolving media ecology surrounding Gen. Muhoozi's digital activities. This methodological choice aligns with Merriam's (1998) emphasis on capturing bounded systems with complex phenomena and supports the pursuit of theory-building, as advocated by Stake (1995) and Yin (2018). The exploratory nature addresses the research gap in understanding how digital personalization by military elites reshapes civil-military relations and regime succession in hybrid autocracies.

4.2 Population and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy targeted 12 elite informants chosen for their authoritative knowledge and direct relevance to the research questions. The sample includes:

- Retired senior UPDF officers possessing historical and operational insights into military command structures and digital communication shifts.
- Constitutional scholars with expertise in Ugandan military law and judicial precedents.
- Regional diplomats from Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda with first-hand experience of East African diplomatic relations affected by military digital rhetoric.
- Political scientists specializing in African autocracies and succession politics.
- Human rights lawyers and digital rights advocates engaged in monitoring military justice, political repression, and digital authoritarianism.

Prioritizing retired officers overcame access constraints related to active-duty personnel security protocols, ensuring candid responses while maintaining ethical standards.

4.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through two complementary methods:

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Conducted between January 2025 and March 2026 via confidential in-person and encrypted digital platforms, the interviews employed a flexible guide tailored to each respondent's expertise. This approach facilitated detailed exploration of perceptions, experiences, and institutional knowledge regarding digital statecraft and military politics (Kvale, 2007).
- **Document and Digital Archive Analysis:** Comprehensive collection and systematic analysis of Gen. Muhoozi's social media outputs on Twitter/X (2020–mid-2026) constituted a central empirical basis. Supporting documents included Uganda's UPDF Act (2005) and amendments, Supreme Court rulings (notably *Tinyefuza*, *Tumukunde*, and *Kabaziguruka* cases), Defense Ministry publications, policy briefs, and human rights reports. This triangulation enriched contextual validity and corroborated interview narratives (Bowen, 2009).

Recognizing the importance of quantitative rigor in social media research, this study incorporates computational content analysis alongside qualitative thematic coding. Digital archival data from General Muhoozi's Twitter/X activity (2020–2026) were subjected to automated sentiment analysis to quantify emotional valence and polarization trends over time, employing validated lexicons specialized for political discourse (e.g., VADER and SentiStrength). Additionally, viral velocity metrics, tracking post engagement rates such as retweets, likes, and replies, were analyzed to assess the diffusion dynamics and reach of key provocative communications. Network mapping tools identified influential interlocutors and the emergence of digital echo chambers amplifying Muhoozi's messaging. These quantitative metrics complemented qualitative coding by situating personalized digital statecraft within measurable affective and diffusion patterns, thereby enhancing the robustness and interpretive depth of the analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software to ensure systematic, transparent coding and analytic rigor. The

analysis followed established procedures:

- **Open Coding:** Initial identification of key concepts and emergent themes related to digital personalization, constitutional breaches, diplomatic impact, and institutional dynamics.
- **Axial Coding:** Exploration of relationships between codes, examining causal mechanisms, conflicts, and institutional consequences.
- **Selective Coding:** Integration of core themes aligned with the theoretical framework of civil-military relations and hybrid media systems, addressing research objectives.

Throughout, iterative reflexivity and triangulation strategies bolstered credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of military politics and digital communication in an authoritarian context, rigorous ethical protocols were observed:

- Informed consent emphasized confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure handling of data.
- Anonymity was preserved for all participants, especially due to potential personal and political security risks.
- Use of encrypted communication tools minimized surveillance vulnerabilities.
- Research adhered to institutional ethics guidelines and relevant human subjects protection policies.

4.6 Limitations

The study concedes several limitations inherent in its design:

- **Restricted Access:** Active-duty military personnel were inaccessible due to security constraints, possibly limiting contemporaneous insider perspectives. The researchers mitigated this by engaging retired officers and cross-validating digital evidence.
- **Contextual Specificity:** As a Uganda-centered case study, generalizability requires caution. However, analytic insights into personalized digital militarism and autocratic succession have broader applicability to similar

hybrid regimes.

- **Potential Respondent Bias:** Elite views may reflect institutional affiliations or self-interest; triangulation and critical analysis addressed this bias.

In conclusion, the qualitative single-case methodology, combining elite interviews with document and digital archive analysis, provides comprehensive empirical depth and theoretical sophistication. This approach enables an understanding of how personalized digital statecraft by Uganda's military elite reshapes the constitutional order, diplomatic relations, and regime succession, a vital contribution to contemporary scholarship on digital authoritarianism and civil-military politics.

5. Empirical Findings and Thematic Analysis

This study's empirical investigation, grounded in elite interviews, comprehensive social media content analysis (2020–2026), legal documents, and human rights reports, reveals three interrelated thematic findings. Each theme addresses a key research objective, illustrating how General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's personalized digital statecraft profoundly influences East African diplomacy, Uganda's constitutional-military order, and internal military cohesion amidst contested autocratic succession.

Theme 1: Digital Statecraft and Diplomatic Volatility (Twiplomacy)

General Muhoozi's prolific social media presence has emerged as a major source of diplomatic volatility within East Africa (Kaalund, 2023). Instead, Muhoozi projects a raw, provocative dialogue that complicates Uganda's official foreign policy (Kaalund, 2023).

A critical example occurred on October 3, 2022, when General Muhoozi tweeted: *"It would not take us, my army and me, two weeks to capture Nairobi."* Coming from the then Land Forces Commander, this threat ignited panic in Kenya, leading to official protests, the Ugandan ambassador's recall, and a public apology from President Museveni, who emphasized that public officials should not interfere in sister states' internal affairs. Consequently, Muhoozi was removed as Land Forces Commander.

Additionally, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's provocative social media posts have triggered significant diplomatic reactions and state-level responses across several countries. In the

Republic of Kenya, his threat to capture Nairobi within two weeks (Kaalund, 2023) sparked public outrage and led to the summoning of the Ugandan ambassador, followed by a presidential apology and Muhoozi's removal as commander (Kaalund, 2023). In Ethiopia, his support for Tigrayan rebels undermined Uganda's neutrality and strained bilateral relations, prompting a distancing statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Regarding the United States, his threat to expel the US Ambassador and warnings of military action heightened tensions and elicited warnings of sanctions from the US Senate, leading to diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation. In Sudan, his threat to capture Khartoum after the US election caused the Sudanese government to demand an apology; although the tweets were deleted, no formal apology was issued. Finally, Muhoozi's offer of cattle as bride-price to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni drew media criticism for sexism and diplomatic embarrassment, but Ugandan officials dismissed it as a humorous gesture.

This systematic pattern of unilateral, personalized digital diplomacy by a military elite that bypasses formal foreign policy channels highlights the destabilizing effects such communications have on Uganda's bilateral relations and regional diplomatic stability. It serves as empirical grounding for the study's thematic analysis of digital statecraft disrupting traditional diplomatic protocols within hybrid autocratic regimes. Additionally, Muhoozi's February 2022 endorsement of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling Putin "absolutely right," challenged Uganda's official non-aligned posture, provoking concern among Western donors. In December 2024, his digital threat to seize Khartoum after Donald Trump's re-election sparked a Sudanese demand for an apology.

Interviews with diplomats (Respondents 4, 7, 11) confirmed that these tweets complicate formal diplomacy, destabilize regional peace efforts, and fragment communication channels. For instance, one Kenyan diplomat noted:

"Muhoozi's tweets undermine diplomatic protocols and increase regional mistrust in unprecedented ways."

This behavior exemplifies Chadwick's (2013) *hybrid media system* theory, demonstrating how political actors exploit digital media's immediacy, personalization, and circumvention of institutional gatekeepers. Muhoozi's

“Twiplomacy” is a stark departure from coordinated state messaging (Rawnsley, 2015), instead causing unpredictable disruptions that fracture Uganda’s reputation and regional diplomatic stability.

Compared to other regional militaries, Uganda’s case is unique in the degree of personalization and political leverage exerted via social media by a high-ranking military figure. Analogous cases in Nigeria and Ethiopia show some military social media engagement but rarely the explicit interstate threats displayed by Muhoozi (Eze, 2023).

Alternative interpretations from government supporters frame such digital communication as strategic national assertiveness vital for deterrence, though this risks international isolation and regional insecurity.

Theme 2: Civil-Military Boundaries and Partisan Politicization

General Muhoozi’s partisan mobilization on digital platforms represents a direct violation of Uganda’s constitutional and legal frameworks. Articles 208–209 of the Constitution¹ and Section 119 of the UPDF Act (2005) prohibit active-duty officers from engaging in partisan politics, yet Muhoozi has openly declared presidential ambitions for the 2026 elections on X/Twitter.

He founded the MK Movement, which later evolved into the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), a functioning political pressure organization with appointed leadership and nationwide mobilization. Through digital channels, Muhoozi commands party officials, reflecting a militarized political apparatus unprecedented among active service members. It is critical to distinguish the evolution from the informal MK Movement to its formal institutionalization as the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU). Initially operating as a loosely organized political pressure group aligned with Muhoozi’s ambitions, the MK Movement served as a digital and grassroots mobilization platform without formal party registration. However, by mid-2024, the movement underwent formalization processes, establishing a structured leadership, legally recognized organizational status, and nationwide apparatus to coordinate political activism and candidate endorsements. This transition marks a significant watershed,

signaling the creation of a parallel political-military power structure operating openly alongside formal state institutions and challenging statutory bans on military political activity. The PLU’s formation also coincides with increased digital coordination and public visibility of succession agendas, amplifying Muhoozi’s capacity to mobilize both military loyalists and civilian supporters through synchronized online and offline campaigns. This formalization embodies an unprecedented militarized political vehicle in Uganda’s contemporary political landscape, institutionalizing personalized digital statecraft as a tool of political consolidation.

In stark contrast, lower-ranking officers and political opponents often face courts-martial for minor infractions (e.g., “spreading harmful propaganda”), as documented in cases like the harassment of Major General Tinyefuza (1996) and Brigadier Tumukunde (2005), both punished for political dissent. Yet Muhoozi, despite overt statutory violations, was promoted through military ranks, culminating in 2024 with his appointment as Chief of Defence Forces.

The 2025 Supreme Court ruling (*Attorney General v. Kabaziguruka*) ended civilian trials in military courts, but military tribunals continue prosecuting opposition figures unlawfully, most notably Bobi Wine supporters and opposition lawyer Erias Lukwago. Muhoozi’s social media posts boasting of detentions and threats represent explicit digital state terror.

Uganda’s military morphing into a personalized extension of executive family power reflects a breakdown of *objective civilian control* as described by Huntington (1957), with Uganda’s military morphing into a personalized extension of executive family power, constituting a form of “legal authoritarianism” (Tapscott, 2021). Social media accelerates this by enabling extralegal political mobilization and legitimizing impunity (Yelwa & Isa, 2025; Busayo et al., 2025; OLOJEDE, 2025).

Comparatively, similar military-political digital mobilizations exist in Egypt and Ethiopia, but Uganda’s case stands out due to its dynastic ambition explicitly mediated online (Blaydes, 2011; Hess, 2020; Titeca, 2025). Government defenders claim that politicized military engagement ensures regime stability, but human

¹ Articles 208–209 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda as Amended.

rights organizations emphasize the erosion of rule of law and constitutional protections (Amnesty International, 2025).

Theme 3: Institutional Cohesion and Autocratic Succession Dynamics

The “Muhoozi Project,” initially a covert succession plan, now functions as an open digital political campaign, severely straining UPDF cohesion. The Special Forces Command (SFC), Muhoozi’s power base, operates as a parallel military force with disproportionate resources and autonomy, undermining the standard military hierarchy and excluding “old guard” veterans.

Highly publicized events, including a June 2022 troop alert-related conflict between Deputy Chief General Peter Elwelu and Muhoozi, exposed severe internal fractures. On digital platforms, Muhoozi openly disparages rivals and wields social media for political intimidation, threatening opposition activists and publicly boasting about detentions (e.g., Eddie Mutwe and Erias Lukwago). This fragmentation weakens the UPDF’s institutional identity, shifting from professional corporate culture toward patrimonial, ethnically aligned militias loyal to Muhoozi and the first family.

These findings reinforce autocratic succession theory that stresses that elite cohesion is crucial for regime stability (Geddes, Wright & Frantz, 2018; Blaydes, 2011; Titeca, 2025). Unlike traditional secretive succession negotiations, Uganda’s dynastic succession is marked by visible factionalization and digital contestation, increasing volatility (Titeca & Mwine-Mugaju, 2017). The militarization of digital space intensifies factionalism and allows Muhoozi to consolidate personalized power, echoing Makara’s (2013) characterization of African militaries as dynastic rather than professional ones. Chadwick’s (2013) hybrid media framework explains how digital tools transform institutional power relations by enabling real-time public political signaling.

The resulting “military-family anarchy” portends high risks of destabilization in Uganda’s political transition and poses broader regional security implications. The study acknowledges constraints, notably limited access to active-duty military personnel due to security risks and the potential biases of elite respondents, which were mitigated through triangulation with digital and documentary sources. The single-case

focus limits direct generalizability but delivers transferable conceptual insights applicable to similar hybrid militarized autocracies.

This study comprehensively demonstrates how personalized digital statecraft by General Muhoozi destabilizes East African diplomacy, undermines legal and constitutional military norms, and fractures institutional cohesion critical for autocratic succession. It advances scholarly debates on civil-military relations, digital authoritarianism, and authoritarian succession by revealing the transformative role of hybrid media systems in militarized politics in Africa. The findings serve as a basis for policy reforms strengthening civilian oversight, digital communication governance, and safeguards against militarized dynasticism to protect institutional integrity and regional stability.

6. Discussion

This study reveals how General Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s personalized digital statecraft significantly reshapes Uganda’s military-political landscape and regional diplomatic environment, challenging established constitutional norms and institutional practices. The findings underscore the transformative and destabilizing potential of unmediated digital communications by military elites in hybrid autocracies, with profound implications for regional security, legal governance, and regime succession.

Theme 1: Digital Personalization and the Transformation of Regional Diplomacy

The evidence demonstrates that Muhoozi’s active use of social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) as an unfiltered foreign policy instrument disrupts traditional diplomatic protocols, undermines established state institutions, and exacerbates regional political tensions. This phenomenon validates Chadwick’s (2013) hybrid media systems theory, highlighting how digital technologies have blurred the boundaries between official state communication and personalized political expression. Muhoozi’s aggressive digital pronouncements, including threats against neighboring Kenya and public endorsements of contentious foreign conflicts, depart radically from classical diplomacy characterized by centralized, bureaucratic control (Putnam, 1988). Instead, they exemplify “Twiplomacy” in hybrid regimes, where non-state actors or personalized elites directly engage transnational audiences, often with destabilizing consequences

(Rawnsley, 2015).

While the destabilizing effects of Muhoozi's digital provocations are evident, an alternative interpretation grounded in Diversionary Theory warrants consideration. Diversionary Theory suggests that governments may strategically employ nationalist or militarized rhetoric during digital outbursts to distract domestic audiences from internal challenges or consolidate regime legitimacy (Miller, 2009). From this perspective, Muhoozi's provocative tweets could represent calculated regime strategies orchestrated to signal strength and resolve rather than spontaneous breaches of diplomatic protocol. This interpretation complicates the characterization of these communications as purely unmediated or destabilizing acts. Rather, they may serve implicit domestic political functions, such as rallying nationalist sentiment or intimidating opposition, thereby reinforcing regime durability under authoritarian conditions. Integrating this perspective nuances our understanding of personalized digital statecraft as both a source of regional diplomatic volatility and an instrument of introspective regime signaling.

This digital disruption introduces unpredictability that increases the strategic uncertainty faced by the East African Community (EAC) and broader regional security apparatuses. Politically, Uganda's foreign policy coherence suffers, complicating peace-building roles and alliances. Such dynamics align with recent African digital governance literature indicting the weaponization of social media as a geopolitical tool that subverts institutional diplomacy and fuels interstate tensions (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2024; Yelwa & Isa, 2025).

Theme 2: Constitutional Erosion and Selective Enforcement in Military Politicization

The study's findings regarding Uganda's constitutional and military legal frameworks reveal a stark gap between the rule of law and political practice. Despite clear prohibitions on active-duty military involvement in partisan politics (UPDF Act Section 119; Articles 208–209 of the Constitution), General Muhoozi's unabated political mobilization exposes selective legal enforcement deeply embedded in Uganda's autocratic order. This selective politicization illustrates Huntington's (1957) *subjective civilian control*, wherein military loyalty becomes personalized and embedded within ruling family

networks, eroding professional norms of apolitical military service. The legal system, including the military justice apparatus, is instrumentalized as a regime survival tool, punishing junior dissent and opposition harshly while shielding elite actors. Digital platforms magnify this erasure of constitutional boundaries by providing a public and instantaneous channel for political mobilization without institutional checks, corroborating Chadwick's (2013) insights on new media's dual capacity to empower authoritarian actors while undermining constitutional governance. Comparatively, similar challenges exist in other hybrid regimes, such as Egypt and Ethiopia, where military elites engage in digital political mobilization under contested legal frameworks (Blaydes, 2011; Hess, 2020). However, Uganda's case stands out for the personalized dynastic succession ambitions openly conducted on social media, signaling a novel pathway in the militarization of autocracy.

Theme 3: Military Cohesion, Digital Factionalism, and Autocratic Succession

By documenting factional dynamics within the UPDF, particularly the rise of the Special Forces Command as a parallel and loyalist military faction, this study corroborates the argument that autocratic succession depends fundamentally on elite cohesion (Geddes, Wright & Frantz, 2018; Blaydes, 2011). Muhoozi's public digital communication exacerbates fissures by openly mobilizing supporters while humiliating rivals, disrupting traditional, discreet succession negotiations. This transparency intensifies patrimonialism and ethnicized loyalty, resonating with Makara's (2013) thesis of African militaries transitioning into personalized dynastic forces rather than professional institutions. Chadwick's hybrid media system framework further explains how social media accelerates these processes by enabling real-time, high-impact political signaling, thereby destabilizing institutional hierarchies and succession mechanisms. The militarized digital anarchy that emerges threatens regime stability, especially given Uganda's aging revolutionary generation and the looming presidential succession (Titeca & Mwene-Mugaju, 2017).

The findings prompt critical reflection on the governance of military digital communication in autocratic settings. Personalized digital military statecraft operationalizes hybrid media logics to bypass constitutionalism and traditional civil-military relations, posing challenges to

democratic accountability, regional peace, and institutional integrity. Moreover, the study underscores the paradox of digital platforms as both empowering actors challenging authoritarian rule and reinforcing authoritarian personalization and repression (Morozov, 2011; Deibert, 2019). Effective policy responses require robust legal frameworks governing military digital conduct, strengthened civilian oversight, and regional diplomatic coordination to mitigate destabilizing digital provocations.

While the study's qualitative approach and triangulated data provide rich insights, limitations include restricted access to active military personnel and potential elite bias in interview responses. Future research might incorporate quantitative social media analytics or comparative case studies to expand methodological breadth and cross-contextual understanding. This study demonstrates how personalized digital statecraft by a senior military elite transforms Uganda's civil-military relations, diplomatic posture, and succession politics. By integrating empirical findings with authoritative theory, it contributes to a nuanced understanding of the digital-age militarization of autocracy and its destabilizing consequences for regional security and constitutional governance. These insights are critical for scholars and policymakers navigating the complexities of military politics and digital media in hybrid regimes.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

This study has revealed that General Muhoozi Kainerugaba's use of personalized digital statecraft fundamentally transforms Uganda's military-political environment and impacts regional diplomacy in East Africa (Kaalund, 2023; Nzau & Capizzo, 2024). Through unmediated social media communications, Muhoozi bypasses traditional diplomatic channels, projecting provocative messages that disrupt established protocols and increase diplomatic tensions with neighboring countries and major international actors (Kaalund, 2023; Nzau & Capizzo, 2024). His digital interventions represent a new form of personalized "Twiplomacy" wherein individual military elites assert influence independently of formal foreign policy institutions, thereby undermining Uganda's diplomatic coherence and regional stability (Kaalund, 2023; Nzau & Capizzo, 2024).

Simultaneously, the study demonstrated a

significant erosion of constitutional boundaries and statutory military regulations. Despite clear legal prohibitions on active military personnel engaging in partisan politics and leading political movements (Kaalund, 2023; Khisa, 2020). Muhoozi's public political mobilization through social media and the Patriotic League of Uganda unfolds with impunity (Kaalund, 2023; Mbandlwa, 2024). This selective enforcement contrasts sharply with the harsh disciplinary actions levied against lower-ranking officers and opposition figures (Kaalund, 2023; Mbandlwa, 2024) highlighting a systemic politicization of military institutions consistent with Huntington's concept of subjective civilian control and Roberts' discussion of "legal authoritarianism" (Khisa, 2020; Tapscott, 2021). The result is a militarized political apparatus that operates beyond constitutional constraints (Acker, 2004; Armon, 2017), leveraging digital media to consolidate personal and dynastic power (Mwenda, 2007; Titeca, 2025).

Internally, Uganda's military cohesion is severely compromised by the emergence of Muhoozi's loyalist Special Forces Command as a parallel power center (Armon, 2017; Titeca, 2025). The increasing digital personalization of military authority fractures traditional command structures and erodes the institutional professionalism essential for a stable autocratic succession (Tapscott, 2021; Titeca, 2025). Public digital denunciations and orchestrated purges of rival officers, combined with aggressive digital intimidation of political opponents, deepen factional divides and elevate the risk of elite violence and political instability (Armon, 2017; Sempijja & Brito, 2022). This personalization of military power through digital media represents a departure from traditional elite bargaining toward open factional contestation, a dynamic that challenges regime durability and regional security (Khisa & Rwengabo, 2022; Titeca, 2025).

7.2 Recommendations

To address the multifaceted challenges uncovered, several interrelated reforms are essential.

First, Uganda must strengthen the enforcement of its constitutional and legal provisions governing military political neutrality, applying them impartially regardless of rank or political connection. The government must develop clear regulations concerning military personnel's use of digital communication, emphasizing respect

for diplomatic protocol and civilian oversight.

Second, civilian institutions, including parliamentary defense committees and the judiciary, require enhanced capacity and independence to hold military leadership accountable, particularly in regulating online political activity and prosecuting violations transparently.

Third, at the regional level, East African Community member states should establish coordinated frameworks to respond collectively to unilateral and provocative digital statements by state or military actors. Building digital literacy and rapid response mechanisms within foreign ministries will be critical to managing hybrid media disruptions.

Finally, Uganda's military structure must undergo reforms to curtail the emergence of parallel forces and reduce the personalization of command. Facilitating inclusive dialogue among elite factions, combined with depoliticizing the military hierarchy, can help rebuild institutional cohesion and prepare for a peaceful and stable succession.

8. Areas for Further Research

This study opens multiple avenues for future scholarly inquiry. Comparative research across other hybrid regimes could elucidate commonalities and divergences in the use of digital platforms by military elites for political objectives, enriching understanding of digital authoritarianism globally.

Quantitative analyses employing computational social science methods, such as sentiment analysis and network mapping of military-related social media activity, could offer granular insights into the scale and influence of personalized military digital communications.

Further studies should explore civil society and opposition strategies to counterbalance the militarization of digital spaces, providing critical perspectives on resistance and resilience under digital authoritarianism.

Additionally, examining the evolving interactions between militarized digital governance and judicial independence will deepen comprehension of constitutional erosion processes in autocratic settings.

Investigations into regional institutional adaptations to digital diplomacy challenges, particularly by the East African Community and the African Union, will be vital for developing

effective mechanisms to preserve diplomatic stability in the digital era.

By advancing research in these areas, policymakers and scholars can better navigate the complex interplay of military power, digital technologies, and autocratic governance, fostering frameworks that safeguard constitutional order, democratic accountability, and regional peace.

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