From Apathy to Action: Understanding the Youth's Political Engagement on Social Media in Bangladesh

A Thesis Submitted by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing my degree at BRAC University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where it is appropriately cited with complete and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all primary sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

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Approval

The thesis titled "From Apathy to Action: Understanding the Youth's Political Engagement on Social Media in Bangladesh" submitted by Tahia Samrin in Summer 2024, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Social Sciences in Anthropology.

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Abstract:

Social media has increased horizons and created a wide scope for people to interact, express and connect. While it has made scopes for efficient connectivity, it has also created a platform for the people to share thoughts and opinions. In the age of technology, social media makes it easier for the youth to combine and share their perceptions regarding all aspects of life and society. The inclusion of the youth in the social and political landscape of Bangladesh is particularly important and social media has been proven to be one of their core outlets for expression and interactions. However, the youth are also known to be disinterested in the political affairs of the country over the last several years. This study explores how the youth of Bangladesh interact and position themselves in the political landscape through the use of social media. It sheds light on how the youth define and learn about politics and the factors that influence their political engagement on online platforms. The young generation have become more inclined towards learning and talking about politics since the student movement of 2024, and by exploring their perceptions post the movement, it is observed that there are several underlying factors that lead towards their political engagement on social media. Feelings of responsibility, unity and hopefulness to make an impact and heavily encourages the youth to learn about the political issues of the country. However, issues such as misinterpretation and discrimination in online spheres demotivate people to consider social media as an important political tool. Through a comparative analysis, it was found that the youth are more interested in engaging with and expressing their political views after the movement of 2024 in contrast to their disinterest previously. This thesis contributes to the understanding of the youth's perceptions of politics and their choice of political engagement on social media in Bangladesh and to the advancement of the literature based on the student movement of 2024.

Keywords: Social media, politics, youth, political engagement, political apathy

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my two wings, Ammu and Baba, who gave me the chance to fly as far as I could.

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Chapter 01

Introduction:

Social media has become one of the most integral parts of our daily lives and our diverse personalities. It creates a network that accelerates our emotional communication and ideological expression and becomes the main channel for all kinds of interactions, be it social or political (Chengping, 2020). As the popularity of social media increased, the users' dependency on it also increased exponentially to the point that we cannot think of our lives beyond our social media identities and platforms. As it integrates into all channels of our lives, it also becomes an important outlet for political expression and engagement which further affects political participation among the people, especially the youth (Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). The ease of expression and efficiency of information seeking on the social media platforms has the ability to create positive change among the youth's political behavior and therefore, their political selves (Wang, 2007). In the context of Bangladesh, the youth's engagement in the political arena can be a creative and dynamic force which can influence the political systems and act as catalyst for much-needed changes in the political domain (Tamanna, 2018), which is possible through the use of social media. However, to understand the trajectory of political engagement of the youth on social media in this country, it is necessary to understand the history of Bangladesh, the movements which have mediated both online and offline political participation and the personal affordances that impact the choice of their political engagements.

1.1: Background:

For the longest period of time, when anyone would think about the political scenario of Bangladesh, it would be regarded as the battleground for two female leaders and parties run by them based on their family heritage. After the independence in 1971 to the coup in 1975, the country was run by the dominant party, Awami League and its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Following the coup, the country saw two military-backed regimes by Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Mohammad Ershad respectively and finally got the taste of democracy with the election in 1991 (Schendel, 2009). Since then, two dominant parties had been playing the political field like a game of catch, solidifying the two-party system. Democracy was fabricated to a certain level as the political parties played with the identities and beliefs, the painful remnants of the war and through the forceful dominance of familial political power (Jackman, 2021). However, history remains as proof that throughout all the turns of political power and progression, the youth were at the center. The student power has repeatedly brought change in the national, social and political backdrop of the country. When we study the history of the birth of Bangladesh, the highlights are the student protests that encouraged the civil people and pressured the authority to take measures. From 1952 to 2018, the country has seen several youth protests that stemmed out of social and cultural contexts and needs and soon turned into political phenomena (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). As the new century rolled in, we have the Shahbagh movement in 2013 and the quota reform movement and road safety movements in 2018 as remarkable examples of youth protests (Jackman, 2021).

Thousands of students along with civilians from different professions and classes called for a reconsideration of the verdict of a life sentence instead of a death penalty for a Jamaat leader for his war crimes of 1971 at Shahbag, which also started to be referred to as Gonojagoron Moncho

(mass awakening platform) (Jackman, 2021). This is the movement of 2013 which became larger when people started to protest against the politics of religious parties like Jamaat. As a result, thousands of followers, where most of them were madrasa students, of an Islamist group started to march towards central Dhaka with their 13 points demanding to promote Islam and its teaching (Jackman, 2021). A considerable role was played by the blogger community of the country where they participated in the protest online (Chowdhury, 2019). This was followed by a huge operation by the Awami League government and its party activists where hundreds of lives were lost, out of which most were left unreported. Again, 2018 was a happening year for the youth of the country as they went out into the streets for the right to their education, profession and most importantly the safety of their lives (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). The anti-quota movement was a result of discontent regarding the job opportunities in the public sectors where almost 56 percent of the seats were reserved for different quotas, out of which 30 percent was reserved for the children and grandchildren of the freedom fighters of 1971 (Jackman, 2021). For a generation that knows about the war only through books and stories, their future being at stake due to the remnants of the war seems unreasonable. Their resentment was further flamed by the issuing of fake freedom fighter certificates and not filling out the seats even if the quotas remained unfulfilled. The students also took to the Internet and social media to gain support from people all over the world and increase in number. They posted stories, pictures, videos etc. to let their voices be heard. The mass movement urged the government to make promises to reform the quota system, which the world by now knows were only fake promises then. Another movement that shook the entire country was the road safety movement which was sparked by the death of two college students due to an accident caused by racing public buses (Jackman, 2021). Hundreds of students were quick to act and they immediately demanded justice by blockading the roads. The students protested on the

roads for days, demanded for safer roads and stricter traffic laws and also started to enact the changes they wanted to see. The students did a remarkable job by managing the traffic, creating emergency lanes and checking vehicles for proper papers and license. Similar to the movements mentioned above, the road safety movement also gained major traction on social media. The youth posted pictures and videos of their protests on the streets to bring more people in. They also used social media to bring many heartbreaking and violent road accidents that have happened throughout the years to light. This helped to bring empathy among the people and motivate people to strongly demand reforms of road rules and laws. The above mentioned movements and protests stemmed from social causes and for the want of a better nation. However, as the movements grew to attract the government, the movements often became political and the youth were caught at an intersection between the social and the political.

The extent of the youth movements were not only seen on the streets but also on online outlets. Social media has mediated several youth movements as mentioned above. While these are only examples, there are numerous movements that only this country has seen, but has been seen globally too. With the use of hashtags, there have been global social media movements which have attracted people from all over the world and urged them to participate. While people will recognize the protests as they see it on the streets, they often fail to recognize the contemporary manifestations, which are online impressions on social media platforms (Wang, 2007). Social media becomes the center stage for the organization of the movements and controls how it is spread throughout different media and people. However, social media expressions leave a lot to imagination and misunderstanding, discouraging the youth to fully immerse themselves into the political discourse and conversations (Ullah, 2013). Social media has created innumerable opportunities for the people of all generations to express themselves through various platforms.

While social media has become an important outlet for the youth to express themselves politically, several factors can play a negative role in shaping the scope, forms and styles of expression (Weeks, Halversen, & Neubaum, 2023). The young people fear social sanctions in both their personal and professional lives when they expose themselves through political expressions. While political behavior can be acclaimed from a very personal level of individuality, political expression mostly depends on the feeling of community and social cohesion (Lane, et al., 2019). Ideological diversity found within the youth can often lead to decrease in political expression and hinder the level of commitment towards political discourses. Also, due to the complex nature of the political scenario of the country, the youth are believed to be apathetic and apolitical where they want to see dynamic social and political changes but do not want to be rigidly engaged in the political processes (Tamanna, 2018). The spread of false news, misinformation and rumors also discourage the youth from expressing their opinions. The lack of education and proper information on the political affairs lead the young people to become disinterested in political discourse. While there are many such factors that were recognized by various research work and studies regarding the youth's political expression on social media, recent occurrences in Bangladesh urge us to reconsider the youth's political expression and behavior on social media.

Bangladesh has seen an unprecedented turn in the political landscape which may be one of the most historically significant events the world has ever seen. What started as an anti-quota movement to ensure equal opportunities for all, turned into one of the biggest movements the country has ever seen, which eventually resulted in the fall of the "autocratic leader" Sheikh Hasina (Chughtai & Ali, 2024). Since the high court's decision to reinstate the 30 percent quota for the freedom fighters' descendants on 5th June, 2024, the streets were echoed with the demands for a fair system and more fuel was added to the fire when Sheikh Hasina termed the protestors as

"rajakars" (Sanyal, 2024). The authority and government started to mock the protestors and were insensitive towards the demand of the people. This only provoked the protestors further and they increased in number, both offline and online. While some marched on the streets and chanted their demands, others took to the internet to spread the right information, alert the international media and give constant updates on every situation. Both the offline and online spheres were united for a cause, and the cause was their rights to a fair nation. As the situation started to slip out from the government's hands, they started to take innocent lives all over the country while putting people under an internet shutdown for more than 5 days (Sanyal, 2024). As the internet came back, the people, especially the youth, returned online to carry out the movement alongside the people on the streets. . With the increase in violence and disregard for a fair system, the protests turned into a mass movement, where the people only wanted one thing, the fall of Hasina. Ultimately, on 5th August, Hasina was forced to resign, her constitution fell through and Bangladesh saw the rise of an interim government under the leadership of Dr. Mohammad Yunus (Sanyal, 2024). From the beginning of this student movement against discrimination, the people gradually started to raise their voices and openly express themselves, especially politically. The youth who were once apolitical and did not engage in political discourses or discussions, started to actively engage in every political debate and conversations. Even though the movement started to disperse from the streets, the online activism did not stop.

The country has not only seen a huge change in the political landscape of the country, it has also seen a remarkable change in the political expression of the youth. This leads to the objective of this research. The **objective** of this research is to understand the youth's perception of politics, to interpret their perspectives regarding their political engagement and behavior on social media and analyze the factors behind the probable changes within their choice of political engagement after

the student-led movement of 2024. This research aims to understand the pre and post-movement trends found within the political engagement of the youth on social media platforms. While different studies and research have found that the youth may often be doubtful, uninterested or discouraged to express themselves politically on social media, it is important to look into the youth's perspective once again after the "second independence" of Bangladesh.

1.2: Research Questions:

1. How does the youth learn about and interpret politics?

2. How did the youth's political engagement on social media change after the movement of 2024?

3. What factors influence the youth's choice of political engagement and expression on social media?

1.3: Research Rationale:

The youth of Bangladesh have a glorious history of political participation but according to recent trends and research, their inclusion in the political landscape seem to have diminished. However, this has changed after the quota-reform movement of 2024 and many voices have begun rising online and offline. There have been multiple studies done to understand and highlight how the youth navigate around social media for their political expression, none of them focus on the socio-political climate of Bangladesh since the movement of 2024 where we have seen the rise of a new voice among the current generation. They have taken to the streets and online to fight and express themselves in order to build a better societal landscape with improved political constructs. The research aims to understand how the youth views their political identity within the social media

realm after the movement and what factors they consider to become political actors. While many may still resort to their concerns and stay reserved on the political conditions of the country, there also may be a big part of the youth trying to build towards a more politically aware self. Through this study, it will be possible to understand the factors of change towards the choice of political engagement among the youth on social media in Bangladesh.

Chapter 02

Literature Review:

2.1.1: Social Media as a Platform for Political Engagement for the Youth:

There have been multiple studies done on the relationship between social media and political engagement. Social media platforms are one of the most crucial aspects that increases emotional and ideological communication among the youth (Chengping, 2020). It is a core outlet for the youth to be able to become important actors in the political and state affairs of a country. In an article by Chengping (2020), it is stated that social media has gradually become one of the main channels for political expressions with the development of new media technology. Through the interpersonal relationships built through the networks and the interactivity that social media promotes, a citizen is able to communicate and comment on the affairs of the government as permissible by the laws. While traditional political participation is restricted, social media creates a two-way pathway for the people to exchange information and expressions (Chengping, 2020). Social media and networks are a strong link for the youth the real world but due to reasons such as disconnect with the older generation's views on politics, lack of fairness and mutual benefit because of traditional hierarchy and fear of interpersonal friction that may cause with the incorporation of political ideas into the social lives, prevent most young people to be disconnected with the politics of a country. There needs to be political literacy and motivation for the youth to be involved in the political conversations of a country and promote higher political participation and it can be done through the use of social media.

In an article by Wang (2007), the interrelationship between Internet use and political attitudes and participation is analyzed in depth and it seeks to understand political behavior beyond the process of elections. The Internet and social media, through its efficient communication methods, opens a pathway for the users to be politically expressive but it also does not magically cause people to become politically interested overnight. Political participation depends on the information and surveillance rather than entertainment purposes on social media (Wang, 2007). The study was done by using Taiwan's Social Change Survey and with a sample size of 1,026, it was found that the respondents were more likely to engage in political interest and participation when they frequently expressed their political opinions. Social media networks create an efficient platform for mass participation because of the community that is built through sharing similar opinions and the ease of information sharing. However, Wang (2007) says that people are only eager to politically express themselves when they believe that there is a chance of impact from their expressions. When they believe that their opinions and efforts are going into deaf ears, unlike every other issue, the people will refrain from political conversation and participation too.

Political participation can be promoted through higher political expression on social media which can directly influence offline political activities for the youth (Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). According to the article by Zúñiga et.al. (2014), social media can contribute as a new antecedent of political expression and can influence the users to create a political identity. While traditional media have been helpful in political participation, social media has given rise to new heights of political expression from the grassroots due to its efficiency of expression, diversity and relationship building. Zúñiga et. al. state that similar to how talk precedes action, political expression has the ability to alter the youths identity from observer to participant. Social media is not only a platform to connect with friends and family, it also gives the users a scope to build their

varied identities and personalities and let them decide how they want to portray themselves. However, this also does not guarantee consistent political participation from the youth because there is an uncertainty of the social or political group they may engage with (Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). The study was done by drawing data from a two-wave U.S. national panel study and like many other studies, it also establishes a connection between the Internet and political participation. An individual may choose to build a self or identity on the social media networks through their own personality or distinction which may in future lead to political participation due to the space that social media creates and the new relationships these networks form. Zúñiga et.al. (2007) conclude that with the current generation as the largest user of social media and as social media becomes a core outlet for political participation, the connection between social media and politics is a step towards a more politically active future with the future generations.

2.1.2: Political Expressions Online Affect the Personal and Social Self:

In order to understand the connection and relationship between political engagement, political participation and social media, it is important to interpret how social media affects the social and political self. Lane, et al. (2019) suggest in their article that social media has the scope to influence political behavior while stimulating political self-representations of the people. It helps to create self-concepts which means a collection of perceptions, competences and engagement about politics and how an individual views themselves as political actors (Lane, et al., 2019). By understanding the perspectives of political expression, political representation and political self-concepts of several respondents, Lane, et al. (2019) found that online political expressions becomes a gateway for the users to view themselves as political beings and opens up their political participation. Once individuals engage politically in a public place, they are motivated to present

themselves as serious political actors of the state. It creates an identity which portrays them as knowledgeable and efficacious members who should be taken seriously in public spaces due to their opinions (Lane, et al., 2019). Stemming from our existing identities, having a platform online to express different opinions, users find it motivating to push their political views online (Lane, et al., 2019). All in all, the online spaces; social media can become a strong tool for political expressions and an impressive outlet for users to create and establish their self-concepts. However, due to different affordances offered by different social media sites, political expressions become difficult for the users.

According to Weinstein (2014), the personal has become widely political because online platforms have influenced not only individual identity but also social, political and civil expression. It is important to understand how the youth navigate through their personal and public identities online and how they treat online spaces as a venue for political expressions. It is also of concern how personal expressions have turned into political identities and the youth have to be aware of what they portray on online platforms, while drawing the line between offline engagement and online expressions (Weinstein, 2014). She states that individuals write themselves into being on social media and therefore they get to choose the facets of their identities that they want to portray while many choose to refrain from showing any civic or political expression due to longer term implications on the platforms. Through the research on 70 U.S. based respondents, it was found that 53% of them use a blended form of online lives where they express their offline civic opinions and work online as they believe that they have a bigger platform online to showcase themselves as serious civil actors. 19% of the respondents portrayed a bounded behavior where they refrain from expressing their offline beliefs and work online due to how the public will see them and what they might face due to their opinions (Weinstein, 2014). The rest of the respondents differentiate

between the social media platforms where they create different expression outlets according to the affordances of the platform. The online platforms are ripe with opportunities but also filled with challenges for the youth, especially when it comes to political or civil identities. The youth try to tailor their identities and personalize their online persona as much as they can and since their personal lives become easily debatable and political on these platforms, it is important for them to take as much control as they can.

2.1.3: Fear of Sanctions on Political Expression Online:

As the youth unite in social media networks to build their political identities and engagements and express the political self, there are several challenges and sanctions that they have to go through which may or may not limit their political and social engagements on social media. The inclusion and participation of the youth in politics can be a dynamic force which can bring positive and innovative changes for a country, but in the present political landscape, the youth's engagement is limited and scarce (Tamanna, 2018). In a research done by Tamanna (2018), around 200 young people were surveyed and interviewed to understand the perspective they have towards politics and to find the degrees of their disengagement in Bangladesh. In a country that has been ruled through a two-party system, led by two begums of power, the democratic system has turned into a futile attempt (Tamanna, 2018). The research, based on locations around Dhaka with a high concentration of universities, noted several reasons for the disengagement of the youth from politics such as the feeling of isolation from the political system, lack of security and financial resources which restrains from partaking in politics and lack of knowledge about the political system of the country which has been fueled by the alienation from the state. The youth expresses that even though they have strong patriotic feelings and vision for reforms for the country, they

are not being able to get the chance to express themselves where the leaders are reluctant to change (Tamanna, 2018). She states that there should be direct connection between the political leaders and the youth which can start conversations and engagement. While conversations are important, the youth also should be given financial resources and education through institutional efforts which can help them to form a young and fresh political party (Tamanna, 2018). Politics should not be seen as a luxury, rather it should be realized as a right of the citizens. The youth needs to have a sense of reliability and security to enter the political scene of the country.

According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space where "private people come together in public" in order to find and discuss critical knowledge that can lead to political change (Kruse, et al., 2017). Kruse, et al. (2017) state that social media has the potential to create speech communities which give rise to communicative action, turning the digital space into a public sphere. The visibility, discursive capabilities and access to unlimited information makes social media a public sphere but it also creates unequal space and unrealistic ideals of social communication (Kruse, et al., 2017). Kruse, et al. (2017) describe that the users are seen to restrict and isolate themselves from digital spaces when they fear differing ideas and competing views which is often fueled by social media surveillance. Based on a study done on 29 participants from a university in the U.S., where there was a mix of different race, age and gender, it was found that lack of civil discourse, fear of surveillance, and the 'hug-box' phenomenon were responsible for the reluctance of political expression on social media platforms among the people (Kruse et al., 2017). Users found it futile to engage in discursive conversations because people tend to be more hostile on social media, especially about politics and healthy debates would turn into heated arguments (Kruse, et al., 2017). This online behavior also instills fear of confrontational relationships both online and offline and leads them to take measures such as unfollowing,

unfriending or blocking someone online (Kruse, et al., 2017). Personal and professional surveillance also forces the users to manage a pleasant and proper persona online. Kruse, et al. (2017) describe 'hug-box' as the restriction of connections which would lead to differing opinions and forging relationships with people who are like-minded which is also accelerated by the capital market forces on social media. The capitalistic forces also disrupt the dichotomy between the public and private lives because there is an invasion of personal space. Again, according to the users, social media is a happy and fun place where they do not want to engage in serious issues such as politics and create hostile conversations and they believe that these topics are better suited for face-face interactions (Kruse, et al., 2017). While social media has all the potential of becoming a public sphere where the private and public space of the users converge due to capitalistic means, it has also created major confusion among people when it comes to expression, especially political expressions.

Social media has created myriad opportunities for the users to express their political opinions but many refrain from doing so because of their fear of personal and professional repercussions (Weeks, et al., 2023). Weeks, et al. (2023) state that online users who have diverse political voices and expressions self-censor themselves due to negative repercussions and consequences and are less likely to share or converse with like-minded people. A theory called "spiral of silent theory', as mentioned by Weeks, et al. (2023) in their article, means that the users fear social isolation which forces them to monitor their online behavior, more often if their opinions do not align with the majority. Network diversity negatively affects political expressions but with so many options at hand, it is also important to look into the high and low commitment forms of expressions (Weeks, et al., 2023). Since the online space is so vast, the users especially inhibit the political expressions because of dispositional fears or the fear of social sanctions. The fact that online

expressions circulate for a really long time and it is nearly impossible to regulate the audience you are reaching to, the users refrain from such uncertain conditions (Weeks, et al., 2023). The users are driven with fear whenever they exhibit themselves and expressions on online platforms which negatively affects their online political participation because they would rather prevent than cure negative consequences. Weeks, et al. (2023) state that the ideological composition of the users' networks play an effective role in understanding their fear of social media expressions where they portray as much as they can afford without facing the wrath of the online world.

2.1.4: The Bangladesh Context:

In order to understand how social media can influence political engagement within the youth in Bangladesh, we also need to look into the affordances and activities that the youth of this country are a part of or can participate in. The youth of this country has gone through tremendous social and political movements where social media has played an integral role. Al-Zaman (2023) states that since Facebook is such an integral part of the people's lives, it is important to see how politically active and expressive people use Facebook and engage in political communication. Through the use of commenting, sharing and reacting to posts, Facebook users produce non-verbal expressions and elements to participate in the political trends and communications (Al-Zaman, 2023). Through a research done on the Facebook pages of Bangladesh's leading political parties, this study focuses on how the people of Bangladesh interact on the political party pages and the implications of it. The study finds that, among the Facebook pages of BAL (Bangladesh Awami League, BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and Jamaat-e-Islami, BAL had the highest interactions on their page in the last 10 years which were mostly done through reactions by emoticons. There was an abundance of care and love reactions for the BNP page which taps into

a more emotional side of the users while more haha and angry reacts were seen on the BAL pages which indicate that users were leaning towards a feeling of hate and mockery towards the party (Al-Zaman, 2023). Al-Zaman (2023) states, through the analysis of the study, that it is possible to conclude that the political parties use a certain emotional approach in the political discourse to create an echo chamber among the users. There needs to be a policy shift among the distribution of content and transparency on the Facebook pages of the political parties to promote participation that creates an equitable environment.

In another article by Ullah (2013), it is noted that political activism and attitudes among the youth of Bangladesh can be influenced by the information and communication technologies. It is an in-depth work which explores how the current generation, the educated youth of Bangladesh, have engaged in political and civic activities, which can be distinguished from the previous generation, through the use of ICT. Through a study based on 69 participants from all over the country, it was found that political activism is done through two processes, one is done according to the instructions of the party higher-ups or by being a part of an organization directly affiliated with a political party and another is by being a conscious citizen who has the desire to be responsive towards the country (Ullah, 2013). If the latter may be called social activists, who are driven towards their social interests, the former is known as party activists who are active in participation in the political activities of the country for the sake of the party. The use of ICT has opened up a new avenue for the youth to express themselves politically and mobilize not only online actions but also offline participation. The study finds that, through the use of ICT, the youth are able to find an alternative channel to exchange and express political conversation within the circles within their generation, because there still is a significant disconnect among the older and current generation when it comes to politics. The youth are able to immediately express themselves

through the use of Internet, but the question of pure democratic opinion and participation remains as illiterate youths of the rural areas fail to include themselves within the digital spaces (Ullah, 2013).

The key to politics in Bangladesh is visibility and social media creates the ultimate platform for performativity and image that accelerates political performances and engagement (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). The article by Kuttig and Suykens (2020) also focuses on as Facebook one of the most central platform as a digital space for political visibility among the youth. Even though digital spaces are an extension of the offline political performativity, it creates a space for the youth to create their own political identities and behavior through the use of texts and images. Social media is not only used by the youth of the country to portray their political expressions, but it is used heavily by the politicians to create an image of attention, affection or trust (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). The youth, especially the students of this country, has been one of the most important roles in shaping the political landscape of Bangladesh which has been done by both party affiliations or driven by social causes through individual or communal efforts. The main aim of this article is to understand visibility and performativity as the driving force of the politics in Bangladesh and how social media becomes integral in this endeavor. It is a pivotal space to display political participation and networks that can boost the political image for anyone who is interested in it (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). Using the digital space, especially Facebook, allows the youth to display their commitment towards a certain political party or political cause and it transforms mundane activities into effective performances when it is made visible in the right manner. In a context where visibility matters the most, the digital space becomes imperative and that is the case for the political dynamics of Bangladesh.

2.1.5: Research Gap:

There have been multiple studies on the relationship between social media and political expression leading to political participation. Current research focuses on the importance of social media for promoting political inclusion within the younger generations and how the youth can navigate around the affordances of social media. Studies also focus on different sanctions that social media users face online and offline due to the lack of proper appropriate initiative and opportunity to politically express themselves. However, there is limited research done in the context of Bangladesh and the concept of political expression on social media have not been thoroughly explored. Since the student movement of 2024, there has been a wave of political expression and engagement among the youth of Bangladesh which has fueled new forms of belonging within the political landscape of the country. The political transitions the people of the country recently saw has been tremendous with the youth being at the center of all of it and social media has played a big role in catalyzing the movement. As one of the most recent phenomenon, there has not been significant research surrounding the student movement and this research aims to contribute to understand how the youth perceive political conversations and engagements on social media after the movement and how it has evolved throughout their years.

2.2: Theoretical Framework:

2.2.1: Habermas's "Public Sphere":

Jürgen Habermas's theory of "public sphere" denotes that a public sphere is created when private individuals assemble to create a public body that enables them to showcase and express their opinions regarding matters of general interest. If we are to put this theory within the political

interest, a political public sphere gives the people the freedom to express the matters of the state, which further urges the state to care for the public and their wellbeing, especially in a democratic form of government. When the control of the state depends on the democratic nature of the government, the political public sphere gains an institutional influence over the law making bodies. According to Habermas, the public sphere acts as the mediator between the state and the society where private people, who were excluded from the public authority that consisted of religious or political authority, came together to form a public body. From the era of the monarchies and feudal authority, the church had majorly dominated the public opinion but by the end of the eighteenth century, religion became a private matter and people, especially the bourgeoisie, formed the public sphere based on national and territorial affairs. Society, as a result, stood directly in opposition to the state and state affairs became a concern of public interest.

However, there is a blurring distinction between the public and private spheres since the public sphere consists of private individuals who formed a social cohesion to separate themselves from the private. While the public sphere is formed with a group of people trying to represent and express their opinions, they are also private conversations which grew in numbers and left the private atmosphere. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television may have been the media for the public sphere, but in today's time, social media triumphs them all as it converges the public and private spheres. An individual's private and public spheres are now intertwined at more than one intersection and social media has enabled them to express themselves in a larger manner. In order to understand the nature of political engagement among the youth within social media, Habermas's theory of the public sphere is critical since it highlights and conceptualizes the public discourses derived from private conversations regarding the political and state issues.

2.2.2: Chowdhury's "Resistance Sociality":

To further build on the understanding of the intersection of society and social media, the study draws from Moiyen Zalal Chowdhury's notion of resistance sociality (2019) which establishes a relationship between social media, society and resistance. The history of Shahbag movement in 2013 stands as testament to how a social media movement can not only be online, but it can transcend into the offline sphere. With the emergence of blogging spaces and a community of unheard but effective voices in the political sphere, the bloggers and online activists started their journey from 2006 (Chowdhury, 2019). Through social media movements, the youth are able to express their interaction and participation about a specific topic which, even if generated through online activism, can eventually be taken offline. Social media provides the youth with a platform to expose their intensities or interest about the topic which depends on their social media political efficacy, or the belief among the participants that their political actions on social media will directly or indirectly affect their environment (Chowdhury, 2019). The theory of resistance sociality interprets that social media has the ability to create social temporality and spatiotemporally which can eliminate the boundaries and borders between the local or the global and the public or the private. With leadership and the call for action, it is possible to take social media movements into larger platforms. Using this theory, this study analyzes the youth's choice to engage in political conversations and participation on social media platforms, in light of the quota-reform movement of 2024.

2.2.3: Glasius's "Authoritarian Practices":

In order to understand the political engagement among the youth, it is necessary to understand the political scenario of the country. To interpret the political nature of Bangladesh, this study looks into the notion of authoritarian practices as defined by Marlies Glasius (2018). A common trend that can be found in countries who have been established as democratic states is the emergence of authoritarian nature or authoritarianism which can also be seen in Bangladesh for the past several years. Authoritarianism has been defined by political scientists and theories as the opposite of democracy, heavily focused on the conduction of fair election and in a negative sense which is only located at the state level (Glasius, 2018). The definition does not include how democratic states may present autocratic nature or traits which can be shown by the leaders "democratically" elected by the people. In this case, Glasius introduces the definition of authoritarian practices which denotes that in an organized setting, a power-holding actor will sabotage accountability to the forum by disabling their access to information and their voices, where the power-holding actor may be a political actor or representative and the forum is the people under the actor's leadership. Access of information can be either through secrecy or by deliberately providing false information to the people on a regular basis, whereas, voices can be disabled by enforcing penalization, intimidation, discouragement or bribery. All of the mentioned trends have been recognized by the youth of this country and have influenced their political engagement to a great extent. In order to understand their choice of political engagement on social media, it is necessary to understand the unseen and hidden authoritarian practices of the country which the youth were encapsulated in.

By using the above mentioned theories and notions, this study intends to understand the youth's scope of being able to transcend from their private spaces into the public sphere through social

media. Drawing from the real life experiences of the respondents, it is possible to understand the conditions and factors that led to their choice of political engagement and interpret how they navigated through their political self and resistance on social media in a complicated political environment that was not readily welcome to include and incorporate the youth's voices.

2.3: Conceptual Framework:

2.3.1: Politics and Political Behavior:

If asked to define politics, it becomes difficult to put it into a box which would justify its diverse meanings. In order to understand how the youth of Bangladesh define politics, we also have to recognize that politics may have several constructs that fit into each individual's definition. According to Eulau (1986), politics is a field with several individualistic and collective manifestations that consists of complex social events and cannot be obtained within the self-society continuum as the self and society are heavily intertwined in the political life. In politics, there is a pole where the individuals have preferences, expectations, demands and needs, and on the other end there is society that consists of minute to giant organizations that act as the field of action. The political relationship among the self and the society converges at micro and macro levels and emphasizes on the reciprocal and developmental characters. Individuals need to be considered as the unit of action and not within a collective or within the presence of another individual, and therefore encouraging the social self. Eulau (1986) attempts to define political behavior and denotes that it is important to return to the root of politics which is man and attaches the political behavior to the attributes and characteristics that showcases their incorporation with the state, government and political power. However, in order to define politics or political behavior, we are

constraining the margins of the concepts and therefore, limiting the field of politics since it can enable an individual to both rule and obey, persuade and comprise, coerce and represent and even fight or fear within their social values or personal ideologies (Eulau, 1986).

2.3.2: Understanding the Political Self and Identity:

Gentry (2018) says that in order to establish a political identity, an individual has to understand their role and scope within the political world and create an inner narrative that expresses their political self. The process of identifying the political identity, an individual is required to separate themselves from others and articulate how their ideologies are built differently. Building a political identity or political self is a process that requires maturation of ideologies and requires commitments to certain political beliefs according to the requirements of the environment. While an individual may have different identities, the political identity denotes the understanding of a good society or government and their expectations from the said institutions. Younger adults or the youth try to find their footing in the political system and understanding of their political identities through the internalization of political knowledge that matures as they age (Gentry, 2018). It is important to focus on the youth because they are at an explorative stage where many may have formed their beliefs, many are questioning their surroundings and others may still be a blank slate when it comes to establishing their political identity. Following Gentry's (2018) research, this study focuses on how the youth of Bangladesh are forming their political identity and therefore expressing their political beliefs. It is important to understand the political identity development within the youth to understand how their behaviors and actions portray them as political creatures. Once they form their political identity, the youth are likely to express, debate and resist certain events and narratives according to their political knowledge.

Chapter 03

Methodology:

3.1: Respondent Selection:

This research undertakes a cross-sectional study among a specific group of people, mainly in the early-late twenties within a fixed period of time. To understand the scope of political engagement on social media and the varying factors behind it under different political or social circumstances, the research focuses on the youth. Through purposive sampling, the most informative group of participants were chosen to meet the objectives of the research and to not shift the focus of the analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This led towards selecting a small sample size through which we could get the most information that is necessary for the research and to draw conclusions. 15 respondents were chosen and they went through individual interviews with the researcher where the questions focused on understanding of politics, their interpretation of political phenomena and their approach towards political engagement on social media. For this research, the heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling method was applied because even though the sample size was small, the variation in the descriptions given by the participants were aligned with the key themes and hypothesis that was being observed (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). All the respondents were selected from different undergraduate majors to have a more holistic understanding of their thoughts and opinions and how their academic backgrounds helped shape them. Through the interviews, it was understood that the respondents were from middle to upper middle class families, with sufficient family incomes that allow them to study at a private university with higher costs. This information was useful to understand how their position in the

society has affected their interest and engagement in political issues and conversations before and after the student movement. For a more practical approach, participant selection was limited to students enrolled at one private university (BRAC University) and was dispersed among different streams, departments and undergraduate terms.

The reason behind choosing BRAC University students is the intensity of its students' involvement during the protest on 18th July, 2024, which was witnessed by the researcher and the respondents. The students of BRAC University displayed tremendous dedication and passion towards the cause of the movement, which was reflected in their online and offline engagements throughout and after the movement. It was especially important to not generalize the experiences and expression of the students' political behavior or engagement and therefore, the research was limited to one university. By interviewing and observing their online interactions, it was understood that each of them had different perspectives which could not have been classified into different university categories. The focus of the study was to comparatively analyze the youth's political engagement before and after the movement and not compare amongst several universities. This study is to understand and compare the individual experiences and perceptions of the youth regarding their political participation and is not a comparative analysis on different universities. The study does not explore the comparisons between universities rather focuses on the youth's experiences. One private university was also chosen to eliminate the debate between public and private universities and the diverse experiences the students' have when it comes to political engagement since the research was done after the quota movement of 2024.

The research also partook in blended ethnography by observing their online engagements and offline perspectives through interviews. Using the concept of "information ecology", which emphasizes the use of multiple internet applications and technologies for simultaneous and

interrelated forms of expression and activism (Penney, 2019), the research focuses on the social media platform usage of the participants. By going through their online and social media profiles, the respondents was selected based on their political engagement on the said platforms. The study intended to find a diverse group of participants who have been politically engaging online on various levels. By choosing respondents who are actively, semi-actively or non-actively engaged in political expression on social media, which was done by preliminary conversations and viewing their posting histories, we had the opportunity to look into different perspectives for further analysis.
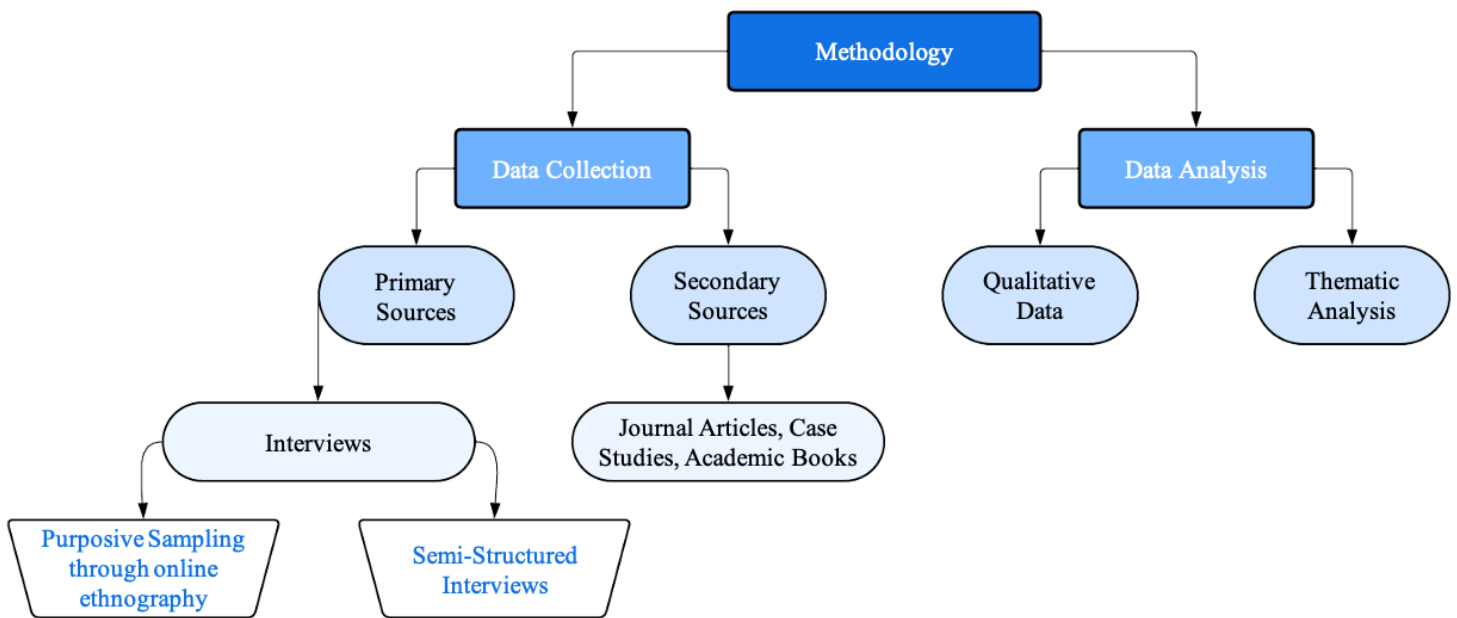

Figure 1: Structure of Methodology

3.2: Data Collection:

The primary source of the data collection was the interviews with the selected participants and by observing their social media usage. The respondent interviews were conducted both offline and online and the range of the duration of the interviews were 40-180 minutes. Depending on the

responses and experiences of the respondents, a few of the questions were added to further understand their opinions and ideas. The questioning was done in a semi-structured and open-ended manner to bring out the entirety of the respondents' experiences. This method allowed to cover the themes of the research, omit and add questions according to the objective of the research and provide depth to the analysis and discussion of the findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The respondents were given clear instructions and brief about the study so that they were fully aware of their participation. They all gave clear verbal consent to being a part of the study and upon their request, their anonymity has also been protected. They were also asked to consent to being audio-recorded for the transcription of the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in English for the convenience of data analysis.

A survey was attempted to attain some quantitative data but it was unsuccessful in providing substantial depth to the qualitative data. The survey consisted of close-ended questions which were answered through a Likert scale by several respondents who were not part of the interviews. Since it was difficult to get a larger number of people to give out in depth answers to the questions that would satisfy the analysis of the research, the survey was conducted. However, since the questions were close-ended and were limited to common statements found from the interviews of the 15 respondents, it was difficult to analyze the reason behind the survey responses. Through thorough analysis of the interviews, saturation of data was achieved and the survey responses failed to add substantial value to the findings. The survey was later omitted from the findings and analyses of the research. The research has been done entirely based on qualitative data derived from the interviews of the respondents and their social media engagements.

The secondary source of the research was literature review where several journal articles, books and newspapers were thoroughly studied to support the findings and the analyses. Different literary

sources were found and researched on to find theories, findings and analyses based on similar topics which gave a better understanding of this research. By studying the existing literature and theories based on similar issues and topics, this study was built and further analyzed with the help of the interviews.

3.3: Data Analysis:

After substantial interviews and conversations with the participants, the responses were coded, summarized and categorized into broad themes by thematic analysis. The broad themes were further sectioned into sub-themes to understand the underlying factors of each broad theme. The broad themes were interpreted based on the research questions and the sub-themes were categorized based some recurring responses from the respondents. The research followed both an exploratory and explanatory method for the requirement of the analysis of the research. The application of both methods allowed us to build on the existing theories and research data while finding new data to explore the concepts further and in a different light (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). By thematic analysis, the responses was further studied to find relationships with the socially constructed concepts and research hypotheses. This method allowed us to describe, define and comprehend the responses and categorize them into accompanying themes for analytical benefit of the research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). There was thorough comparative analysis done based on the responses to understand the underlying analytical themes. All the responses were compared and contrasted with other responses to understand if there were similar themes or concepts that were being mentioned by the participants. After the responses were coded, it became easier to categorize the data according to the themes and analysis of the research. With the codes and responses, summaries were drawn simultaneously to make the final analysis

and discussion of the research based on the theoretical framework. The categorization of the responses according to the themes made it easier to compare and contrast within the theoretical framework, theories and research previously done and highlight the core objectives of this research and it was possible to come to an understanding about the choices and factors of change of political engagement on social media among the youth in Bangladesh.

Chapter 04

Understanding Politics and the Youth's Political Interest:

4.1: Participants' Demographic Background:

It is important to look into the personal and social factors that work towards the building of the political ideas of the youth of Bangladesh and how they view themselves as political beings in the society. Their thoughts and perception move forward towards building their choice of political expression and engagement on not only the online platforms, but in offline arenas. In order to understand how the youth of Bangladesh portray their political expressions online, we need to interpret what they think of politics, how they define their political margins and how they engage and put interest in political matters. Their knowledge about the political history and affairs also build their perception towards politics because not only it is the stepping stone towards building their expressions, it also determines their ideologies and future trajectories.

All the respondents of this study were within the age range of 22-26 years old with an average of 12-15 years of experience on social media usage. With the usage of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and Whatsapp, they have built substantial profiles online which are reflections of their offline lives. While many of the respondents do not spend more than 3-5 hours online on a daily basis, the others have stated that they are more likely to spend more than 8 hours on social media through which it can be understood that social media encompasses a big part of their daily lives. It also determines how they differentiate between their online and offline lives and how they choose to express themselves on both spheres (Chowdhury, 2019). Their experiences both online and offline helped to understand how they view their personas and build them

according to the affordances that they are part of. With social media as one of the core outlets to express their opinions and thoughts, it was possible to understand how the respondents made their choice of political participation online (Lane, et al., 2019). Understanding the trajectories of their social media usage was important to interpret how they navigate online to portray themselves as political beings and indulge in political conversations.

The respondents are all students or alumni of Brac University with different degrees which helped to understand the trajectory of their ideologies and thoughts built through academic pursuits. There was a mix of 2nd to 4th year students with different majors and as well as two graduates in the respondent group. Out of the 15 respondents, 4 of them have Anthropology as their major, 4 are Economics majors, 2 are English majors, 2 of them are CSE (Computer Science Engineering) majors, 1 of them has a Law major and the other 2 are EEE (Electrical and Electronic Engineering) majors. Through their undergraduate majors, most of them have indulged in further understanding of the political landscape of Bangladesh, be it for academic purposes or self-interest. With an ability of critical thinking and analyzing, they have tried to refocus on what they have learned throughout the years, especially after the movement of 2024. Not only their undergraduate studies, but the respondents have also mentioned that their primary and secondary educations have also affected their understanding of politics. As mentioned by the respondents, they have all acquired education on the history of Bangladesh and the political trajectory of the country which they believe has not been part of the whole story and they are eager to learn more of it. Their academic histories have helped shape their understanding about politics and knowledge about political history which will be highlighted in the following chapters.

There was a mix of male and female respondents where 9 of them were females and 6 of them were males. While we were able to see similar interest and passion among respondents about

politics and political issues, there was much to be dissected when it came to the environment of the online and offline platforms which affect how they portray themselves. Both online and offline spheres are not necessarily kind to the females and they have more to contemplate about when they choose to express themselves directly or indirectly regarding politics (Ullah, 2013). Through their experiences and thoughts, it was possible to understand how the gender factor is integrated in the choice of political engagement on social media.

Table 1: Demography of Participants

Name	Sex & Age	Educational Qualification	Most used social media platforms	Social media usage (on a daily basis)
Adiba	Female, 24	4th Year, Major in Anthropology	Instagram, Facebook	Few hours
Anika	Female, 22	2nd Year, Major in Economics	Instagram, Facebook, Messenger	5-6 hours
Anindita	Female, 23	4th Year, Major in English	Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Telegram	12-15 hours
Aonkita	Female, 22	3rd Year, Major in Economics	Instagram, Facebook	Few hours
Farhat	Female, 24	3rd Year, Major in CSE	Instagram, Facebook, Discord, Emails	1-3 hours
Fardeen	Male, 23	4th Year, Major in EEE and CSE	Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Tiktok	3-5 hours
Hasan	Male, 23	4th Year, Major in Law	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter	2-3 hours
Jenny	Female, 24	Graduate, Major in Anthropology (2023)	Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp	3-5 hours
Labib	Male, 23	4th Year, Major in EEE	Instagram, Facebook	3-5 hours
Mahima	Female, 22	4th Year, Major in Anthropology	Instagram, Facebook	7-8 hours
Maimuna	Female, 25	Graduate, Major in English (2024)	Instagram, Facebook	3-5 hours
Sabah	Female, 22	3rd Year, Major in Economics	Instagram, Facebook	10-12 hours
Sayad	Male, 26	4th Year, Major in Anthropology	Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp	5-7 hours
Shaheer	Male, 24	3rd Year, Major in Economics	Instagram, Facebook, Linkedin	3-5 hours
Shangram	Male, 22	3rd Year, Major in EEE	Instagram, Facebook	3-5 hours

4.2: Knowledge and Understanding about Politics:

4.2.1: Learning from the families and the older generation:

The first objective of this study was to understand what the youth think about politics, how they define politics in their own terms and how their understanding of politics in Bangladesh is built. To interpret their thoughts and ideas regarding politics, they were asked how they got their knowledge about the socio-political history of the country and how it helped to shape their perceptions. Many of the respondents have also mentioned that their knowledge and information comes from their families. The interests of the families as a whole have helped many to determine their own interests about political concepts. Their families have urged them to become part of discussions and conversations which have helped build a larger net of opinions for them. Hasan (23), a Law major, stated,

"I come from a family of lawyers and judges. Even before there was social media, I would always hear my parents and grandparents discuss politics. Once I started studying law, the knowledge I had from before was further intensified."

Maimuna (24) said she had grown up in a family that had discussions about various topics on a regular basis and that is how she grew up to understand more about politics and the country. She said,

"I think because my family is tight-knit and close to one another, we used to always have discussions about several current affairs. We used to talk about certain propagandas and facades in a very conversational manner. I believe that has made me see things in a different manner."

While families can be the source of critical knowledge and conversations regarding politics, there have also been trends of party loyalties among the families of Bangladesh. Due to the bipartisan nature of politics in the country for the longest period of time, the previous generations have submitted to each of the party's sides (Jackman, 2021). It was also mentioned by some of the respondents that they have always felt that their parents were inclined towards one particular party. Ullah (2013), in his research found that there has been a distance between the new generation and the older generation when it comes to politics. The younger generation would rather not vote than vote just for their parent's loyalty towards a political party. Since the youth start learning from their families, their thoughts regarding politics also tend to become restrictive in such cases.

4.2.2: Learning about a pushed narrative:

All of the interlocutors stated that their education on the history of Bangladesh started at a young age because of their primary level studies. Their knowledge started from the understanding of the liberation war and how it shaped the trajectory of the country moving forward. However, while they give credit to their primary education which helped them to learn about the birth of the country, they are also skeptical about knowing the entire story. According to Al-Zaman (2023), there has been an imminent risk of emotional manipulation in political discourse in Bangladesh. As a generation that has been born and brought up under a certain government regime, they believe that they have grown up being enclosed in a certain narrative which many have termed as "propaganda". Adiba (24), an Anthropology major stated,

"My entire understanding of Bangladesh's politics has been shaped by the previous regime that just left. They had a certain propaganda that they liked to push, like the liberation war narrative, and it shaped how different ethnicities and religions were treated."

A similar sentiment was shared by Shaheer (24), an Economics major,

"I think for the last 15 years, the regime had reshaped our minds and skewed it to a point where it was biased towards them for our entire history and our founding fathers through the education systems and textbooks."

Some of the respondents expressed their thoughts about feeling blindsided and influenced into believing a certain narrative about the political landscape of the country and therefore, the history of Bangladesh and its roots. The bipartisan nature of the political landscape of the country gave rise to destructive and confrontational political culture which made the youth focus away from political conversation (Ullah, 2013). A CSE major, Fardeen (23) stated,

"The villainization of certain political parties was something that was very prominent growing up. It shaped my naïve young brain. Another thing I experienced was the propaganda of glorifying the father of the nation, which in the last two months I have come to realize. I am slowly starting to realize the history that has been hidden away."

4.2.3: Indulging in advanced knowledge through research:

It was reflected from the participants' responses that even though they had grown up learning about a fixed narrative, they have made efforts to learn further and enrich their knowledge about the political background of the country and about current affairs. As they progressed through their academic journeys, most of them took the initiative to educate themselves further for both academic purposes and self-knowledge. They indulged in books and articles that gave them reliable and credible knowledge about the political landscape of the country and helped them

acquire a diverse set of critical thinking and gave them the scope to look into different perspectives. Labib (23), an EEE major mentioned,

"Brac helped me formulate my political thoughts through its courses which included critical thinking activities. I have also found friends with similar interests who have helped me look into politics from an ideological point of view."

Anindita (24) and Maimuna (24), both are English majors and they have expressed that they have always relied on academic books to formulate their thoughts about politics. Belonging to a similar academic background, they think that their academic endeavors have always required them to be updated about the political histories and current affairs which have heavily impacted their understanding of the concept. According to Chengping (2020), it is important for the youth to become knowledgeable towards political concepts to build their political expression.

4.2.4: Social media as a mode of knowledge:

However, it was not just academic books or articles that provided knowledge for them. Some of the respondents have also credited the role of social media and the Internet in helping them learn. According to Zúñiga et.al. (2014), previous research has always showcased the information use of the Internet which can also be further transformed in expression. The participants have expressed that their initial curiosity starts from a post or a status that they see on social media platforms which urges them to dig through the issue. Shangram (22), an EEE major stated,

"Even though it is an unpopular opinion currently, most of the time when you look at something political, it comes from social media. I check the comment sections to see the various perspectives

of the people regarding the issue. I try to find different narratives if I find the comment section to

be one-sided.”

A similar thought was expressed by a CSE major, Farhat (24),

“I have not always been much of a newspaper reader but I find myself going through different

issues when I see them on online portals and social media. When I find something interesting, I

research it further.”

Some of the other respondents have also mentioned the role of Instagram and YouTube in helping them get further insights on political topics that intrigue them. They go through different posts and videos to understand the gist of a situation which leads them to decide if they want to know about the issue further. It is important that the youth attain media literacy (Chengping, 2020) and social media and online platforms have worked as a provider of bite-sized information which the youth are able to digest before indulging themselves in the intense research.

4.2.5: Diverse definitions of politics:

While the respondents have expressed that they believe they have been a part of façade throughout their childhood, they have also taken initiatives on their own efforts to get into the right side of the stories. They have educated themselves through different pursuits and with the help of their friends and family. It can be observed that an individual's background and surroundings help build their perceptions in an impactful manner. They are able to find their own paths and narratives through critical thinking and research and the current generation are eager to find out their own truths and get out of the shackles of pushed narratives (Ullah, 2013). However, while they learn about the past, they also build their own narratives and opinions about politics. As every individual tends to

dig into further information, they also shape their own definitions and interpretations of politics. Politics is one such phenomenon that cannot be enclosed in one certain definitive term. From the concept by Gentry (2018), we can observe that understanding politics comes from several personal and collective manifestations which can be shaped according to the individuals' conscience and understanding. With different understandings come different definitions which vary from one person to another and such a trend was found among the respondents too.

While some people see politics as a grand scheme of things that includes everything starting from the society to the government, others believe that politics is within us in the smallest of things and it is very personal to oneself. According to Fardeen (23), *"People are a mosaic of different opinions and politics boils down to the people, their opinions and how they embody them."*

Adiba (24) said,

"Every aspect of who you are and what you do is somehow connected to a political situation and therefore I believe that everything is political."

Similar sentiments have been observed from the thoughts of another respondent, Aonkita (22), an Economics major,

"The combination of my identities determine my politics. I think everything around me is political and how I choose to conduct myself in this environment is how I define politics."

However, none can deny that politics is determined by the affairs of the state and the government. This opinion was mirrored in the thoughts of some of the respondents. They believe that anything that comprises society is within the constraints of politics. Farhat (24) believes that politics refers to the ground set of rules of decision making within a state which should evolve with time. She said,

"The whole ideology of politics depends on the geographical location of a country or the ethnicity of the citizens or the time and era that we live in. So it is not a static scheme or discipline."

Shaheer (24), in a similar manner, stated,

"I believe politics is about statecraft. I understand it to be a conversation about the overall welfare of the country and its people."

Another trend of thought found within the respondents was the connection between politics and welfare. They believe that politics is the method through which the welfare of the country can be determined and carried out. Labib (23) said,

"The Arabic term for politics is "siasa" which when translated means taking care of the people. I believe in this term and want to view politics as a positive aspect that simply benefits from taking care of the people of a country. Even though it might a utopian definition, I want this meaning to exist"

Politics cannot be constrained within a one-dimensional bracket and neither can it be defined in a fixed manner. Politics has its very own contexts and concepts which are embodied by different individuals in different manners. According to Eulau (1986), the margins of politics transcend the affairs of the state because politics is the process in which an individual grows their identity as self and not into a collective. According to the concepts by Gentry (2018) and Eulau (1986), and the responses of the participants, we can observe that it is important for the youth to understand their roles within the state to determine how they want to engage and include themselves into the political landscape. Their understanding of the politics further establishes their relationship with the phenomenon and helps build their opinions around it.

4.3: Interest in politics (before the movement):

According to their perspectives and their roles within the society, the youth decide how they want to interact in political matters and conversations. Their interests are built on the foundation of how they view politics. The youth are eager to find their footing in the political sphere with their acquired knowledge and interest (Gentry, 2018). Another objective of this study is to understand where the interests of the youth lie when it comes to politics. According to previous studies, it has been observed that the youth are unlikely to be politically involved and interact in political conversations. The youth have displayed feelings of disinterest and detachment when it comes to political conversations and they have also expressed their unlikeliness to include themselves in the complex nature of the country's politics (Tamanna, 2018). However, significant changes within the youth's political interests have been noticed since the movement of 2024 in Bangladesh. More and more people are inclined towards being included in the political landscape of the country and become part of the change with their voice. This study aims to understand why and how their interests fluctuate with a comparative analysis of the participants' responses to how they view changes in their interests.

Many of my respondents have said that they had minimal to no interest in politics earlier to the movement. They said that they had feelings of hopelessness and insignificance when it came to putting their attention towards the political conversation of the country.

4.3.1: Feeling of hopelessness:

Farhat (24) mentioned that she did not find much interest in politics because she did not think there was an outlet for positive change. She said,

"I had never found it very amusing or it never boggled my mind enough. There were a lot of things going on around me which I did not believe I could be a part of since most of the people were blindsided by a particular political party."

Sabah (22), an Economics major, mentioned that she saw politics as the bad side of society where people only cared about their own personal gains. She did not find hope in involving in a concept that only looked towards personal gains. She said,

"Politics for me only meant bad politics where it was just about how people misuse their power. My interpretation of politics led me to become more disinterested in political issues because I did not believe that we may have the ability to become part of positive change."

Labib (23) said that seeing the realities on the ground, he felt a deep sense of helplessness. He said,

"I felt like things needed to change but I did not know how to do it or how long it would take. I never felt that I have any say or anyone has any say no matter how much they study. I always felt that I was not going to be able to make any changes."

Moving forward, many of the respondents mentioned that their feeling of being insignificant or hopeless towards the political affairs of the country led them to feel that they were unsubstantial elements of the society. Their lack of disinterest led them to feel that their opinion held minimal weight when it came to the grand scheme of affairs. According to Blair (2020), the unchanging political nature of Bangladesh came from the long history of authoritarian practices, which we can relate to with the concept of Glasius's concept, where change has been insignificant for the youth to look forward too. With the youth not being able to push through the political regimes and voice their own choices in this country, it was difficult to wish for their interest and inclusion on any level.

4.3.2: Feeling unsubstantial:

While there was a want for knowledge, the respondents mentioned that they had nothing to add to the narrative of political concepts because they believed that no one was willing to take in alternate ideas. Being away from different perspectives and ideas put them in a space where they believed their voices were not to be heard. From the theory of Glasius (2018), we can understand that the lack of information and secrecy by the government led to lower interest among the youth because outlets to invite new opinions were blocked by a power-holding authority.

Tasfia (23), an Economics major, mentioned that she had always been part of a society where narratives were already built and she never felt the urge to develop a perspective that was beyond those said narratives. She said,

"I used to think that the political situation that I grew up in was the ideal one because that is what I was taught. I did not care about politics before because I did not feel the need to look beyond whatever I was being fed."

Fardeen (23) said,

"I was always interested in world politics because of my extra-curricular activities. I learned about the political issues of the world but did not learn much about Bangladesh's situation because I was never exposed to different perspectives regarding it. However, once I did learn about it, I found that my opinion did not hold much power."

Political performances are only substantial when it has the ability to lead towards positive change, away from the mundane everyday changes (Kuttig & Suykens, 2020). The youth are only eager to give their energies and interests when they find the scope for political performativity within their

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own spaces. Their hopelessness towards the political landscape therefore raises feelings of unimportance and disinterest. However, many even did find interest in political issues but withheld from expressing themselves much. They would indulge in their own personal opinions and thoughts but did not opt for publicly expressing their interests.

4.3.3: Limiting political interests within personal spheres:

Many of the respondents have mentioned that even if they were not actively talking about politics all the time, they saw it as their duty to be informed and knowledgeable about it. They would try to see everything from varied perspectives but did not feel the urge to put forth their ideas. Adiba (24) said,

"I tried to keep up with everything that was happening with the country because I felt like it was my duty. Even if I do not actively talk about it, I always try to be informed."

Maimuna (24) shared similar sentiments and she said,

"I would say I am particularly involved in the informational side of political affairs but I am not expressive about it. I would not physically go out of my place to participate in it."

Shaheer (24) mentioned that his opinions are driven by how he views. He also mentioned that he believes his interests are not always mirrored in his expressions because his opinions may not be welcomed in every circle. He said,

"A lot of my areas of interests about politics are different from how the mainstream views it. I shape my opinions based on my own perspectives and therefore, while I do have interest in understanding politics, I am not someone who would publicly express it."

Even though the respondents have noted that they have been involved in educating themselves about political issues and affairs of the country for many years now, they felt their outlets were biased and closed off from accepting different ideas and thoughts. Isolation from the political narratives and transitions can affect how the youth portray their ideas and therefore, it is also understandable that the slightest of interest may also remain hidden within personal spheres. However, there has been a new wave of hopefulness and feeling of responsibility among the youth and they are not more eager to find interests in the politics of the country because they hope to become part of larger positive impacts.

4.4: Interest in politics (after the movement):

Since the movement of 2024, there has been significant change in the interests of the youth and how they view political issues and concepts. They are more inclined towards surrounding themselves with higher knowledge and wish to put their knowledge in a positive direction. Their interests have led them to become more expressive about certain issues and have piqued their curiosity about different narratives of the political landscape. The youth now feel a sense of responsibility towards the country on a larger scale and hope to project their interests towards positive pursuits.

4.4.1: Sense of responsibility:

Being able to decide on how to become involved in the politics of a nation is also a choice that not many are able to take. The youth realize their position and privilege which leads them to start thinking about politics when they are given the scope. They want to take the responsibility of uniformly bringing positive change and it was reflected in their thoughts. The respondents have

mentioned that they feel that they come from a position of privilege where they no longer can feel oblivious to the politics of the country. Shangram (22) said,

"I can no longer think that I do not care about politics. Other than that, I cannot also think that just having the knowledge makes me better than someone else. I need my interests to be impactful."

Sharing a similar thought, Fardeen (23) said,

"My privilege of being born in my socio-economic circle now pushes towards a responsibility that I feel towards politics. My sense of responsibility has made me much more interested in the politics of Bangladesh than it has before."

The respondents believe that their position in the society or their backgrounds give them the push towards gaining more insights about the betterment of the country. Aonkita (22) said,

"My identity urges me to be more politically interested and vocal. I have the platform and the position and I should be utilizing that."

Their sense of responsibility towards the people and the society brings out a newly found interest in the political affairs of the country. According to Ullah (2013), the youth are more likely to engage in politics out of responsibility and the need of the situation. It urges them to become more thoughtful and be more inclined towards becoming part of the many voices that change the landscape of the country. However, the sense of responsibility can only be led by the feeling of hopefulness among the people. When there is hope of change, the people are able to find outlets of interest and intrigue towards the country.

4.4.2: Feeling of hopefulness:

The feeling of hope within the current generation has transformed their thoughts and ideas. By being part of a major transition of the country and knowing that their own people were the driving force of the change, it brings a sense of hope among people that indulging in the political conversation can indeed bring substantial change for the country. Labib (23) said,

"When I saw the people around me become very interested in the way things work around in politics, I felt that there really is a reason to be hopeful."

Watching more and more people uniting for a common cause and to change the landscape of the country brought major changes in the perspectives of the people. According to Farhat (24),

"When I see the major transformation the country is going through, I see the glimmer of hope among the people. This has definitely increased my interest in politics and knowing about the country's affairs."

Similar sentiments was also shared by Jenny (24), an Anthropology major,

"I have been more interested now because even though it might be far-fetched, I feel like I could be a fragment of the change moving forwards. There is a chance to make a change."

It is important for the youth to see the ray of change in order to feel a sense of relativity towards the politics of the country. The youth need in-depth knowledge and understanding to effectively participate and engage which can be done through truthful and proper political knowledge (Tamanna, 2018). The feelings of hope and responsibility are also backed by the ability to find more reliable information and credible sources that do not promote pushed narratives and propagandas.

4.4.3: Ability to find more reliable narratives:

The respondents believe that they have a wider net to understand and interpret on their own terms. The ability to critically attain more information with varied perspectives give them the scope to become more interested in the politics of the country. The youth feel there is more space in the society to bring in more critical ideas and accept diverse perspectives.

Adiba (24) shared a similar thought,

"I think I have had the chance to be more aware of the decisions that the government takes and be critical about it. I believe a certain space has been created for all."

Moving away from the previously pushed ideas, the respondents have noted that they have found more mediums of diverse knowledge that have led them to make more informed opinions. They have had the chance to find more reliable sources that no longer distort the history of the country and the truths of the situation of Bangladesh. While reliability is subjective, the youth now have the space to find more narratives and choose what to believe in. They also believe that because people have found a new voice, they are no longer afraid to bring out the lies and expose them. Tasfia (23) said,

"I am finding more sources to rely on for the truths of every story that I have heard. I research more on the banned stories that have recently been exposed and try to know more about the history of the country. Learning about all these has increased my interest in the politics of the country."

Some of the respondents have also mentioned that there the scope for more freedom of expression which was not present before. The ability to express themselves on a larger scale have piqued their interest in knowing about the politics of the country. According to Sabah (22),

"When we had the former regime, we did not have the freedom to fully express ourselves. I feel that the reach of newer narratives have increased and people have found a feeling of freedom."

The feelings of hope, responsibility and reliability have opened new doors for the youth of the country. They find themselves to be more active and interested in the politics of the country because they believe that there is a space for people now and they have the ability to become part of the positive and truthful narratives. The power of the movement, the influences of the current generation and the shift of the government towards a better direction have inspired the youth of Bangladesh to indulge and find interests in the politics for the betterment of the people and the country as a whole (Sanyal, 2024). Their hopefulness can not only be seen in their interests but also can be viewed in their expressions and engagements in both online and offline environments which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 05

Social Media as the Ground for Political Engagement:

Social media can be one of the strongest forces for political engagement among the youth because of its efficiency and its popularity among the current generation (Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). According to Al-Zaman (2023), in the context of Bangladesh, there can be effective participation from the younger generation on social media due to its ability to bring in more unfiltered opinions than other media forms. However, political expression on social media varies from individual to individual and different contexts. As seen in the previous chapter, the interest in political affairs have fluctuated for the youth of Bangladesh due to diverse political situations that the country has faced. The youth have gone through various changes in their pursuits of political interest and conversation which have affected the way they interact and express themselves regarding such topics. This study further aims to understand how the choice of political engagement and expression among the youth of this country changed after the impact of the movement of 2024. Since the movement, there have been different sentiments among the younger generation and their emotions have been reflected in their social media usage. Their conversations, interactions and expressions have seen varied changes and those will be presented in the following chapter.

5.1: Political engagement (before the movement)

According to the respondents', there has been significant changes in their political expression and engagement on social media after the movement. They reported to have felt different reservations, disinterest and discontentment while expressing their opinions before and believed that social

media was not accepting of different perspectives. Their disinterest regarding the country's politics led them to become non-expressive when it came to political opinions.

5.1.1: Disinterest leading to limited engagement:

The youth were highly apolitical when it came to Bangladesh's political landscape due to its complex and unwelcomed nature (Tamanna, 2018). Their stance with the political situation was that they did not have any stance because they felt their impact would be miniscule in the larger scheme of things. The youth believed that the political landscape had provided them with minimal space to express themselves. In this regard, Mahima (22) said,

"The way the last regime was stationed made me feel super disinterested in politics of this country and led me to learn a lot less about it. Because I had no interest, I did not want to put forth any opinions on public platforms."

A similar thought was shared by Maimuna (24),

"I did not particularly enjoy reading about particular news and talking about it because I felt that it was propaganda being thrown at me. I also did not think I had the space to talk about it."

Some of the respondents also stated that they could not carve out a space for their own opinions and learn different perspectives. This was reflected on Shaheer's (24) responses,

"I tend to have a lot of opinions that may not be the masses' opinion. I felt that there was no scope for me to speak about my thoughts because it would not be accepted."

Due to the lack of acceptance and curiosity regarding the politics of the country, the youth have displayed low engagement on social media platforms. Social media is a space that comprises varied

ideas and opinions. When it came to a topic that was set in a complex manner, the youth took a step back because they did not want their voices to go in vain towards a cause that could not create interest among them.

5.1.2: Not considering social media as an outlet for political engagement:

Social media platforms create the most efficient space for communication, entertainment and connections. According to Chowdhury (2019), the political use of social media through digital sociality can accelerate in creating collective and individual identities. While social media can be an important outlet for varied political conversations and opinions, not everyone views it as intensely. It is often seen that the youth are eager to keep their offline and online interactions separate but the lines are easily blurred. According to Weinstein (2014), the youth choose how they want to present themselves on the online spheres. Many consider social media platforms as their entertainment source and as a way to stay connected with people. This was also reflected in the responses of the participants of the study. They were reluctant to put in intense and debatable opinions on their social media. Jenny (24) said,

"I am a very private person and my social media is only for my close friends. I did not ever consider it to publicly announce my political stance."

Since politics is a serious topic, it creates diverse sentiments among people and can create conversations which many tend to avoid. While being on social media, people tend to be more inclined towards engaging with lighter content. Farhat (24) said,

"I am connected with a lot of people on social media who come from different backgrounds and different perspectives. I do not want to engage in political conversations with them because I do not want to trigger debatable conversations. I tend to avoid those."

A similar thought was shared by Tasfia (23),

"I never cared about politics much then why would I be talking about it online? Social media was a space for me to connect with my friends, not engage in debates and controversies."

According to Habermas's (1964) theory of public sphere, it is difficult to divide social media from the world outside. While it can be possible to limit online interactions, it is often difficult to remove the self from the online or the private from the public. While disinterest and lack of space created lower engagement among people, the youth's tendency to choose how they want to create their online persona and space put an impact on their political expressions. Not only did they want to divert themselves from controversial conversations, they also felt that there was no impact in engaging in such interactions because it was either misunderstood, unsubstantial or redundant.

5.1.3: Preaching to the choir:

Many of the respondents mentioned that their social media platforms were curated with people who had similar interests and thoughts. They said that the people they were connected to online are their friends and family who come from similar backgrounds and education. In such cases, they felt that they had nothing to say which would be different for their social circles. Shangram (22) said,

"I know the people that are on my online platforms are the people of my socio-economic background, people of similar thoughts and education backgrounds. It kind of felt redundant to say anything because I believe that these people are already thinking whatever I want to convey."

Sharing a similar idea, Labib (23) said,

"I tend to express myself more when I feel that not many people are thinking of the same things. I tend to be quieter when I find more people around me talking about the same issues. Since I have people with similar interests on social media, I did not feel the need to add to anything."

Some of the respondents also shared that they thought that their opinions were already out for public consumption. Since anything they wanted to express was already shared, they no longer needed to put in their own words. According to Sabah (22),

"I think there are people who are more constructive and articulate than I am. Sometimes I share their posts but rarely include my own words because I find similar thoughts shared already."

While there may be some level of interest to express political opinions online, the youth were more inclined to share with and receive thoughts from people with similar opinions. There is a certain level of comfort that one gains from conversing with like-minded people but it also deters communication among many since their thoughts may already be reflected in other's opinions. In this context, we can look towards the theory of public sphere and determine that while private conversations turn into public discourses when it is online, it can also create difficulties because of the range of the interactions. As understood from the responses, it is also possible that social circles within social media can cause disinterest in public discourses. Many have also reported that they were interested in how politics work and how it affects different nations, but their interest in the politics of Bangladesh was limited due to the above mentioned reasons. While politics was

interesting to them due to its diverse nature, different sentiments and complex nature of the politics of the country led them towards being more introverted with their political engagements on social media platforms.

5.2: Political engagement (after the movement):

During and after the movement of 2024, we saw a tremendous change in the conversations of the youth. They became more expressive and opinionated when it came to politics and how they wanted the nation to be built. The youth became more inclined towards expressing themselves on a greater level and engaged in constructive conversations. According to the respondents, they became much more vocal and involved in interactions that were related to the social and political changes and trajectories of the country.

5.2.1: Higher interest led to higher engagement:

Many of the respondents mentioned that during and after the movement, all they could converse about was the political transitions of the country. They were motivated and interested in putting more effort in such conversations and their enthusiasm was reflected on their social media. In this regard, Shaheer (24) said,

"I do not think people had an outlet before to express their political opinions before due to various reservations. But after the movement, conversations have been more active, both online and offline."

Similarly, Farhat (24) said,

"I have noticed that there has been a shift in my conversations. I am a lot more expressive and outspoken and I am more likely to engage in content related to social and political issues online than before."

As the youth were at the center of the 2024 movement, they believe that there has been a wave of newly found interest which leads to higher political engagement. They try to make more informed conversations, they are more critical about how the government functions and they are more vocal about how they want positive changes that benefit all. This sentiment was reflected in Hasan's (23) response,

"I would say that the younger generation is getting more involved about understanding politics and the history of politics. They are talking about different policies that can counter the current policies."

With a shift in their interest towards politics that was led by one of the most revolutionary movements this country has seen, the youth have become more expressive because they believe that they are at the center. They have seen how their voices made a change and how their passions were channeled towards a positive direction during the movement. This has led to them being more confident and enthusiastic about being more involved and learning about the politics of Bangladesh. Social media can be a powerful outlet for publicizing and encouraging political discourse and can widen the public sphere (Kruse, et al., 2017).

5.2.2: Using social media as an informative outlet:

While there were different opinions about social media being an important outlet for political engagement among the respondents, most of them mentioned that social media was one of the

most impactful platforms for them during and after the movement. They mentioned that all the social media platforms were important for them during the movement because it was easier to get information in a shorter period of time. Since everyone was informed and keeping track of everything that was going around, social media was the quickest way to get updates and learn about the unrevealed stories of political violence and instabilities. Anindita (23) said,

"I would never discredit the power that social media has because it is a common place for all and has been a democratized platform where anyone can talk."

Sharing a similar thought, Sayad (26) also mentioned,

"We all say that social media is a world in itself. The online engagements surely brought more people in and gave them a chance to be more involved."

Social media had the power to bring in more people together and disperse information. The advantage of quick communication and information was recognized by the youth (Lane, et al., 2019). The online mediums have the ability to provide highly accessible modes of exchange of information. With new information surfacing every day, people interacted more with the conversations and added more of their opinions. However, some of the respondents were also skeptical about how people were accepting the information and navigating through them. According to Adiba (24),

"I would not say that social media is the most impactful platform, but it can definitely put some pressure on the people to learn and act more towards the politics of the country. I think it is the responsibility of the people to verify and be critical of the information."

While social media can have a huge impact on the political engagement and expressions of the youth, it is also up to them to understand the consequences and concerns behind every information and opinion being shared.

5.2.3: Leaning more towards offline conversations:

In regards to the theory of resistance sociality (2019), digital sociality or political engagement on social media can often transcend into the offline spheres which we have seen throughout the movement too. Many of the respondents felt that even though their interest in politics and enthusiasm in engaging more in the political content had increased, a lot of it was channeled on offline platforms. They preferred to have conversation with friends and families and their interactions were limited to their social circles after the movement. The youth had gone through a rush of information and emotions during the movement but they have now settled into offline conversations rather than online interactions. They are more inclined towards listening and having meaningful conversations rather than putting out different opinions open for interpretation for other people. Shaheer (24) said,

"The physical interactions have helped me a lot because I am more expressive that way and I tend to learn more from people. Since politics is such a sensitive topic, I feel better to have these conversations offline."

A similar sentiment was shared by Hasan (23),

"I have always preferred offline and in-person interactions regarding political views and ideologies because that is my comfort zone. I talk with my friends and people who share similar

opinions. I also have some control over how my thoughts are being taken into context in in-person conversations."

Some of the respondents have also mentioned that since the movement, they have started to shift more towards offline conversation because of the huge rush they have had online during the movement. There were hundreds of information and updates to navigate through and many have shifted their energy towards in-person conversations. While it is impossible to not engage in political conversations post-movement, many amongst the youth are also preferring to engage in smaller scale, face-to-face conversations. Maimuna (24) said,

"I feel that my voice is going to be more invested in explaining that we should keep the conversations going. I have never had this much social and political engagement on social media as I did during the movement. But since then, I have started to observe and engage with my close circle of people. I still have thoughts but I prefer to talk about them on a smaller scale."

While some may choose physical conversations for the introvert nature, some may choose it for their comfort, others may be choosing it to divert their minds from the rush and speed of social media. It is important to understand that there are a lot of factors that lead towards converting offline interactions to online conversations which can impact policy-making and governance (Ullah, 2013). Lack of attention from the authorities, personal and professional sanctions and discrimination grievances can lead to lower online engagement about political affairs. However, no matter which medium they choose, there definitely has been a major shift in the political engagement of the youth in this country and there are several factors that influence their choices. It is imperative that we understand the underlying factors behind the political engagement of the youth on social media to better interpret their choice of participation in the political affairs and conversations concerning the country.

Chapter 06

Decoding the Dynamics behind the Screen:

While social media can be a powerful tool for political engagement, there are several factors that encourage or discourage the youth to express themselves on online platforms. Some may find it impactful and useful in different contexts, others may see the underlying issues that comes with expressing varied opinions online. According to the respondents, there were several factors that they weighed in when they chose to politically engage on their social media platforms during and after the movement. Since most of the respondents mentioned that they had started gaining more interest in political conversations during and after the movement, as mentioned in the previous chapters, this chapter decodes the dynamics of political engagement online to understand their decisions regarding social media as their outlet for expressing themselves.

6.1: Factors that encourages political engagement on social media:

Many of the respondents found social media as their core outlet to engage and communicate with their peers about the social and political situation during and after the movement. While some may have taken to the online world out of a sense of responsibility, many mentioned that there were feelings of guilt that led them to participate in some form during the movement. Others have reported to have seen social media as the only accessible outlet due to personal reservations. However, it was also reflected in their responses that the impact of social media for the current generation was undeniable and it should be considered as an important part of the movement of 2024.

6.1.1: Unity, liability and guilt:

Previously, the youth have felt disconnect and detachment from the political situation of the country and it was also seen within their actions. However, their stance as not having interest or the idea of being apolitical also come from a position of privilege which many of the youth recognize. Political apathy can also be the consequences that can arise from different factors which mostly are discouragement of action and lack of opportunity (Rosenberg, 1954). However, after the movement, it was observed in several of the respondents' statements that they were driven by an immense sense of responsibility towards the nation and the people of the country to start talking about how the political landscape of the country was important to understand and decode. They believed that it was time for them to include themselves into the movement on whichever level possible and bring forth the violence and atrocities that were being displayed towards the people. Anindita (23) said,

"I keep telling everyone that I'll make sure I die with a bullet in my head because now I feel that I have this responsibility within myself to make an impact because I have seen how it worked out and how it resulted in such a positive impact. It was a puzzle where multiple pieces came together and I was one of those tiny pieces."

Labib (24) shared a similar sentiment and said,

"If I can help someone tomorrow by engaging in the welfare of the country by voicing out about the social and political issues, I believe I will have fulfilled my definition of politics. For me it means welfare of the people and no matter how utopian it sounds, I want to be a part of the welfare and I see this as my responsibility."

Many of the respondents also felt a sense of guilt that led to them trying to be more responsible towards the people and their welfare. When lives were lost and rights were being taken, the youth felt immense urgency and guilt. They felt an accountability towards having the scope of being on the right side and voicing out their wants and needs. According to them, social media created a space for them to become a part of the movement, even if they were a miniscule piece in it. This feeling was reflected in Maimuna's (24) response,

"One of my biggest driving forces was guilt. The guilt of being informed, yet not being able to take an action or a stand. I know about different political ideologies and have learned a lot about the philosophies of life but nothing is of use if I do not put it into action. This guilt brought me online."

It was evident from the responses of the participants that they wanted to be a part of the movement in any form and shape. They wanted to be able to represent their thoughts and expressions to make a positive impact. The youth see the social and humane side of any situation before jumping into the politics of it. Sabah (22) said,

"It was never about politics for me. Politics always came second, I just wanted to speak for the people and their right to live without the fear of being shot in broad day light."

In the movement too, they gathered and united for the rights of the people. In the beginning it was for the right to better education and jobs and later it was for the right to live without fear. The people of the country came together and united for one cause. Eventually they realized that to bring in social rights, there needed to be political change and social media was the perfect place to gather all, unite thoughts and plan actions accordingly. The immense impact of the movement urged the youth to take a stand and most of them did it through online mediums. However, it was also observed that for many social media was the only mode of expression due to safety concerns.

6.1.2: Not being able to go out on the streets:

The issue of having to be restricted to the online platforms was mostly seen within the female respondents. Most of the female respondents mentioned that they had to take into account their safety on the streets and restrictions imposed on them from their families when they wanted to go out to protest along with others during the movement. Aonkita (22) mentioned,

"I could not get out of my house during the time of the movement and the first reason was the concerns of my parents. Secondly, I was scared for my safety. I feel ashamed of it but I also have to consider my own safety. Being a female and a member of a religious minority group, it was especially important for me to take these concerns into account."

Women most often feel unsafe when going out in the streets due to several issues that they have to face on a regular basis. Their fears increased several folds when it came to the movement where such large numbers of people were gathering. However, they still wanted to make an impact and social media helped them to inform, engage and express about the movement. Jenny (24) said,

"During the movement, I felt helpless that I could not do anything actively. Posting on social media for me was me taking action. Since I was not able to go outside due to my own safety concerns, online was the only place where I could do something, say something or make an ounce of impact towards the cause."

Similar sentiments were reflected in Tasfia's (23) response,

"I had to take into consideration my own safety and my family's safety. They were constantly concerned for me even while I was posting online because not everyone can get over the traumas we have faced in the last 15 years. Since I was not able to join the protest, I tried my best to do

whatever I could do. I posted online, I made content and I tried to inform and motivate others to do the same."

It is important to understand that for many social media platforms were the only outlet to let out their frustrations, have a scope to be more learned and to voice their own opinions. Gender discrimination is seen as one of the most important factors of lower political engagement among the younger generation because they are not given the scope to express themselves online or offline (Ullah, 2013). In a situation like this, the women choose the lesser of the two evils and therefore, resort to the online platforms where they can somewhat control how they are presenting their thoughts while still being present. While we see the bigger picture of the physical aspect of the movement and the revolution that followed, it is also imperative to take note of the nuances that led people, mostly females, to politically engage and express themselves online.

6.1.3: Social media as the most accessible outlet for the current generation:

Through social media movements, a relationship can be formed between the younger generation, social media and digital sociality. According to the theory of resistance sociality by Chowdhury (2019), social media has the ability to transcend through influencing the offline space and the youth in the most efficient manner. Social media, as a public sphere, has the ability to bring in the most diverse voices and the youth are more likely to be receptive and accepting of different opinions. By reflecting on the theory of Habermas (1964), it can be deduced that social media has the ability to bring private interactions into public conversations since it blurs the line between the online and the offline. Since the youth are the most active on social media, the public discourses are largely stimulated through them. The youth are the most accessible online because of the new age of technology and are inclined towards initiating conversations online (Wang, 2007). According to

the respondents, social media played a big role in gathering people, informing them about the movement and in gaining global attention. Since the reach of social media is wide, it gives the youth the scope to enhance their boundaries and be more accessible for each other. Sayad (26), in this regard, said,

"We all say that social media is a world of its own. We tend to avoid it sometimes for our own peace but we cannot deny the fact that this is the same platform that made the movement so quick and impactful."

Similarly, Shaheer (24) said,

"I believe that one of the things that actually helped during the movement and why the government forced an Internet blackout was the fact that social media had become a very powerful tool in having our voices heard. It is a powerful tool to motivate the masses but it also depends on how you motivate them."

It was also observed in many of the respondents' thoughts that social media was the place where most of the youth would be found. It is easier to reach the current generation through social media than any other platform. Mahima (22) said,

"Social media is particularly important not only in the sense that it is a place for mass dialogue, but it is also the place where most of the youth can be found. And most people today understand social media lingo more than anything else. The youth are more inclined towards understanding what a Facebook status may want to convey rather than a lecture being provided in class."

Social media platforms can be observed as one of the most dynamic modes for the youth's expression and it can provide a space for them to engage with like-minded people in a quicker and more efficient method. Being online, the youth can choose how they want to engage, perform and

be visible for others to interpret them and become accessible to a larger audience (Wang, 2007). However, it is up to the youth to determine how they choose to engage with others while keeping their own principles and voices justified.

6.2: Factors that demotivate political engagement on social media:

While there was a wave of political engagement from the youth on social media platforms before and after the movement of 2024 due to varied factors, many of the respondents have mentioned that they have had reasons to refrain from further interactions online in regards to political topics. Social fears and sanctions affect communication and commitment patterns in regards to political content (Weeks, Halversen, & Neubaum, 2023). Some have mentioned that they do not find the worth in engaging in political conversations online due to severe consequences they may have to face, others have mentioned that it is extremely easy to misinterpret words online. Many have also mentioned that mob mentality and peer pressure keep them away from expressing themselves because not everyone on the Internet is still ready to accept diverse views.

6.2.1: Weighing consequences and concerns:

The online world can often be harsh and brutal when it comes to accepting diverse opinions. People can often be rude and inconsiderate towards others when an opinion is open for public consumption. Rather than risking personal and professional, people are more inclined towards refraining from sharing their political views (Weeks, Halversen, & Neubaum, 2023). Many of the respondents have mentioned that they are skeptical about expressing themselves because of several social and legal sanctions that fail to protect the freedom of speech online. Hasan (23) mentioned,

"I would always think twice about posting anything online, whether it is a serious post or satire. I would always feel that if I write something and it goes viral for the wrong reasons, consequences can go south very quickly."

A similar sentiment was also shared by Fardeen (23). He said,

"There is always a fear factor that is very prominent. You always have to weigh the consequences of your words. Whether it was worth speaking out for you to get potentially kidnapped or killed, it never outweighs it. I would rather not risk my life over a stupid Facebook post."

There is always a fear of being ostracized on the online platforms which can be caused from the fear of being personal and professional sanctions. Most of the respondents have mentioned that they have been nurtured and taught to not say anything that disrupts the calm for several years. In this regard, Tasfia (23) said,

"We have been traumatized about using social media platforms because we are taught from the different spheres of our lives, both personal and professional, to not say the wrong thing. We have also seen examples of terrible violence due to a single Facebook post. It is not easy to get over years of conditioning."

There is a direct relation between the fear of sanctions and political expression and it can be mostly noticed online because it is faster to identify or single out people. While many are concerned about social sanctions, many have also mentioned that there are cases of misinformation, misrepresentation and misinterpretation online. Given that social media can often be hostile, the willingness of the people to commit to online political conversations outweigh the consequences. People are quick to believe and misjudge a lot of content they see online which leads to confusion which leads towards skepticism about interactions about political issues.

6.2.2: Miscommunication and misinterpretation:

Since social media is such a vast platform for varied opinions and discussions, people can often misinterpret and create miscommunication amongst themselves. It is also often used to spread misinformation which harms communication among people. The number of people on the online platforms and their varied opinions may connect people virtually but the diversity influences the youth's online expression and presentation (Weeks, Halversen, & Neubaum, 2023). Social media is often seen as an access point for quick information but when said information is misrepresented and conveyed in a misleading manner, more so than often, it will lead people to refrain from communicating online. This sentiment was reflected in Farhat's (23) comment,

"I have often seen opinions taken out of context and being misinterpreted online. It is easier to find faults in whatever people say. I try to limit expressing myself online because I want to limit any hostility towards myself."

Some of the respondents have also mentioned that even though during the movement everyone was extremely vocal, they do not feel a sense of freedom when speaking out because they are afraid whether others will be accepting of their thoughts. Since social media posts are mostly conveyed in shorter messages, images or videos, it is more open for interpretation. Sabah (22) said,

"I would not say that I do not feel safe, but there is a wide spectrum of people with varying ideas and I do not really know how each of them might interpret my words. My views might hurt someone's sentiments or beliefs and therefore I believe that I still do not have the freedom to completely express myself."

Many of the respondents have also talked about how people are restricted to some extreme opinions and are more likely to misinterpret different opinions because they do not want to bring in alternate perceptions. In this regard, Adiba (24) said,

"During the movement, everyone had come together for one cause. However, since the movement, there have been extremes on two ends of the spectrum. If there is anything you are expressing that is polarizing, it will affect both sides. It is as if we only have two sides and these sides are mostly extremely repressing online."

From extreme opinions we see the rise of mob mentality among the people which further reduces online interactions. Since it is easier to bully and attack people online, the mob mentality either forces people to select a particular side or become ostracized completely which leads to lower political engagement from the youth.

6.2.3: Mob mentality:

Many of the respondents mentioned that they believed that there was a certain mob mindset among the people during and after the movement. People are more likely to have complex attitudes regarding politics and policies which can often result from a lack of knowledge regarding the issues. The lack of proper knowledge leads people to submit towards political extremisms and unjust confidence in their beliefs (Fernbach et. al. 2013). Such mentality or views lead them to join the bandwagon with everyone else whether they fully understand the underlying issues and sentiments. To avoid being singled out in a swarm of people, many preferred to speak in the same tone as others. This headed towards superficial and unmindful expressions which others did not want to subject to. According to Shangram (22),

"It does seem like a lot of people are joining into the political conversation just to sound political instead of actually having well thought out opinions on such issues. People who were not bothered before are trying to sound knowledgeable without having enough substance."

A similar thought was also put out by Aonkita (22),

"A lot of people join the mob because if you are with the majority, you cannot be singled out. People who were not vocal initially during the movement started to speak put because if they did not, they would be the ones the mob came after."

The respondents expressed their disinterest in subjecting to the extremes or the mob mentality. They would rather try to see the more constructive and abstract ideologies rather than repeating particular incidents. Since the movement, the youth prefer having a look towards more nuanced perceptions since they are trying to move away from previous narratives. Labib (23) said,

"Mob mentality cannot create constructive conversations. They will always be looking towards the next hero to solve all problems for them. I am more inclined to have a learning mindset rather than become too expressive about things I do not know much about. I want to learn and then act because noise and empty promises can only take us so far."

Since the movement, the youth have become more mindful and want to be more receptive towards different ideas to make a well-informed decision. Their sense of responsibility and hope for positive outcomes have made them more interested in learning more about politics and understanding the depth of all social and political issues. For the effectiveness of political interactions from the youth, it is important for them to know about the policies, work on their attitudes and discourage mob influence with substantial content (Fernbach et. al. 2013). Therefore,

even though there is a higher level of interest among the youth to become more responsible when it comes to politics, they are also seeing the importance of being critical and constructive.

Chapter 07

Conclusion:

As we saw the new era of politics come in Bangladesh in 2024 with the student movement, we also saw a new generation rise up to become a part of rebuilding the nation, transforming the political landscape and ensuring that people no longer have to submit to the socio-political restrictions of the country. The youth of Bangladesh have shown immense passion and dedication towards the student movement and brought in one of the biggest revolutions the country has seen till date. Their enthusiasm, desires and frustrations were seen both on the streets and in the screens. As the new generation integrates themselves into nation-building, we see how social media has the potential to become their public sphere. Social media is now where we find the most of the current generation and it is important that we understand the importance of the online world in changing the way the youth interact and influence the social and political transitions of Bangladesh. However, while we give credit to social media, we cannot forget the personal affordances and influences that have led the younger generation to determine how they want to present and express themselves during complex political transitions.

7.1: Key Findings and Analysis:

The objectives of this study was to understand how the youth of Bangladesh view politics, how their political interests and engagements on social media have changed throughout the times and determine the factors that influence their choice of political engagement online after the student movement of 2024. Politics has diverse meanings to every individual which have resulted from various academic pursuits and knowledge from the older generation. The younger generation was

subjected to years of forced narratives and low political engagement which led them to have lower interest in politics. Other factors that led to lower interest were feelings of helplessness and being unsubstantial in the never ending political landscape of the country. However, since the movement, there has been significant changes within the youth and their political interests due to increased sense of responsibility towards the nation and gaining the ability to become part of positive changes. Their political engagements on social media have also seen a huge turn because earlier the youth was scared of personal and professional sanctions and they feared being subjected to unjust social ostracism. Their disengagement was also led by not seeing social media as a powerful tool for political expression and viewing it as an entertainment outlet with like-minded people with no chance for constructive discourse. Recently, social media has come to be recognized as an impactful tool for political engagement since the movement and the youth have been more inclined towards using the online platforms due to its efficiency and accessibility. However, it is also undeniable that there are factors like negative consequences and miscommunications, gender discrimination and political extremism being promoted through mob mentality, which continue to discourage the younger generation to come forth with their political expressions and opinions online.

7.2: Limitations:

- Due to time restrictions, it was not possible to take a larger sample size for the study. Since the number of participants was small, it may not accurately reflect on all existing factors that influence the choice of political engagement among the youth of Bangladesh on social media.

- The study only focused on qualitative data derived from interviews and observations from the participants' social media usage and the lack of quantitative data may fail to represent the statistical observations which could have added depth to the findings.

- Since the study was conducted after the student movement of 2024, the youth's perceptions regarding their political engagements previously may be subjected to complex representations. Learning about their thoughts prior to the occurrence of the movement could have added more depth in understanding their stance about political engagement on social media.

- Every participant had varied thoughts and perceptions regarding their political understanding and engagement. The diverse responses were difficult to code and summarize into themes and therefore, it was challenging to put out a holistic analytical study with every factor being fairly observed and presented.

- It was difficult to tap into the experiences of the participants during the movement of 2024 due to it being traumatizing and difficult for many to cope with which made the participant selection and the interview processes more challenging.

7.3: Future Directions:

Since the movement of 2024, there have been limited studies on the political expression and engagement of the youth of Bangladesh. Based on the findings and limitations of the paper, there can be several scopes for further research which are mentioned below:

- Conducting similar case studies on other university students. Since this study focuses solely on BRAC University students, there can be further research on students from different public or private universities. There can be an in-depth analysis of the difference between

public and private student universities to understand the complexities of political engagement among the youth further.

- Understanding the legal frameworks that influence the political engagement online among the youth of Bangladesh and how it affects how they choose to integrate themselves into the political landscape.

- Analyzing the concept of apoliticism among the youth and the factors that lie behind it.

- Exploring the need for political literacy in order to promote higher political engagement and avoid political extremism among the youth of Bangladesh.

- Enhancing the accessibility of social media for the youth to use it as a political tool and expand their horizons online without discriminatory factors.

- Conducting further research on the political and social choices of the youth of Bangladesh since the student movement of 2024 and understanding the position of the current and future generations in the political transitions of the country.

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<center>**Appendix**</center>

<center>**Demo Thesis Questionnaire**</center>

Demographic Questions:

Name:

Age:

Occupation/Education:

Which social media platforms do you use the most for maintaining your online interactions and connections?

How often do you find yourself using social media platforms?

Research Question 1: How does the youth understand politics and their interest in politically expressing themselves?

1.1: How would you define politics? What does politics mean to you?

1.2: How would you describe your interest in political issues and conversations?

1.3: We have seen the regime of one particular party for the last 15 years. How has that contributed to your understanding of politics in Bangladesh? What are your feelings about the two-party politics?

1.4: Which sources do you rely on for your political knowledge? How did you learn about the political history of the country?

1.5: How has your knowledge and interest in politics changed after the movement?

1.6: How often do you find yourself expressing your political stance on social media?

1.7: How important is it for you to let your peers know about your opinions about politics?

1.8: Do you think your voice on social media has significant value in bringing change within the community or in raising awareness about certain issues?

Research Question 2: How did the youth's political engagement on social media change after the movement of 2024?

2.1: Do you think social media platforms are an impactful outlet for expressing your political views? Which platforms do you use/rely on for political engagement?

2.2: Do you see significant change in your expression and conversations regarding political affairs and issues on social media after the movement? If yes, then how so?

2.3: Why do you think your political stance has changed after the movement? *Depending on the previous question

2.4: Which platform (online/offline) has been the most impactful in order to politically express yourself? *Depending on their core outlet during the movement

2.5: Which methods do you prefer to engage yourself with political conversations on social media? *Ask about your online activities- liking, sharing or commenting on posts, creating your own statuses that convey their thoughts or to give updates, sharing politically humorous posts etc.

2.6: Which platform (online/offline) would you choose in order to express yourself now that the mass movement has simmered down?

2.7: How engaged or committed do you feel to the political situations and conversations in recent times? Are you interested in engaging in political conversations and in expressing yourself online in the coming years?

Research Question 3: What factors influence the youth's choice of political engagement and expression on social media?

3.1: Why do you think there has been a significant change in your choice of political expression after the movement?

3.2: Why do you think it was/was not important for you to politically express yourself and make your position known online or offline?

3.3: Now that the offline gatherings have decreased, have you utilized/continued to utilize your online platforms?

3.4: What do you think are the factors that encouraged/can encourage you to express yourself on political issues online? *Depending on their previous answer

3.5: Have you ever faced any kind of setbacks or backlash when you tried to put forth your political opinion from your peers and community online?

3.6: What kind of concerns do you have regarding your political engagement on social media and have they changed after the movement?

3.7: What kind of changes from the state (*ask about expectations of safety and anonymity from the state and law, probability of the voices being heard to accelerate change) would help you to have a higher political engagement on social media?

3.8: Do you think there can be changes within the social media platforms to promote higher political expression by creating a safer and more reliable platform for the youth? How so?

3.9: After such an impactful movement, do you think it is important for the youth to actively engage in political discussions and know about the political affairs of the country? Why so? *Depending on their previous answers