

A MULTITUDE OF DISSENTING VOICES:
NAVIGATING THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE 2024 JULY MOVEMENT IN
BANGLADESH

By

Prodipta Hasin
21203010

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University
May 2025

© 2025. BRAC University
All rights reserved.

Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full 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 main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

Prodipta Hasin
21203010

Approval

The thesis titled “A Multitude of Dissenting Voices: Navigating the Role of Media in the 2024 July Movement in Bangladesh” submitted by Prodipta Hasin (21203010) of Spring, 2025 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 26th May 2025.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:
(Member)

Dr Mahruba Mowtushi
Associate Professor, Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University

External Expert Examiner:
(Member)

Dr Tabassum Zaman
Associate Professor, Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University

Departmental Head:
(Chair)

Professor Firdous Azim
Professor and Chairperson, Department of English and
Humanities
BRAC University

Abstract

In July 2024, the people of Bangladesh witnessed one of the most crucial and abrupt turning points in the history of the nation since 1971. What began as discontent over a government policy regarding certain jobs quickly turned into an intensive anti-government movement, fuelled by a string of attacks administered by the government. Both during and after the protests, the country's media, both conventional and digital, have played a significant role in constructing public opinion. It has, however, also been used to weaponise this mass mobilisation by the government through various means. This paper is an in-depth examination of the role the media played in that student-led quota reform and later anti-government protests in Bangladesh from the 10th of July to the 5th of August, known mostly as the July Movement of Bangladesh. By delving into the multi-layered and complex media atmosphere of Bangladesh, this study not only highlights instances of suppression and censorship, but it also sheds light on the mobilising forces of media in times of socio-political crises. Moreover, to add a more nuanced approach, the research does not only focus on the media atmosphere during the July Movement but also on the way in which media shapes the discourse and public narrative in the aftermath of such social movements. It takes into account the activists of the movement, weaving their voices into every discussion ranging from surveillance and citizen journalism to, in fact, the tenuous current socio-political situation of the country. This thesis contributes to the scholarly exploration of the media landscape and its weaponisation and mobilising impact in Bangladesh, specifically in the context of such a mass social movement.

Keywords: Media, July Movement, Social Movement, Resistance, Censorship, Government.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my younger sibling, Mahir Daiyan Chowdhury, who went out to the streets on 18th July 2024 to fight for what is right, knowing and accepting the fact that there is a high possibility of him not returning home. You are my hero.

And to every single martyr and fighter of the July Movement 2024.

Acknowledgement

I would first like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Mahruba Mowtushi. Throughout the last six months of working on this thesis, as well as the rest of my undergraduate journey, Mowtushi miss has been a beacon of inspiration and guidance for me.

I would then like to thank my family, my parents and younger brother, who have remained steadfast in their support throughout my entire life. My father, Minhazul Hoque Chowdhury, and my mother, Nasrin Mahmud, have never let me believe for one second that I cannot achieve everything my highly ambitious mind aspires to achieve. And my brother, Mahir Daiyan Chowdhury, who is my favourite person in the world, no ‘thank yous’ would be enough to convey how much his constant friendship and affection mean to me.

I am extremely grateful to my department, all the faculties that I have come across in my last four years at BRAC University, and all my classmates and friends for making this life-long dream of studying literature so fun and comforting. And finally, the heartiest thanks to each and every one of the interviewees of this research, Nibir, Arpita, Udoy, Jubayer, Aahir, Siam, Arunima, Nubair, and Walid, without whose contribution this study would have been impossible.

Table of Contents

Declaration	2
Approval	3
Abstract	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgement	6
Table of Contents	7
List of Acronyms	9
Glossary	10
Introduction: ‘Reshaping Narratives: Media as a Catalyst for Social Movement in Bangladesh’	11
Stories behind the Spark: A Historical Background of the Quota-Reform Movement	14
Literature Review	19
Methodology	25
Chapter 1 Censorship and Silence: The Weaponisation of Bangladeshi Media Atmosphere	27
1.1 The Menace of Misinformation	30
1.2 The Ultimate Censorship of A Networked Protest: Internet Shutdown and Communication Blackout	33
1.3 An Orwell-esque Nightmare: Surveillance and Crackdown	36
Chapter 2 Beyond the Silence: Sparks of Resistance Reshaping Narratives	40

2.1 From Bystanders to Broadcasters: Redefining Journalism through Citizen Reporting	43
2.2 Beyond Walls and Borders: Unleashing the Power of Social Media for Mass Mobilisation	47
2.3 Spray Paints and Melody: The Creative Articulation of the Movement through Visual, Audio and Literary Media	51
Chapter 3 The Aftermath of a Storm: A Never-Ending Loop of Repression, with Glimmers of Tentative Hope	56
3.1 The Uncontrollable Wildfire: Misinformation Fueling Communal Tension	58
3.2 A Re-run of the Old Play: Threats Against Media Professionals and Rise of Extremism	61
3.3 What Comes Next: A Pessimistic Hope?	62
Conclusion: Not an End of A Revolution, but the Beginning of One	67
Works Cited	70
Appendix A	76
Appendix B	77

List of Acronyms

OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
NTMC	National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
DGFI	Directorate General of Forces Intelligence
NSI	National Security Intelligence
DMP	Dhaka Metropolitan Police
BUP	Bangladesh University of Professionals
AFP	Agence France-Presse
BOAN	Blogger and Online Activist Network

Glossary

Swadeshi (1905-1911)	A movement that began as a resistance against the partition of undivided Bengal in 1905. It was a movement that supported self-sufficiency through production and usage of Indian products rather than European ones
Razakar	A paramilitary force in East Pakistan during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 as a counter-insurgency against the Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters). In Bangladeshi history, they have a tainted legacy, as they were locals of East Pakistan who actively collaborated with the West Pakistani army in the mass killing of East Pakistani civilians.
CNN Effect	A theory in media studies that states how the modern television and media industry plays a crucial role in global and local policy-making and decisions.
Invitation to tea with ‘boro bhai’	In the Bangladeshi community, this is a tactic of intimidation since ‘invitation to tea’ here does not actually mean that; rather, it means a discussion with someone with superior political or social power (‘boro bhai’ here translates into big brother, but it has the connotation of someone who is superior in some sense) and intimidates the other party or person into submission.
Digital Security Act	Passed in 2018, this law aims to prevent the spread of any kind of hate speech on digital, print and broadcast media. However, it quickly started to be misused by the government and law-enforcement agencies, with the arrests of many activists and journalists, to repress any and all speech that criticises the government.
Shahbag Movement	A mass public demonstration in 2013 in Dhaka’s Shahbag area that was sparked by a call for death sentences for the convicted war criminals(razakars) of the 1971 war of Bangladesh.
Bangla Blockade	A programme initiated by the ‘Boishommo Birodhi Chhatra Andolon (Anti-Discrimination Student Movement)’ that called for the blockage of main intersections across every city of Bangladesh by the college and university students to protest against the Supreme Court ruling regarding job quotas.

Introduction

Reshaping Narratives: Media as a Catalyst for Social Movement in Bangladesh

The history of Bangladesh is deeply embedded in social movements initiated and politicised by students. Even before the birth of the nation in 1971, students were the driving force behind many significant movements protesting injustice and rights violations. From anti-British movements like Swadeshi (1905-1911) to the Language Movement of 1952, the Liberation War of 1971, anti-authoritarian protests of the '90s, and many more contemporary protests of the 21st century like the Shahbag protests (2013) and Road Safety movement (2018), students have been at the frontlines of the history of Bangladesh. They have been a significant opposition to political hegemony and authoritarianism in Bangladesh for as long as it has existed.

The country's most recent uprising, one of the biggest since 1971, was the student-led quota reform movement of 2024. A movement that began as a criticism of a specific government policy concerning job quotas quickly evolved into a pro-democracy movement decrying the corruption of the then government. With a violent crackdown against not only student protesters but also journalists and civilians, this movement turned into one of the most infamous cases of state violence in the history of Bangladesh. In a report published by the UN Human Rights Office in February 2025, it was estimated that up to 1,400 people may have died during the protests, the great majority of whom were killed by military rifles and shotguns loaded with deadly metal pellets, frequently used by Bangladesh's security forces. The report also finds that thousands more people were injured, mostly with life-changing injuries. This assessment is based on reported deaths compiled by governmental and non-governmental sources as well as other available evidence. A UN organisation called the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights(OHCHR) was informed by the Police

and Rapid Action Battalion(RAB) that over 11,700 persons had been arrested and taken into custody. However, the deaths and arrests only fuelled the spirit of the protests, and they continued to take to the streets despite the violent crackdowns, which eventually led to the then prime minister, Sheikh Hasina's departure on 5th August 2024 and the formation of an interim government on 8th August 2024.

To lead successful protest movements, a league of factors comes into consideration, including organisation and leadership, civil society involvement, media involvement and many more. This paper specifically highlights the involvement and effect of various forms of media during the July Movement in Bangladesh. In times of social and political unrest, the media has been a way of forming and controlling public opinions since the era of Gutenberg¹ and *Samachar Darpan*². However, being an extremely crucial component of movements and protests, the authoritarian powers have also used and misused this media as a form of oppression and injustice. Media is a sensitive institution of any country that can be controlled and weaponised by much more than capital, distribution and time and space in paper and broadcast. Censorship, lobbying, gatekeeping, copyright and licensing have also been factors in how much information goes through the filters of media control (Jarvis 184).

Although, in the current era of digitalisation and globalisation, it is not as easy to control the media by the government, corporate houses, and other capitalist entities as it might have been one or two decades ago. In a rather overwhelming world of the web, social media, and digital news portals, public opinion and mass movements have taken new shapes and forms. Digital technologies have changed the landscape of social movements, ostensibly in favour of political oppositions and government critics. With a level of ease that would have been unimaginable to previous generations, activists in this era rise in opposition to corrupt

¹ The first noteworthy book printed in Europe using mass-produced metal movable type was the Gutenberg Bible. It marked the start of the "Gutenberg Revolution" and the Western age of printed literature.

² Published in 1818 by the Baptist Mission Press in Serampore, *Samachar Darpan* was a weekly Bengali newspaper, which is regarded as the original newspaper published in an Indian language.

and repressive governments that attempt to control the public discourse. By getting around censorship and constant surveillance, the protesters of the digital age have found a solid mechanism by which to take back control over the media (Tufekci xxii).

This research aims to highlight the role of both traditional and non-traditional media in times of revolutionary social and political turning points. It aims to answer the question of how media is used as a means of oppressing and controlling the public by the authoritarian state power, yet at the same time, it is the power of media and collective effort that topples longstanding hegemony. By aiming to probe into this investigation surrounding the July protest, the paper highlights the topic of state censorship on both broadcast and print media, the week-long infamous internet shutdown, and finally, the extreme surveillance and arrests on social media against students and civilians. The paper also portrays the opposite force of media, something that sprouted as a tool of resistance during this violent crackdown, by focusing on mass citizen journalism on social media, visual media such as videos and photographs, graffiti, and other social media trends that further fuelled and inspired the movement. The main reason for focusing primarily on the July Movement of Bangladesh in 2024 is to look at this student-led movement in a more nuanced manner, especially regarding the media war and political unrest that followed the movement. Although the students seemingly succeeded in toppling the authoritarian government, the political scenario and international relationships post-protest are far from ideal. It is important to note here that the ‘students’ mentioned do not represent a homogenous entity. While it is true that the initial inspiration behind the protests was the unification of mass students from all political parties except Awami League, with different religions, genders and socio-economic statuses, as days went on, and the fall of the Hasina government seemed inevitable; an obvious fracture could be seen in that unity. After 5th August, the unified students proved to have been from different political ideologies with their own agendas, which only further intensified the

fracture, leading to clashes of opinions and ideas among the unified mass of ‘students’. Some of the key female activists, non-Bengali-speaking activists, and activists of other religions got quickly sidelined in the days after 5th August, which unfortunately is still persistent at the time of writing this paper. It is also important to mention that the majority of the media coverage of the protests was heavily focused on the major cities of Bangladesh, like Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet, making the face of the movement highly urbanised and highlighting only a handful of the total student population in the country.

As we approach the study of a comprehensive analysis of the role media played in the July Movement, we should keep in mind this sense of unity the movement initially promised and the way in which it slowly started to disintegrate. This is also essential in looking at the July Movement and the media’s impact on it in a more nuanced manner, as it not only showcases the usage of media to resist and unify during the movements but also the face of media in spreading and combating disinformation and misinformation in the aftermath of the movement.

Stories behind the Spark: A Historical Background of the Quota-Reform Movement

The political atmosphere of Bangladesh has been heavily influenced by the ruling party Awami League, for over one and a half decades. During these years, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League (AL) established dominance over all the political, judiciary and security institutions, especially after the election of 2014³. According to a report published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the broader economy of Bangladesh started to become affected by this long reign of one political party in

³ The election of 2014 was boycotted by the main opposing party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and several other political groups on the grounds of the polls being rigged by Sheikh Hasina. International community, including United Nations also questioned the inclusivity of the election, with one of the leading newspapers of the country *The Daily Star* calling Awami League’s victory ‘predictable and hollow’

the form of corruption, crony capitalism, and clientelism. Students and many young individuals were facing difficulty finding work in both the public and private sectors. A massive range of quotas, specifically in the public sector, only further contributed to unfair competition and mass unemployment.

The High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh restored a quota system on June 5, 2024, assigning 30% of all public sector jobs to the descendants of the freedom fighters of 1971. This was a direct opposition to the 2018 rule of the High Court abolishing the quota system in the face of mass student protests, which deemed the system unfair, as this system favoured the grandchildren of freedom fighters and some with certain kinds of political ties with the Awami League, despite having nothing or little to do with the actual Liberation movement against West Pakistan. In a country where a large number of youth already suffer from unemployment⁴, this complete disregard for merit-based qualifications sparked huge controversy and massive dissatisfaction, leading thousands of Dhaka University students to march in protest of this High Court ruling. The following demands were made to the government by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (‘Boisommo Birodhi Chhatra Andolon’):

- Total dismissal of the current quota system for government jobs.
- Reforming the quota system to reserve quotas for minorities and individuals with disabilities.
- Establishing a maximum quota of 5% for all government (Siddik 3).

However, the situation took a turn for the worse when, on July 14, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked, ‘Why do they [the student protesters] have so much resentment towards freedom fighters? If the grandchildren of the freedom fighters don't get

⁴ The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Labour Force Survey 2023 reports that 1.94 million people of the nation's 26.76 million young workers between the ages of 15 and 29 are unemployed.

quota benefits, should the grandchildren of razakars get the benefit?’ (‘কোটা সুবিধা মুক্তিযোদ্ধার নাতিরা পাবে না তো কী রাজাকারের নাতিরা পাবে?’ | Sheikh Hasina | JTV 00:06:25 - 00:06:38)

A flurry of protests spread among students of various public universities across the country in response to this problematic accusation by the Prime Minister. The use of the term ‘razakar’, a derogatory term used to describe the Bangladeshi allies of the Pakistani military in 1971, deeply offended and enraged the students. As a result, on the night of 14th July, the streets of Dhaka came alive with the ironic slogans of ‘Who are you? Who am I? ‘Razakar, Razakar’, ‘Says who? Says who?’ ‘The dictator, the dictator!’ (*Daily Star* Digital Report)

From the next day, a war of condemnation and blame games started to occur between the general student population and several political members of the Awami League. On 15th July, the students of various public universities were brutally attacked by the student wing of Awami League called the Chhatra League. Images of bloodied students, unarmed and helpless in front of the sudden attack, started to circulate around social media, leading to the engagement of the general population.

Since there were not enough members of the Chhatra League to put an end to the escalating demonstrations, the police also joined in the attacks. On July 16, six persons were claimed to have been killed, including Abu Sayed, a student from Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur. Videos of him being attacked that were recorded by fellow students on the spot went viral on various social media and news outlets, in some ways turning the tide of the protests. Students from private universities, various civilians, and even some opposition parties of the Awami League started to join in. (Sanyal)

When the demonstrations continued, in light of the death and destruction by the Chhatra League members and several law enforcement officers, the Student Movement against Discrimination (‘Baishamya Birodhi Chhatra Andolan’) modified its nine-point demand into a single demand: the forced abdication of Sheikh Hasina from politics. By

August 4, 2024, there had been 328 reported deaths since the violence escalated on July 16. Sheikh Hasina's attempts to quell the protests by enforcing a curfew and shutting down the internet nationwide failed when the Bangladesh Army refused to shoot protesters who disobeyed the order. Ultimately, on August 5, precisely two months after the protests began, the army gave Hasina forty-five minutes to step down, pack her belongings, and leave Bangladesh as irate demonstrators poured into 'Gana Bhavan', her official residence.

(Sanyal)

The role of media, both digital and traditional (i.e., newspapers, television, and radio), in influencing political outcomes and public opinion was crucial to this mass student movement. Ahnaf Tibro (2), a researcher at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), states that the protesters' voices were amplified and their cause received international attention mostly due to the CNN effect, a phenomenon where national media coverage shapes public opinion and policy actions. Rapid information transmission and mobilisation activities were made possible at the same time by media symbiosis, or the interaction between social media platforms and traditional news agencies.

The objective of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the significant role played by the media in the July student movements in Bangladesh by answering the following research questions:

1. What role did media, both traditional and new, play in the student protests of July-August 2024 in Bangladesh?
2. How did the previous government use traditional media and communication blackouts to censor and control the flow of information during the protests?

3. In response to this severe crackdown and censorship, how did the student protesters and the general public resist with their own take on the media to encourage and inspire?
4. After the regime was overthrown on August 5th, 2024, what is the current status of press freedom and freedom of expression? Where do the people of Bangladesh go from here, in terms of the media sector?

Literature Review

Although there are extensive studies on the role of media in crises and conflicts that have been conducted over the years, it is mostly West-centric. Media censorship in times of crisis by governments and powerful authorities and the mass media's role in engaging the general population in social movements are among the many pointers that researchers have focused on while studying the impact of media as a tool of oppression as well as resistance. However, the research on such subjects is very limited when it comes to the Bangladeshi context. The small amount of research that has been done on Bangladeshi media and its role in times of crisis is mostly outdated since media is a field that is massively changing every year with the spread of social media and digital connectivity.

One exception to this fact is the work of Arild Engelsen Ruud and Mubashar Hasan. In their edited book named *Masks of Authoritarianism: Hegemony, Power and Public Life in Bangladesh*, they have compiled a range of works investigating the shifting political atmosphere of the last few years in Bangladesh and how they impact everyday life. The chapter by Riaz Ali and Fahmida Zaman in this collection specifically studies the intricate oppression and severe censorship of media outlets in Bangladesh under the Sheikh Hasina regime (2008-2024) by analysing specific interviews and case studies of Bangladeshi journalists. Ruud and Hasan mention Hannah Arendt and her opinions on public spaces and the power of collective action. They use Arendt's concept in this regard to define media as that public space where the masses come together to agree or disagree with the authority. Therefore, a form of repression arises in this media when an authoritarian government comes to power, leading to surveillance and a serious power imbalance (6).

Speaking of the public sphere and its impact, the work of Jürgen Habermas has also been analysed and applied to understand the public sphere of Bangladesh. Though Habermas's theory of the public sphere largely focused on European bourgeois society; the

basic concept of the public sphere and the significance of news in shaping and reshaping it can be applied to the Bangladeshi context. The public sphere, according to Habermas, is the space of one's social life where public opinion is formed through rational discussion where all citizens can participate. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are all part of a literary public sphere, which is directly in contrast to the political public sphere where debates and discussions regarding the state happen. The role of this public sphere is to act as a mediator between state and society, where the citizens can be bearers and receivers of information that was difficult in arcane monarchist societies. (Habermas 49, 50)

However, this concept of the public sphere is outdated and only applicable in bourgeois European societies. Nearly six decades after the term 'public sphere' was coined, Habermas spoke on the role of the internet and social media in the formation of the public sphere and public opinion. He calls social media a "semi-public, self-enclosed and fragmented" mode of communication that fabricates and disrupts the political public sphere. (146) The radical change brought upon by social media in the communication of this era empowers and encourages all the members of the public sphere to become potential 'authors'. Unlike traditional media, this new media does not have any gatekeepers, editors, or authenticators above these authors. So the limitless flow of unverified, unfiltered and inauthentic information creates a disruptive and chaotic public sphere, full of fragmented opinions. This leads to a global network with no intermediaries or intermediaries who have little to no responsibility, with the spread of unpredictable and unexpected content that alters the entire concept of public communication. These unregulated contents on social media, without any professional filters, create a fragmented and self-enclosed 'echo chamber' (Habermas 159).

There is also a study done by Anis Rahman in the journal *Media Asia* on the relationship between Bangladeshi television channels and the public sphere that delves into

the marketisation of television news and the control of the state in shaping and reshaping news. Another book chapter by Anis Rahman on print and electronic media has also been used to understand media's role in the Bangladeshi social context as a way of resisting as well as falling into the grasp of authoritarian powers.

Since this thesis studies the role of media during mass social movements, there has been extensive research on media in times of conflict to further strengthen the argument. In this regard, the work of Zeynep Tufekci has been detailed and comprehensive by analysing the role of the new media and the internet in various social movements. Her book *Twitter and Tear Gas* studies the transformation of the public sphere and social movements with the rise of digital technologies in the context of the Arab Revolution during the early 2010s, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and the Zapatista Uprising in Mexico. She focuses on how these significant social changes have been impacted by the internet, social media, and something she terms the 'networked public sphere'. (xxix)

She borrows a term from Evgeny Morozov to define the activism of this digital era as 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism', a way of participating in social movements with minimum effort or commitment (xxvi). Easy access to social media and digital networks does not always necessarily mean equal participation in networked movements. People with large followings on social media who usually influence and inform the masses in these sensitive situations do not always have the legitimacy or credibility of formal leadership (xxiii). Tufekci also has an article on the government's response to the digital revolution, along with one chapter in her book titled 'Government Strikes Back', where she talks about how, like the protesters, the government and the authoritarian figures have evolved and adopted new ways of censoring, creating confusion and distracting the population.

However, with the authorities attempting to censor and control flow of information during social movements, the audience and the ordinary citizen's have come up with new

approaches to resisting that media. To understand this case of resistance, this paper has drawn from Stuart Hall's theory of 'oppositional decoder' as explained in his essay 'Encoding/Decoding.' In Hall's theories, the audience or the consumer of the media plays a vital role, so much so that the communication circuit he explains has the audience as an active reproducer of the information of the sender. There are three types of audiences, or what Hall terms 'decoders of information,' one of which he calls the 'oppositional decoder.' In the simplest terms, oppositional decoding of information happens when the receiver of information perceives said information in a 'globally contrary manner,' meaning the audience understands the intent behind the sender's encoding of specific information, but they decide to receive and reproduce that information in an opposing manner completely (Hall 127).

This theory of oppositional decoding was used to understand the harsh response of the Bangladeshi audience during mid July 2024, specially in the light of the 'razakar' remark of the Prime Minister. A remark that has a sordid history in the 1971 war in Bangladesh, and was initially meant to invoke shame among the protesters. However, the protesters interpreted the message conveyed by the government in a completely opposite meaning. Going past the history behind the term, the protesters turned this shameful slang into a word of resistance, in the lines of Hall's oppositional decoding.

Since the July Movement in Bangladesh is quite recent in light of social movements, it has been difficult to find comprehensive analytical studies on it. The majority of the research works published in this area have been journal and newspaper articles. There is an analytical article on the progression of events during the mass movement of Bangladesh in July 2024 by Ankita Sanyal in the International Centre for Peace Studies. This study highlights the key events from the anti-quota movements to the fall of Sheikh Hasina. Moreover, an essay by Abu Bakar Siddik explores how the July movement became a pivotal point in Bangladesh's political landscape and its impact on the discussions regarding freedom

of speech. Another article, by Zoheb Ahnaf Tibro, published by the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), on the CNN effect and what he terms a ‘Digital Monsoon’ in the July uprisings, analyses the media’s contribution to the July uprising of Bangladesh. He delves into the role of both international and national media and links the CNN effect theory to the fall of an authoritarian regime in Bangladesh. A study done by Azim and Zaman, published in the journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, also portrays the significance of media in shaping the July Movement, especially in terms of creative expression such as rap songs, graffiti and many more. To understand the importance of digital journalism and social media movements, this study has cited the research of Dr Moiyen Zalat Chowdhury in the Shahbagh movement of 2013 and the role of social media and bloggers in constructing the narrative of such a mass Bangladeshi movement.

Earlier this year, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) did a full report on the facts and findings of all the human rights violations committed by the Awami League government from July 15, 2024, to August 5, 2024. This report delves into the details of the July uprising in Bangladesh, focusing mostly on facts and figures of the movement. However, despite being extensive in their reporting with interviews and case studies and the progression of events in July 2024, the report does not provide an analytical approach to said events.

A deeper analysis of the events during July 2024 can be found in the newspaper articles published in the local newspapers, especially in *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*. Along with every other news outlet in Bangladesh, these two newspapers have published numerous pieces on the July uprising. The opinion pieces and editorials written by veteran journalists and, in some cases, scholars, have been a source of in-depth analytical discussion on the said uprising. The movement also got intensive attention from international media outlets like *Al Jazeera*, *The Guardian*, and *BBC*.

In *Prothom Alo*, there was an entire series in late August 2024 on various forms of media as a resisting power during the July movements. The writers wrote articles highlighting various slogans, songs, poems, posters, graffiti, and social media trends in this series called ‘Bidrohe-Biplobe’, which translates into ‘In Rebellion- In Revolution’.

In *The Daily Star*, there has been a significantly comprehensive article on the history of censorship in Bangladeshi media during different political periods by Naeem Mohaiemen. A lot of articles during and after the July uprisings have also been published on the timelines of the protests, the internet shutdown by the government, and the role of journalists and media in Bangladesh after the July uprising.

Methodology

The findings of this research are derived from qualitative data from a number of primary and secondary sources. Firstly, the paper focuses on the primary data collected from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on human rights violations of the July Movement. The qualitative information used in this paper was derived from comprehensive research into various books, journal articles, and a large number of newspaper articles published online. Since this is a quite recent social movement, most of the research done regarding the July Movements was the first-hand experience of journalists, media professionals, and protesters. Therefore, a large number of facts and statistics that are used in this paper have been collected from the newspaper articles published at a time while the protests were happening.

This study loosely relies on the theory of the ‘public sphere’ by German scholar Jürgen Habermas. Habermas theorises the concept of the public sphere as a part of one’s social life where public opinions can be formed. According to this theory, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and any type of mass media could be considered a part of the public sphere. Habermas calls this a ‘mediation’ within the state and society, where individual private citizens can contribute to forming a ‘public opinion’. (50) The purpose of this idea is mainly to preserve the state of democracy and contribute to social welfare (Habermas 55).

On the other hand, to research more qualitatively to gather more recent information and opinions regarding the protests, the author has also conducted several interviews on news consumption, the role of media, and the internet shutdown during the July Movement. The interviewees were students from mostly public and private universities of Dhaka. A total number of 9 interviews were conducted, all of them being held online in a semi-structured

manner. The interview questions were open-ended and built in a way that brought out descriptive and unique answers from each interviewee. The author also gathered information from a seminar by a leading journalist in Bangladesh, Tasneem Khalil. In the seminar, Khalil speaks about freedom of speech and the importance of a free press in building a new Bangladesh.

The interviewees were selected and categorised based on their mode of participation in the movement. A few of them were direct organisers and activists in their own institutions who were fighting on the frontlines. A few others were activists who fought on the frontlines but were not organisers. Some others actively participated in online activism on social media, along with a few days of participation offline before the harsh crackdown began. Their answers were also categorised based on the chapter segments of this study, such as their experiences with the censorship and internet shutdown, their activism through social media and citizen journalism, their experiences with other forms of media like rap songs and artworks, and finally, their hopes and disappointments in the context of the ‘new’ Bangladesh after August 5th, 2024 (Appendix A, Appendix B).

Chapter 1

Censorship and Silence: The Weaponisation of Bangladeshi Media Atmosphere

The government's discontent over social movements and its far-from-ideal way of minimising them is nothing new in Bangladesh's sociopolitical history. Imposing censorship in traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio has existed since the country's independence in 1971. Naeem Mohaiemen states in an article that a frequent occurrence during the 1980s was the disappearance of television episodes, particularly but not only from Western programmes. In today's world of unrestricted social media and dozens of satellite channels, such actions would be like filtering through sand. However, business interests (as owners and advertisers) and the state (by enacting laws, making arrests, and closing businesses) still have the ability to intentionally limit the flow of information and news. The public records do not include the more discreet kinds of persuasion, like the infamous 'invitation to tea' with intelligence officials or the 'boro bhai' of a political group.

These instances of controlling and influencing the narrative variously by the state and advertising agencies led by the richest people of the nation were also something that shaped the flow of information during the July protests of 2024. Students, civilians, and opposition parties alike – every single person was scrutinised and monitored in a 1984-esque surveillance dystopia, leading to not only the spreading of misinformation but also a violent crackdown that resulted in mass unlawful arrests and forced disappearances. Moreover, the most significant and horrendous act of repressing the flow of information came when there was a nationwide internet shutdown that blanketed the entire country in panic and turmoil, enabling the state and law enforcement to continue their violent crackdown in a communication void.

Crackdowns upon media professionals and severe censorship in traditional national media such as television channels, newspapers, and radio stations have also been consistent in Bangladesh's political scenario. Even though former prime minister Sheikh Hasina kept claiming that the journalists and media professionals in the country had been enjoying the utmost freedom during her continuous rule from 2008, the nation's position as 165th among 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index, documented by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in 2024, proves otherwise.

Levitsky and Way explain in their work (11) the process in which the government controls most, if not all, radio and television broadcasts in many competitive authoritarian governments. There might be exceptions to this, independent sources of news that are distributed without any issue, but they only ever reach a very limited number of bourgeois audiences. It is also noteworthy that while there are a lot of private media, most media organisations are connected to the ruling party through patronage and proxy ownership. Bangladesh Awami League's 15 years in office, marked by controversial and boycotted elections of 2014, 2018, and 2024, were a period of unprecedented media control and dominance. Newspapers were forced to become heavily censored and subdued, except for *Prothom Alo*, *Daily Star*, *New Age*, and a few others. The majority of the private television networks (such as Ekattor TV, Channel 24, and Independent TV) were also marketised and controlled by businessmen with an inclination towards the ruling political party. With time, people's attention started to veer towards more online methods of news consumption rather than depending on television or newspapers. In response, the government introduced the Digital Security Act of 2018, which extended the Information and Communications Technology Act of 2006. However, the DSA was abandoned in favour of the Cyber Security Act (2023) due to harsh criticism and legal violations (Mohaiemen).

These draconian laws implemented were not only a source of frustration for the journalists but also a violation of the concept of the public sphere, hampering and weakening the relationship between the Bangladeshi public and the Bangladeshi government. There was also a ‘culture of fear’ in the media, as termed by Mubashar Hasan, due to the extrajudicial killings and mass disappearances. So, among other things, this malpractice of cracking down on media, censoring, and fabricating news was not a new thing for the Hasina regime.

During the July Movement in 2024, this fragile and repressive relationship between the Bangladeshi state and the traditional media came to a significant turning point. It is important to mention here that the protest turned more intense and deadly compared to the initial quota reform protests because of Sheikh Hasina’s remark on those protesters in a ‘press’ conference. The false accusation of being a ‘razakar’ towards the peaceful protesters of the quota-reform movement was what triggered the movement into something massive.

Throughout July, Hasina did several other press conferences and press briefings where she further provided false information on the number of deaths, accusing the protesters of being ‘terrorists’ and completely disregarding the violence done by both the police and the Bangladesh Chhatra League.

The people, as an alternative, turned to more non-traditional media, namely citizen journalism in social media and groups and broadcast channels updated by protesters and students directly. Tufekci states that this new form of digital connectivity gives a completely new look to the flow of information. Using cell phones to record, broadcast and share information gives protesters the ability to reach millions of people at once. Many ordinary citizens, who may not actively participate in the protests, also have the means of sharing information or recording the most recent updates from their location in this new media. Therefore, this media gives an opportunity to the citizens to portray and circulate the wrongdoings of the authorities directly, moving the discussion beyond ‘authorities said,

activists claimed'. (6) The July Movement showed this case of digital connectivity when the protesters on the streets, as well as ordinary citizens, were recording clashes and conflicts across the country and sharing them on the internet, strengthening the movement and proving the power of collective action.

However, these authorities have learnt to keep up with this new media as well. With the same goal of censoring information during any social movement, the authorities have turned to new tactics of digital surveillance. They produce an information glut, spread confusion through misinformation and disinformation, and even arrange outright counter-protests. (Tufekci 6) This control over the internet, in Bangladesh's July Movement, took the most extreme act of total internet shutdown across the country for almost 10 days.

For the purpose of this study, the crackdown and censorship of media and news by the government to muzzle the protests of July 2024 would be divided into three categories. The categories are based on the timeline and sequential events of the protests, which would be the spread of misinformation and disinformation from national news outlets, the nationwide internet shutdown at the height of the protests, and the surveillance of social media to remove 'anti-government' posts and sentiments.

1.1 The Menace of Misinformation

When students first started to protest in early July, misinformation and disinformation⁵ did not come into play as much as when things started to intensify after Hasina's razakar remarks. The procession of hundreds of students on 14 July chanted passionately, 'Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, razakar. Says who? Says who? The dictator, the dictator!' This slogan, to start with, was massively misrepresented on social media by

⁵ Misinformation here means information that is unverified and fabricated, regardless of the intention behind it. Disinformation, on the other hand, means false information that is deliberately spread to cause confusion and clashes.

ministers of the Awami League and government-funded media, where they omitted the second half of the slogan.

Dipu Moni, the former minister of social welfare, posted on her official Facebook account that those who identify themselves as ‘razakars’ have no right to uphold the flag of Bangladesh. Several other former state ministers, including those for information and broadcasting, education, and others, posted on their social media accounts condemning the students who used the term ‘razakar’ and completely disregarding the second part of the slogan about dictatorship in Bangladesh. The result of this was that those who were actively on the streets on 14th July were at first perceived to be anti-Bangladesh since the term razakar has a tainted history in Bangladesh.

In the current digital era, information spreads like wildfire. Most people no longer rely on traditional news outlets such as television news or newspapers; rather, they find their news on social media and online news outlets. Tufekci calls the protests of this era ‘networked protests’. (228) To control these networked protests, the authorities have come up with new ways of censorship rather than implementing a total denial of access to information. The goal, Tufekci says, is not to block information or control the narrative anymore, but rather to create confusion, cynicism, and a sense of helplessness among the masses to create division. One of the ways to do that is to divert the attention of the audience with distractions to sow doubt and fear. (229)

That is exactly what the Awami League government did with their misinformation campaign and their blaming game. As the days progressed, the information flow in traditional media and by government officials became more and more clouded with unfounded blame and accusations, trying to divert the attention and focus of the movement. The former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in many of her press conferences and briefings, completely disregarded the spirit of the protests, denying any and all accusations of corruption, police

violence, and the nine-point demands of the student coordinators. In a report done by *The Business Standard*, from the ‘infamous’ press conference of 14th July, where she fuelled the protests with her usage of the term ‘razakar’, till the 3rd of August, when after so many deaths and destruction, she urged the students to come and sit with her for a discussion, her misleading and arguably baseless statements in her press conferences were the most obvious attempt at controlling the narrative.

The Student Wing of Awami League, Bangladesh Chhatra League and Bangladesh Jubo League, along with their attacks on student marches on the street, engaged in a mass online campaign of spreading misinformation and disinformation. An interviewee, Arpita Hasin, who was an organiser and protester from International Business Administration (IBA), Dhaka University, said that the attackers of Chhatra League were deliberately spreading misinformation as a trap for general students. She said on 15th August, when the students were attacked at Dhaka University, a lot of Chhatra League members started posting on Facebook groups under fake accounts that students were being attacked on one specific road of the university. As a result, when others went to rescue said ‘attacked’ or ‘injured’ students, they were faced with a large number of attackers themselves instead of injured students. This specific form of spreading disinformation and overwhelming the masses considers attention as the key component of any social movement. By destroying the legitimacy and credibility of information, they confuse and overwhelm the general population. Since the social movement’s main purpose is to bring about change and proceed towards a call for action, the sense of doubt sown by disinformation leads to inaction. This creates a sense of paralysis and a feeling of helplessness, losing the spark and energy (Tufekci 239).

The traditional media, specifically the national news outlets like Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar, proved to be further sources of misinformation. At the height of the protests, these government-funded media outlets were broadcasting

entertainment programmes and mindless advertisements. Although the private media houses were not as blatantly pro-government, still being partially owned by businessmen and advertising agencies that were in support of the Awami League government limited their coverage of the protests. Therefore, information regarding the number of deaths and violence became scarce in most of the traditional media, with the government weaponising doubt and confusion to censor traditional media.

1.2 The Ultimate Censorship of A Networked Protest: Internet Shutdown and Communication Blackout

On 18th July, after a day full of violent protests and constant circulation of horrifying images and videos of those protests on social media, arguably the most crucial and sensitive time during the protest, the government implemented a horrendous new tactic of censorship by shutting down the internet across the nation.

At approximately 1:29 PM on 18th July, while thousands of students and civilians were engaging in intense conflict with law enforcement and being attacked by the student wing members (Bangladesh Chhatra League) of the ruling party, the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) ordered the mobile operators across the country to shut down 4G internet service. Zunaid Ahmed Palak, former state minister for ICT, himself admitted to BTRC and NTMC blocking the mobile internet across Bangladesh in order to ‘control’ the protests and help the law-enforcing agents. However, BTRC officials later denied having anything to do with the internet outage (Hasan).

That night, at around 8:30 PM, slowly, even the broadband internet connection began to be cut off across the nation. After a full night of uncertainty and frustration, the next day citizens were informed through a text message from BTRC that, due to a fire at the data

centre, allegedly set by ‘miscreants’, internet service throughout the country has been disrupted. However, this text message or further statement from the ICT minister or any other officials did not mention how long this internet outage would last.

At a time when almost every citizen was relying on social media for news due to the heavy censorship of traditional media, this unexpected cut-off from the world was horrifying and frustrating. In interviews conducted by the author, protest organisers of several universities have expressed their opinions on the internet blackout and its impact on the protests. One interviewee, Nibir Neelim, mentions that students all across the country got stuck wherever they were due to this communication blackout and a harsh crackdown on students and anyone who even looked like students. The students turned to old-school text messaging and phone calls to keep up with each other, the interviewee says, updating each other on authentic news of their area over the phone.

Zaman mentioned in a *Daily Star* article that the fundamental goal of information control is to promote the legitimacy of the current government by emphasising the capabilities of a personalistic dictator, highlighting the incumbent's viewpoint, and degrading the opponents and other critics. They employ the internet to accomplish this, and they have implemented both legal and extralegal tactics that are referred to as ‘digital authoritarianism’. As a result, the internet, which was once seen as a sign of democracy, is today used as a weapon for social and political control.

In an article published in *The Daily Star*, Mahmudul Hasan mentions all the ways the Hasina government fumbled in their already rocky public perception by implementing this internet blackout. The shutdown, according to Hasan, only led to an easier spread of rumours and misinformation across the country. A majority of Bangladeshi businesses and e-commerce companies rely on the internet, along with individuals whose primary source of

income is from freelance work. The disruption of the internet for so long, therefore, impacted both the individual and national state of the economy, leading to huge losses in some cases. The most impactful consequence of the internet outage, however, came in the form of attention. In her work, Tufekci talks about the internet shutdown in Egypt by the Hosni government in 2011. During a string of anti-government protests, which later led to the revolutionary ‘Arab Spring’, the authoritarian regime in Egypt ordered a complete shutdown of the internet across the country, which was a crucial turning point in the movement. Tufekci argues that this ‘clumsy’ move by Hosni to curb the protests backfired heavily. It was this draconian move that only intensified global and domestic attention toward the protests, which, according to Tufekci, is just as much, if not more, important as information during social movements (227).

The same thing happened in the case of Bangladesh’s government-orchestrated internet shutdown during the July Movement. In *the Daily Star* article, Mahmudul Hasan writes in his article that several human rights organisations reached out and condemned the Bangladeshi government for this act of censorship, terming it an ‘attempt to stifle dissent and control the narrative around the protest.’ It was seen as a violation of freedom of speech in the international community, leading them to pressure and condemn the Bangladeshi government.

Journalists faced a unique challenge in this situation, leading them to turn to analogue methods of recordkeeping and news collecting in a desperate attempt to record everything happening during the time of the internet blackout. In a discussion titled ‘Blackout Chronicles: How Journalists and Activists Navigated the Blackout’, organised by *The Daily Star*, journalists delve into their struggles and challenges during that time.

Tanvir Chowdhury, a video broadcast journalist at *Al Jazeera*, spoke about the challenges he faced sending footage to his international colleagues due to the internet

shutdown. He could not even use the *Al Jazeera* satellite sometimes, as it was occasionally blocked by security forces. He and some other journalists then resorted to the local *AFP* office for assistance, as they provided alternate internet access at that time. Chowdhury states how risky it was for both the local and international journalists working to cover the facts regarding the protests and send them to international media.

Therefore, the internet blackout not only halted communication both within and outside the borders of Bangladesh, but it also hugely affected the economy and Bangladesh's impression in the international community. This dystopian move by the authoritarian government to muzzle the anti-government protests, in a way, backfired by drawing further attention to the protests. Moreover, the massive violation of human rights done in the darkness of internet blackouts implies the weaponisation of this networked world.

1.3 An Orwell-esque Nightmare: Surveillance and Crackdown

Heavy monitoring and surveillance over both traditional and non-traditional media have been a thorn in Bangladeshi media's side since the beginning. Especially in times of crisis and conflicts over the years, when activists and journalists have been using digital and traditional media to communicate and report news, the authorities have made it their mission to implement an Orwellian atmosphere of surveillance.

Ali and Zaman stated in their research that a lot of journalists they interviewed have claimed to be monitored excessively by various state institutions like intelligence agencies, the press department of the PM's office, and the Ministry of Information and Law Enforcement. They say that if a newspaper or any media outlet published sensitive information that could go against the government image in any way, members of the intelligence agencies would not only create pressure on that media outlet, but they would also

threaten individual journalists and their families (49). OHCHR verified in their report that NTMC provided intelligence to government officials by monitoring citizens' personal communications and exchanges. They mention how the Hasina regime built a 'pervasive internet', a complete surveillance system that created an eerie atmosphere of 'being watched' constantly (72).

With the rise of internet-based media outlets and social media, the face of such mass surveillance has taken on a new shape. Hacking software is one of the most common ways the government has been tracking phones, laptops and any other personal devices connected to the internet. Tufekci says that this surveillance and tracking take a more sinister form during social movements to control activists and dissidents. She says that since movements are intricately woven with the concept of expanding networks, they are 'as weak as their weakest points'. Networks, by their concept, are people forming connections with other people, expanding their message outside of an already established circle of networks. It's something like the governments sending informants and spies to open meetings in the pre-internet era. Now, they create fake social media accounts to join online forums and chat groups of the activists of social movements (251, 252). Digital tools during social movements in these situations work as a double-edged sword, providing the activists with an important tool to spread their message to a broader audience but also exposing their private information and making them vulnerable to authoritarian governments (254).

In the July uprisings of 2024, the Bangladeshi population saw this harsh and horrifying form of censorship through surveillance to a great extent. The extent of government surveillance moved beyond media professionals and social activists during July 2024 and the years leading up to it. Private citizens became victims of this as well, so much so that they became self-censored on public platforms and moved to private messaging platforms where their communications were encrypted. The National Telecommunications

Monitoring Centre (NTMC), the same branch of government that was responsible for the internet shutdown in July 2024, has intercepted calls, collecting private information through unjust means, leading to enforced disappearances, arrests and raids, long before the July Movements (Rashid). In an investigative report done by *Al Jazeera* in 2021, Bangladeshi government officials purchased surveillance equipment to monitor the mobile phones of hundreds of people together from an Israeli company in 2018, a country with whom diplomatic ties and trade relations are prohibited for Bangladesh. Eliot Bendenelli from Privacy International said that this specific spying software can monitor almost 200 to 300 phones at the same time, intercepting calls and texts, and even recording the websites someone visits. The investigative report published by *Al Jazeera* also states that this specific technology has been used over and over by the law enforcement and intelligence agencies of Bangladesh to keep track of participants in any protests or demonstrations.

In late July 2024, during and after the internet shutdown, a mass number of arrests were being made by law enforcement based on some baseless general characteristics, for being ‘young and not employed’, for not being able to procure identification cards out of the blue, for not generally living in Dhaka, etc. Without any actual evidence of criminal activities, 70% of arrests were made during this time, as stated by a former senior official in the OHCHR report. The official also confessed that specific arrests were made based on the information derived from electronic surveillance methods, obtained through the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre (NTMC), DGFI, NSI, Police Special Branch and DMP Special Analysis Division (45). There were also threats from the local Bangladesh Chhatra League members, the student wing of the Awami League, who were actively hunting down anyone who was posting online in favour of the protests, at least in early July, as stated by an interviewee, Nubair Rakin.

In an interview conducted by this author, the respondent Nibir Neelim describes the dystopian environment of the crackdown that happened during the July Movement. He said that most of the students posted on social media in favour of the protests passionately, even if they could not actively participate in the protests by going out and marching in the streets of dhaka. However, their online activism highlighted them as prime targets for the police and other law enforcement agents. There were multiple cases of raids happening in the student hostels and residential areas. Arrests were being made left and right just for being a student and even looking like a student. This respondent also mentions several instances when the police patrolling the streets wanted to check the phones of anyone who 'looked suspicious'. This massive invasion of privacy astounded everyone, including students as well as civilians, seeing for the first time the blatant and obvious usage of surveillance and intimidation tactics by the government.

Chapter 2

Beyond the Silence: Sparks of Resistance Reshaping Narratives

Media, in all its shapes and forms, was not only used as a means of censorship and crackdown during the July Movement of Bangladesh. Among other things, the movement was unique in being a completely broadcast and ‘networked’ movement through social media and citizen journalism, resisting and finally succeeding in their effort to push against media censorship and communication blackouts.

‘Networked movements’, as Zeynep Tufekci calls them, are a reconstruction of the public sphere and social movements, with the addition of digital tools and the internet woven into the fabric. These movements lead the activists to seek accountability from institutions and corporations that hold so much power and sway (x). Although Tufekci uses this term to describe the Arab Spring in most of her work, since the spread of the internet and digital devices, social movements across the world have taken the shape of these ‘networked movements’, including movements in Bangladesh.

One of the reasons why an authoritarian government spends so much time censoring and surveilling the mass media of a country is because, when used correctly, this mass media can be just as easily used against the government. In the twenty-first century, with new challenges of constant monitoring and tracking technologies, the public sphere has also developed faster and broader-reaching ways of communication in times of social movements. Tufekci talks about the Tahrir uprising in her book, speaking about how this 2011 Egyptian revolution, which she witnessed firsthand, proved to her how digital connectivity has shrunk the concept of time and space, making Tahrir Square in Egypt a broad centre of attention and visibility in 2011. This enabled the audience to perceive an event as it happened, which means the audience did not only see a filtered version portrayed in mass media; rather, it was

both interpersonal and participatory. Tufekci says that throughout the 18-day-long protests in 2011, she only turned on the television once, that too for research purposes, not as a source of news. While she saw a broadcast of the protest on CNN, she felt the information she gathered from Twitter, where individual persons tweeted their views in an incomplete, however intimate, manner, was more informative than the traditional news media only just portrayed a mass of people, a crowd that is indistinguishable (xxv).

Like in most places in Southeast Asia, public engagement in Bangladesh has a history of leaning towards resistance to autocratic regimes through creative expressions and media. In 2013, the Shahbag Movement, demanding proper trial and execution of the war criminals of 1971, is a prime example of such creative resistance. This mass movement that brought together thousands of people from all walks of life was initially organised by a group of secular bloggers and online activists, who sought transparency and accountability from the judiciary authorities of the government (Rahman 335). This new form of online activism will lead to the rise of new media in Bangladesh, which will significantly contribute to all social movements in the coming years.

Slowly, over the years, the internet has expanded to include blogs, websites, and search engines in different languages, including Bangla. Rahman (335) mentions how during the BDR Mutiny of 2009, this 'blogosphere' of Bangladesh played the crucial role of a proxy news source, while the traditional media outlets of television channels and radios were heavily censored. Challenging the authorities and drawing global attention, Bangladesh then started to see an insurgence of citizen journalism through this new media.

One of the most impactful factors in student movements in Bangladesh, specifically the ones during recent years, has been the usage of social media and digital connectivity. In the context of the July Movement, the Gen Z population (people who were born between 1995 and 2012) and their utilisation of social media to portray their socio-political messages

with trends, hashtags, and memes were an approach to the movement that hasn't been witnessed on this scale before. It is important to note here that it was the viral videos and images of unarmed students being beaten up in Dhaka University on 15th July and the heroic posture of Abu Sayeed right before he was shot by the police that paved the path towards a more violent and intense anti-government movement from the peaceful processions of the quota-reform movement. Many students from private universities and English medium schools, who were not initially involved in the quota-reform movement, citing that they had never planned to apply for government jobs, were furious after watching their innocent classmates from public and national universities being attacked and killed. An interviewee, Siam Mahmud, stated that it was not until the video of Abu Sayed went viral that the masses became mobilised against the regime. Before that, he says, it was mostly about quota reformation. But the moment we saw an innocent protester being shot, all those years of pent-up frustration against the corrupted and power-hungry Awami League regime spread like wildfire and triggered the whole nation into doing something.

The media's role as a resisting force against the authoritarian power in July 2024 led to an impactful turn in the formation of public opinion, policy decisions, and international reactions. Ahnaf Tibro states a theory called the 'CNN effect', a way of shaping the public sphere with media mobilising and amplifying the voices of the protesters and drawing attention to the movements from outside of Bangladesh (2). He says that the live coverage of the protests and the violent crackdown of the government against the protesters brought the attention of global media to the July Movement in Bangladesh. Many students interviewed by this author have stated that they had designated groups of students contacting both national and international media, sending them footage and up-to-date photographs of the violence and clashes during the protests. A student activist, Arunima Chakraborty, stated in her interview that throughout the whole protest, her responsibility was to maintain

communication with every member of their activist group. 'Every day, while our classmates went out to participate in the streets, a few of us who could not do so due to family restrictions formed a group that kept a record of everything happening in the streets by constantly calling and texting the protesters on the ground,' Chakraborty says. Even after the internet shutdown, they used offline chatrooms to keep in contact with each other, according to Chakraborty, proving the attempts of the government to scatter the protesters futile. These instances of using media and communication to their advantage not only amplified their voices but also created pressure on the authoritarian government.

2.1 From Bystanders to Broadcasters: Redefining Journalism through Citizen Reporting

Broad and easy access to information in the twenty-first century has enabled a news environment that is equally participatory and engaging. Citizen journalism, in this sense, is an integral part of today's media atmosphere. Citizen journalism has been defined in so many terms, including 'open-source journalism', 'hyper-local journalism', 'distributed journalism', or 'networked journalism' (Allan 18). In a precise definition given by Bowman and Willis, it is stated that citizen journalism is a new approach to creating and distributing credible information, where ordinary citizens of a society are the key players. In this definition, the authors also add that the purpose of such a flow of information where the citizens play an active role is to establish and flourish a democratic society (9). This connection between citizen journalism and democracy is important to keep in mind for the main argument of this chapter.

Citizen journalism, according to Allan and Thorsen (5), has been significantly contributing to the public interest, even more so in societies where press freedom is not

always granted. By challenging the traditional media and authoritarian flow of information, these citizen journalists take a very personal high risk. It is not uncommon for repressive regimes to place heavy censorship and surveillance over the 'blogosphere', limiting the flow of authentic, first-hand information. The rise of a 'networked society', however, has given ordinary citizens a remarkable power to control and distribute the information flow, all thanks to citizen journalism (Allan and Thorsen 6).

Although this form of journalism, unedited and unfiltered, is likely to give rise to some valid criticism of their credibility and professionalism, it has to be acknowledged that in times of crises when traditional media is restricted and censored, the journalism undertaken by ordinary citizens is revolutionary. In nearly every social movement after the spread of internet users in Bangladesh, from movements like the Shahbagh movement in 2013, the Road Safety Movement in 2018, and finally, the July Movement in 2024, citizen journalism has played a crucial role in shaping the flow of information.

In Bangladesh, according to a report done by Datareportal (Kemp), almost 77 million people use the internet, with 60 million of them using social media. Every year, this number keeps growing at an accelerating rate, giving ordinary citizens access to the networked world. This mass access to the internet and social media leads to a gathering of people from all statuses of society, reporting and sharing day-to-day information. Whereas traditional media like television and newspapers report, gather and distribute information under a heavy threat of censorship and heavy editing, citizen reporting brings that information to the light in the most unfiltered manner within a short amount of time (Khan et al. 257).

During the July Movement in Bangladesh, the traditional media went through one of the harshest periods of censorship, making almost every single one of the renowned television channels and newspapers unreliable. One of the student interviewees, Arpita Hasin, mentioned that during the height of the protests, the protesters and civilians did not even open

the television for news, as it was extremely unreliable. She mentioned Jamuna TV and Channel 24 as the only sources of credible news; however, even that had some limitations. In this environment, where the only source of reliable information was from a distant cousin who lived in another part of the country or the friends who were broadcasting live the violence inflicted upon the protesters in a specific area. Most of the videos and images that were being shared were first recorded by ordinary citizens with their smartphones, some of them so gut-wrenching and horrifying that they sparked renewed rage. Sumain Aahir, a student interviewee who mostly participated in the protests by sharing and resharing posts on social media, stated that she joined public Telegram channels to stay up-to-date with the situation. Videos and images recorded by ordinary citizens were being shared on those channels. One of those videos was of a young student being thrown out of a police tank after he was shot dead. Aahir said, 'This horrifying video did unspeakable things to me, making me angrier and sadder than ever in this situation.' This video, which enraged many more students and civilians like Aahir, was also a product of citizen journalism, as traditional media were not covering cases of such police brutality and graphic videos due to censorship.

The surprising and most remarkable part about this was that although a major element of citizen journalism is the internet and social media, the government's attempts to shut down these did not muzzle citizen reporting. During the time of the shutdown, Nibir Neelim said that they switched to analogue modes of record-keeping and information sharing. There were offline SMS chains between ordinary people who shared up-to-date information about the area they were residing in, reporting any violence they witnessed and keeping offline records of it, like photographs or videos. Slowly, there started to be a rise of offline chatrooms, which worked exactly as Facebook or WhatsApp groups consisting of numerous people but without the internet. There were area-specific and institution-specific chat rooms, as stated by the interviewee Udo Ghosh. As he is a student from Dhaka University, he joined chat rooms

that were constantly updating everyone on the situation at the Dhaka University area. Even though it was limited to a small area, the news was crucial, as stated by Ghosh, since most of the institutional hostels were cleared out, and a harsh crackdown was being inflicted upon students and anyone who even looked like students by raiding private houses and hostels. In the shadow of the internet shutdown, these unrests could have easily been lost, but these offline chat rooms recorded every single occurrence of raids and arrests in that area. These offline modes of communication also provided citizen journalists an opportunity to flourish under harsh surveillance.

In fact, Arpita Hasin stated that it was the internet shutdown that fuelled the speed of the July protests. This interviewee, a student organiser from IBA, Dhaka University, mentioned that had it not been for the internet shutdown, the international community all across the world would not have become so invested in the unrest in Bangladesh. She said that right before the internet went out, she and a lot of other students she knew were actively trying to communicate with international journalists and news agencies with the video recordings and photographs of violence inflicted on the protesters by law enforcement and the members of the government student league. So when the internet went out, it was more than obvious that the authorities cut the internet off to hide the aforementioned atrocities. This led to the international community becoming more aware of the situation and creating pressure on the Awami League government.

Here, let us bring in the previously discussed connection between democracy and citizen journalism. In an ideal democracy, which has been a far-fetched dream of the Bangladeshi political atmosphere, the participation of citizens in the mass media should be a requisite to the freedom of expression. Therefore, citizen journalism could be termed as ‘democratisation of multimedia technologies by the people and for the people’. In this

environment, citizen journalism is a grassroots form of journalism that complements the traditional form of journalism (Okori 158, 16).

Although it started as a quota-reform movement, the July Movements of 2024 quickly turned into an anti-government movement. Over her years-long regime as the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina became infamous for her numerous attempts at destroying democracy. The elections became more and more controversial, with the most recent election of 2024 being boycotted by major opposition parties. Therefore, the ‘democracy’ in Bangladesh slowly but surely took a turn towards authoritarianism, which, along with economic and political turmoils, dissatisfied the general population to no end. Siam Mahmud, an interviewee from BRAC University, said, ‘In early July 2024, when the protesters started to block roads demanding the reformation of quotas, I remember saying to my mother over the phone, “ I think people are finally doing something about this corrupted regime that has continued for so many years. Who knows, maybe this regime and the Prime Minister would finally fall!”’. When the public saw how the government-backed Bangladesh Student League and law enforcement officers were beaten and shot at young protesters, the dissatisfaction turned into fury. And here, citizen journalism comes into play, since the only way ordinary citizens could see the footage of violence was being recorded and shared by the ordinary citizens themselves at first, through social media. Therefore, the role of this form of journalism was a massive weaponisation of the media as resistance at a critical point in history.

2.2 Beyond Walls and Borders: Unleashing the Power of Social Media for Mass

Mobilisation

The use of social media during the July Movement of Bangladesh is arguably one of the most significant key factors in shaping and reshaping the protests to lead to the fall of a decades-long regime. Through social media, the information about both the violence and

resistance spread like wildfire, creating a strong public opinion on anti-government sentiment. Although in the later part of the protests, it became a double-edged sword in its infamous ability to spread misinformation and disinformation at an alarming speed, the protests took the shape of such massive public demonstrations at the beginning because of social media.

At its core, the rise of social media in the last decade has altered the face of all aspects of life, including social movements. While previously we lived in a society connected by mass media that had only a few government and corporate centralised nodes of connectivity, we now have a radically different flow of information and attention. In the current world of the digitalised public sphere, the line between ordinary citizens, social activists, journalists and media professionals has become more and more invisible (Tufekci 29). Social media, according to Tufekci (2), have empowered social movements in three specific ways: public attention, bypassing censorship and organisation or logistics. Old ways of gatekeeping information do not apply anymore, with access to sensitive information through social media that the authorities would have denied the masses otherwise.

In the context of social movements in Bangladesh, social media has been a catalyst bigger than traditional mass media for the last few years. Its biggest impact could be witnessed in the 2013 Shahbag Movement, which was initially organised and led by a group of activists and bloggers who used social media as a medium of communication and gathering information. With the demand for just punishment for the war criminals of 1971, the Shahbag Movement's first protest was a human chain in the Shahbagh intersection of Dhaka. This idea of protests was first circulated in the Blogger and Online Activist Network (BOAN), then a three-month-old Facebook group, creating a Facebook event. Later on, another Facebook group called Jatya Sharthe Blogger and Online Activists (Blogger and Online Activists for National Interest) created a similar event, and then they merged with the

previous group to implement their first procession in the Shahbagh intersection (Chowdhury 481). Chowdhury uses the Shahbagh Movement to justify how social movements of these decades have transcended boundaries, integrating physical protests with online discussions. Rational debates, as Habermas explained in his theory of the public sphere, have moved into the online sphere of social media and blogs.

However, the role of social media during social movements far outweighs the benefit of organisation and logistics, as explained by Tufekci (11). She gives the example of the Gezi protests in Turkey and the role of news gathering and information distribution through social media during the protest. As a response to the failure of Turkey's traditional mass media during that time, young college students built a volunteer news network for news sharing and verification.

Something similar happened in the July Movement of 2024, with social media being a lead actor in the events that led up to the fall of the Awami League regime. In a study done by Hushen (155), almost 95% of the respondents conveyed that they have been using Facebook as their major social media since July of 2024, with 65% of them using Facebook to get news primarily. In Bangladesh, with 52.90 million users (Datareportal 2024), Facebook is the most prominent social media for people of all societal statuses. In the early days of the July Movement of 2024, some students of universities created a Facebook group and page called 'Baishammo Birodhi Chhatra Andolan'. This group, which was initially created to organise peaceful protests, spread and branched out into a region-based group consisting of students all over the country, not just Dhaka (Hushen 156). A student coordinator of this student group, Nahid Islam, who later became the ICT adviser for the interim government after Hasina's fall, told *BBC Bangla* that they used Facebook for online meetings and announcing agendas for their main online activities.

Added to the news gathering and verification, social media also played an important role in shaping and reshaping the narrative, especially when it came to sparking outrage to organise mass protests on 14th July. The ‘razakar’ remark of the Prime Minister on 14th July, and the response of the media consumers to this information changed the face of the protests. Borrowing the term ‘oppositional decoder’ from Stuart Hall, the message that was meant to be conveyed by this comment of the Prime Minister, was perceived by the audience in a completely contrary way. It was evident that with the dark history behind this remark, the Prime Minister intended to invoke the emotions of hatred and shame. However, the audience received and reproduced this remark by disregarding the intention of the sender completely, when they repurposed the term ‘razakar,’ a term that was meant to shame and discourage them, as one of the major slogans of the protest. All across social media as well as the streets of Dhaka, the protesters reproduced the term ‘razakar,’ changing the wind of the movement.

Although Facebook and other social media were significant in the initial stages of the protests, they were equally, if not more, significant during the protests. While most students did not actively engage in political debates, almost everyone stayed informed and communicated with each other through social media. Jubayer Ayomoy, a student of Dhaka University, says that before the internet shutdown on 18th July, Facebook was the safest way of communicating not only with fellow protesters but also every other civilian. In an almost dystopian twist, Ayomoy stated, ‘If we communicated through calls and offline texts, there was almost always the possibility of being tracked.’ Another interviewee, Nibir Neelim, also said that almost every day he woke up and checked his social media for updates on protests across the country. ‘My friends who lived in front of my university constantly updated me if there were checkposts or police in front of the campus so we could gather and lead processions. Without social media, it would have been extremely difficult to circulate news, updates and help posts during the protests.’ There were groups formed with students,

teachers, and many other civilians all across Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram for the sole purpose of circulating information about monetary assistance, managing supplies and volunteers, and many more.

A primary school teacher interviewed by Hushen (159) said that the biggest factor that attracted the masses to the July Movement was the way students were using new and dynamic ways to mobilise. He says, 'For years we have witnessed the same old tactics of clashes and conflicts among political parties. However, the students adopted new strategies for this movement, where social media played a key role. With everybody changing their Facebook profile picture to red in defiance, making memes and jokes about government officials, creating inspiring slogans like "Cheyecilam Odhikar, hoy gelam razakar" (Wanted our right, became we razakar), "Buker vitor onek jhor, buk petechi guli kor" (The heart is filled with anger; come shoot straight at it), and many more, this was something of such a huge scale that we had never seen before.'

This novel approach of mobilising and inspiring an entire country through social media and new ways of dodging censorship as well as organising en masse made this a crucial tool of resistance during the July Movement in Bangladesh.

2.3 Spray Paints and Melody: The Creative Articulation of the Movement through Visual, Audio and Literary Media

Art, or rather politically committed art, is a crucial form of radical media during social movements, as it is the only form of expression that is unique in its complete independence, personal touch, individuality, and handwork. This form of media criticises the traditional mass media, giving consumers the opportunity to distance themselves from the overwhelming pour of information from them (Walker 90).

According to research by Azim and Zaman (1955), one of the most remarkable aspects of the July Revolution in Bangladesh was the ‘creative articulation’ of resistance. Visual media like photographs and posters, auditory reactive expressions like rap songs and slogans, and language and literature played a crucial role in shaping the July Movement into one of the biggest political uprisings in the country.

At the beginning of the protests in early July, the footage of the Bangla Blockade, a peaceful quota reform procession blocking streets all across Bangladesh, began to circulate through social media at lightning speed. Almost all of the interviewees conveyed that from the early days of the Quota Reform Movement to the beginning of July, photographs and videos of protests happening all across the country inspired them deeply.

The visualisation of the revolution has an extremely intense psychological and emotional impact on the audience. Both the footage on social media and news clips enrage, encourage, and empathise with the viewers, leading them to feel a sense of solidarity with the movement. The messages that are conveyed through visual media of struggle, resistance, and unity influence the mass perspective of a social movement (Amin 4).

As the protests intensified in the latter half of July 2024, the horrifying video of Rangpur student Abu Sayeed being shot by the police, a heartbreaking video of a BUP student named Mir Mugdho helping protesters by distributing water right before he was shot, and graphic images of students being violently attacked and arrested left and right began to circulate all across social media. Saad Al Amin (18) conducted a survey about the emotional responses people felt after watching these graphic images and videos of violence. 82% of the respondents stated that after watching the videos, especially the ones of Abu Sayed and Mir Mugdho, their anger was severely intensified towards the government. 62% also said that seeing this visual representation of violence made them feel more personally connected to the protests. Abu-Sayed’s iconic posture of standing up with his arms spread out before he was

shot, and Mir Mugdho's haunting last lines saying 'Pani Lagbe, Pani? (Does anyone need water?)' quickly became a symbol of the movement, with posters, graffiti, and other creative arts being created to capture their heroism and influence the public. Al-Amin (18) states that many focus group discussions that he conducted for his studies also indicated that several participants were more emboldened to participate in the protests after seeing these videos. The findings from this discussion represent that the role of visual media in amplifying emotional and psychological motivation during the July Movement was remarkable.

Graffiti filled the walls of Bangladesh, especially major cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and many more, a visual representation of resistance. With the crackdown and surveillance on free speech and creative expression on social media, the protesters took to painting the walls of their cities with artworks and slogans. This form of creativity was almost impossible to censor, giving the protesters the ability to remain anonymous yet still express their messages with colours and spray paints. From common yet awe-striking portrayals of the dead and injured to messages of secularism, anti-discrimination, and corruption, walls across the cities became canvases for a nation that was silenced for too long. A social rights activist, Shahana Huda says that by expressing the anger and frustration of the younger generation of the country through graffiti, attention was being drawn from not only the authorities but also countless adult citizens of the nation, who might not have been as active on social media (Rashid).

Another remarkable form of creative outlet in the July Movement was music and slogans, with revolutionary rap songs and catchy slogans being spread around the country. On 16th July, a young musician from Narayanganj named Shezan released a song called 'Kotha Ko (Speak Up)'. This song touched something deep in the hearts of the masses, especially in the context of the 15th and 16th July bloody attacks on public universities all across Bangladesh. The song boldly compared the 2024 uprising to the revolutionary 1952

Language Movement, questioning the fact that in a country where young students are being killed for asking for their rights, is it an ‘independent country’ after all? (Shahnewaj) Another song that sparked anger and inspiration among the people was ‘Awaj Utha (Raise Your Voice)’ by another rap musician, Hannan. This was the first song, according to an article published in *Prothom Alo*, that had the audacity to call Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina an ‘autocrat’ in print. This song by Hannan and SnareByt amassed 298 k views on YouTube in just 11 days and became the 12th trending song on YouTube during July. The Hasina regime, not surprisingly at this point, arrested the rap artist Hannan for his lyrics that criticised harshly the current government and their hypocritical weaponisation of the 1971 war of Bangladesh (Azim & Zaman 956).

Along with the music, the slogans of the July Movement also embedded pieces of courage and tenacity into the spirit of the protesters. Rakib states that in slogans during mass uprisings, there is always an attribute of mass spirit in them, making the words more common and catchy rather than poetic and aesthetic. The movement started with asking for quota reformation with slogans like ‘Quota na Medha? Medha! Medha! (Quota or Intelligence? Intelligence! Intelligence!)’ and ‘Amar Shonar Banglay, Boishommer Thai nai. (In my beloved motherland Bangla, there is no place for discrimination)’ quickly turned into harsh and straightforward slogans as the movement got more and more violent. Some that left a mark and moved the masses deeply include ‘Buker Bhitor Onek Jhor, Buk Petechi Guli Kor (Storms arise in my chest, I have spread out my chest, Now Shoot!)’, in reference to Abu Sayeed’s iconic pose of spreading out his arms right before he was shot, and ‘Ek Dofa Ek Dabi, Hasina Tui Kobe Jabi (One Point! One Demand! Hasina, when are you leaving?)’ that vehemently demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The protesters even adapted slogans from revolutionary moments in history, like the slogan ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ from the Anti-British movement and ‘Matribhumi Othoba Mrittu (Motherland or Death)’

from the Cuban revolution. Another form of resistance during this time was literature, both the classics and the contemporary, that conveyed and expressed the sentiments of the movement. The most inspiring and perhaps most common among them was the revolutionary last lines of the novel *Arek Falgun* (Another Spring) by Zahir Raihan. The novel highlights the student-led historical Language Movement of 1952 and the then-West Pakistani government's harsh attempts to quash the protests and the arrests of thousands of protesters. There is a scene at the end of the novel when a deputy jailer gets annoyed at the fact that there is not enough space in the prison to accommodate all the arrested students. To him, one of the student protesters present says, 'Increase the space in your prison, sir. This small jail cell would not be enough,' followed by another protester saying, 'Did you get scared just by the small number of protesters? Let me tell you, come next spring, we will be doubled!' (Raihan 194)

This last line about multiplying the number of protesters against authoritarian powers, this spark of not quitting in their protests against discrimination and injustice, and the poetic and beautiful way of articulation of the spirit of a revolution resonated deeply with the protesters of the July Movement. The last line of the novel 'Ashche Falgune amra kintu digun hobo (Come next spring, we will be doubled!)' was painted across multiple walls of the country, all over Facebook and Instagram graphics and posters, and in the mouths of the protesters on the streets.

These portrayals of outrage in art, music, literature, and many more solidified the sense of solidarity and constant urge to speak up against the acts of violence that were being inflicted upon innocent protesters and civilians.

Chapter 3

The Aftermath of a Storm: A Never-Ending Loop of Repression, with Glimmers of Tentative Hope

Social movements during the 21st century, especially during and after the rise of the internet, digital connectivity and social media, of course, have become more accessible, effective, and easy to organise and participate in. This revolutionary change in this sector, however, has brought on a new set of challenges along with its blessings. The easy connectivity and access to a global network, as can be seen by many movements of the digital era, including the July Movement in Bangladesh, have become a sort of double-edged sword.

One of the key weaknesses of the recent digitalised social movements, according to Tufekci, is the lack of organised leadership due to the easy participation means through social media. This lack of organisation and flimsy ideas of leadership and political structures is what leads to a social movement that suffers in the long run. Jürgen Habermas, the German scholar whose concept of the public sphere has been mentioned previously to understand the media atmosphere of Bangladesh in this paper, also states the fragility of the internet in affecting and shaping the public sphere of media.

Though both the concepts of ‘echo chambers’ and ‘slacktivism’ can be countered with examples where the role the internet and social media play is extremely beneficial to the public sphere and media production, there is truth to these theories to some extent. In light of the July Movement in Bangladesh, consistent unrest among the population after the ‘success’ of the movement on 5th August proves the concepts of limited scopes of an echo chamber and the unstructured leadership of slacktivism.

In the aftermath of the July Movement in Bangladesh, the country’s socio-political climate took a massive turn towards uncertainty and unrest. After the Awami League

government's fell on the 5th of August, streets turned into the playgrounds of both joyful marches and severely violent mobs. After the initial exhilaration of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation and fleeing the country had passed, the masses, in their decades-long pent-up frustration and anger for the previous government, took to attacking every place that had any relation whatsoever with the Awami League government. Like all mob acts of violence, these attacks did not follow any rules or limits whatsoever. They torched and broke down civilian homes and vehicles, many government buildings, and anyone or anything that had even any remote connections or alleged connection to the Awami League government. The mob also attacked and beat up several homes, offices, and places of worship of people of other religions than Islam, with the flimsy excuse that the previous government was friendly towards these communities.

Amidst this already fragile and tense situation, the spread of fake news and misinformation further weakened public confidence and unity. The same social media that was a key factor in shaping the July Movement into what it was, triggered a severely negative domino effect with the spread of fabricated news, photographs and videos without any sort of verification.

As days went on, the interim government led by Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus took power as the chief advisor. Instead of proper compensation for the attacks post-August and ensuring a free and democratic political, economic, and social atmosphere, communal violence, mob attacks and mass arrests have persisted. Many Bangladeshis remain hopeful and defend the failure of the interim government with the point that 'they just need some time to reform the system that the Awami League has corrupted and destroyed in the last 15 years.' Though this is partially true, at the time of writing this paper, at least the interim government's role in ensuring press freedom and security for media professionals remains almost non-existent. With almost 8 months having passed since the alleged 'Freedom

2.0 of Bangladesh', the media industry, journalists, and activists are facing more or less the same amount of censorship and surveillance.

3.1 The Uncontrollable Wildfire: Misinformation Fueling Communal Tension

In an ironic twist, the same social media that was used to combat disinformation and dodge censorship during the July Movement became the field of misinformation and unfiltered news that further fuelled the religious and political tensions in post-August 5th Bangladesh. Social media, in the first place, is just a tool. The role it plays in any social situation completely depends upon its users, meaning while it can be a blessing in connecting and amplifying voices that need to be heard, it can also become a curse while doing the same thing to malicious and untrue voices. In the aftermath of 5th August, social media was mostly used for the latter purpose. People with little to no legitimacy, political and religious extremists, and, in some cases, just straightforward yellow journalists took to Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and other social media apps to spread fabricated visual media, false reports of violence, and triggering and misleading information.

On the night of 5th August, the country went through intense and horrifying turmoil. In the name of celebration and anger, mobs all across the country started attacking the homes of Hindu minorities and people of other religions, their reason being that Hasina and the Awami League have always been allies of the Hindu community in Bangladesh. In an investigation done by the country's leading newspaper, *Prothom Alo*, it was found that between 5th and 20th August, at least 1068 houses and businesses of the minority communities in Bangladesh came under attack, with 22 houses of worship being vandalised as well.

In this sensitive and turbulent time, social media showed its dark side. Some people on social media completely disregarded the attacks on minorities, making it their personal responsibility to tweet and post with hashtags like #HindusSafeInBangladesh, at times even pushing the minority population, who were living in constant fear that their houses and places of worship would come under attack at any moment. One of the interviewees, Nibir Neelim, states that he heard from numerous friends of the minority communities, who were equally active during the July Movement as their Muslim comrades, that their family homes, temples, and even some establishments and businesses were being burnt down, looted, and vandalised. This author herself came across several help posts from Hindu, Christian and Indigenous communities who were doing Facebook Lives of looting and vandalising in their communities. Several of them, after being prompted personally by the author, replied that since the entire country is in chaos, with no law and order anywhere, the media barely paying attention to our turmoil. All of these respondents were distressed, saying that while the people on social media keep debating whether the news of attacks on minorities is true or not, we are being kept up night after night in fear that our houses might be attacked next.

On the other hand, there were social media posts from others who were fabricating and twisting the facts, using old footage of attacks against minorities to create further tension, fear and division. As tensions in both social media and reality within Bangladesh began escalating, from the night of 5th August, several Indian news organisations started to publish fabricated news about the attack on minorities. According to Rumour Scanner, an independent fact-checking organisation of Bangladesh, at least 49 Indian media outlets published at least 13 false reports about Bangladesh between August 12 and December 5 of 2024. Popular and renowned media outlets like the *Times of India* and *The Economic Times* in India published articles claiming that the Pakistani-backed ISI and the Chinese government were behind the fall of Hasina, leading to further panic and fear in an already fragile

geopolitical environment. *Al Jazeera* reported that the famously retweeted and reshared *Times of India* article claiming that West Bengal is likely to get 10 million Hindu refugees from Bangladesh was restating a statement of Suvendu Adhikari, a senior leader of the BJP, the ruling Hindutva extremist Nationalist governing body of India. Therefore, a political clash and a cold cyber war between India and Bangladesh started to brew as well (Mahmud and Sarker).

Arunima Chakraborty shared her experience on 5th August, a day that began with so much hope and anticipation, later turned into fear and disappointment. Extremist slogans from the victory marches and the uncertainty regarding the safety of her family only because of their religion and beliefs, made her feel as though the movement was being hijacked. ‘Before August 5th, it felt to me like the entire country was one team. But afterwards, whenever I said anything on social media and Facebook comments criticising the current situation in Bangladesh, people took just one look at my last name and accused me of being “pro-Indian”’, Chakraborty said.

However, it is important to note that regardless of the truth or falsity of the news and social media posts, it is undeniable that this communal tension created an intense fear and worry within an already marginalised community. A 29-year-old Hindu pharmacy owner from Sylhet tells *Al Jazeera* that the Hindus of Bangladesh are facing a very unique ‘twofold problem’. On one hand, the Indian media spreading disinformation is fuelling the anti-Hindu and anti-Indian sentiment, and on the other, all the incidents of attacks happening are being denied in Bangladeshi media and social media. All of this violence and conflict escalated and was fuelled by the same social media which was the only reliable medium of news during the movement, which was frustrating on so many levels (Hasan).

3.2 A Re-run of the Old Play: Threats Against Media Professionals and Rise of Extremism

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the threat against media professionals and a free media environment has been a persistent concern over the years. In the aftermath of the July Movement, the people of Bangladesh, especially the youth who initially made the movement into what became an anti-discriminatory and pro-democracy movement, were hopeful to have a reformed and independent media environment, like all the other aspects of national life. Almost eight months after the revolutionary ‘Independence Day 2.0’, the situation regarding the safety of media professionals and a free media industry without any governmental partiality still remains tenuous and fragile.

A recent statement by Amnesty International, a leading global human rights organisation, conveys concern over the violent attacks on journalists in Bangladesh, especially during February. Seven months after the Awami League government’s fall, this string of attacks is mostly triggered by mobs or extremist groups of people. A *Daily Star* reporter said that there is no logical reason as to what provokes these mobs to attack journalists and media professionals, which makes them a very real and horrifying threat (Naji).

The situation is made worse by instances of yellow journalism from YouTube stars Pinaki Bhattacharya and Elias Hossain and many others, who do not even live in the country but have influence over the ordinary citizens of Bangladesh to an alarming extent. By targeting two of the leading newspapers in Bangladesh, *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, they triggered a violent mob demonstration outside of their offices in November (Naji). Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemned these attacks and stated in an article that these

newspapers were accused of being anti-Islam and ‘agents of India’ because of their alleged promotion of topics like secularism, women’s emancipation, LGBTQ+ rights, and many more. There were even threats against individual journalists, including local journalists outside Dhaka as well as international organisation *AFP*’s Dhaka bureau chief, Sheikh Sabiha Alam. Most newspapers and individual journalists were offered protection from these attacks by the government, which bodes its own issue that if a media institution becomes dependent on the government for their safety, their responsibility of holding the same government accountable becomes less likely. It is also ironic that the media houses, especially *Prothom Alo*, were placed under the Rapid Action Battalion’s (RAB) protection, an elite paramilitary force in Bangladesh that has a notorious reputation for being involved in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings for over two decades (Naji).

Therefore, the assumption that the media industry will go through a quick and intense reformation process and a free press would be established that holds each and every citizen, including the powerful ones, accountable is still far from reach. With the attacks on media professionals and media houses, it is evident that the regime might have changed, but the old structure that shaped the psychology of the Bangladeshi population has remained.

3.3 What Comes Next: A Pessimistic Hope?

At the time of writing this paper, over eight months have passed since the July Movement. At this point, those who actively participated in the movement, risking their lives for a better future, remain reasonably sceptical yet tentatively hopeful. This segment answers the question regarding the new Bangladesh, both the disappointing results and the positive ones, from the perspectives of the ten students who were interviewed by the author for this

study. Moreover, to contextualise the answers from these young students, the author has also included excerpts from a seminar by a renowned media professional in Bangladesh.

In the seminar arranged by BRAC University in November 2024, a renowned Bangladeshi investigative journalist and the editor-in-chief of the diaspora news platform called ‘Netra News’, Tasneem Khalil, spoke on the aspects of freed media, journalism in Bangladesh, and his opinion on freedom of expression and a free press in ‘Bangladesh 2.0’. Khalil said in that seminar that with the fall of the Awami League regime, only half the battle is done. He said, ‘We have to remember that nowhere in the world has the government handed over press freedom just like that. People had to actively fight for it; so must we.’

After August 5th, multiple reform proposals were being put forward, as everyone was hopeful and anticipating a new mode of governance and the establishment of democracy. But as days went on, it became clear that the questions of minority rights, women’s safety, and issues concerning the violence perpetrated by the army at the Chittagong Hill Tracts and many others, were not going to be resolved as easily or even as quickly as anticipated. In the vacuum that was created by 15 years of autocracy by the Awami League government, multiple political parties with their own agendas started to influence the public sphere for their own benefit, rather than focusing on the greater good.

In this situation, the question of a free press and freedom of expression remains a vulnerable one. When asked where they see Bangladesh and its people going from here on, especially in the context of freedom of expression, the responses of the interviewed student protesters were a mixture of scepticism and hope. While some stated their satisfaction regarding freedom of expression being better than before (during the Awami League regime), others said that they do not possess much hope that total freedom of expression can ever be achieved in a country like Bangladesh.

Arpita Hasin said in the interview that as long as the majority of the Bangladeshi population remained illiterate, or even half-literate, we cannot use mass media to its full potential for our benefit. ‘Even more than literacy, what we need are people with decent mentality, people who are not as narrow-minded as most Bangladeshi people,’ she said. To do that, in her opinion, we need to focus on developing our socio-economic structure altogether. Hasin states, ‘We cannot expect a poor villager to understand or even care about freedom of expression or proper ways of news consumption.’

Walid Hasan, an interviewee from BRAC University, stated with hopelessness that there is not actually anywhere to go from here. ‘Mass media’, according to Hasan, ‘can be used to document everything that is happening, but it would take a long time before we can channel that documentation into something positively impactful.’ The same stream of frustration and hopelessness can be found in Sumain Aahir’s interview as well. She brings up the question of women’s rights while answering the question of freedom of expression. ‘Since I never feel any sense of freedom as a woman, it is hard for me to be hopeful about any other form of freedom,’ Aahir said. She also commented on the recent clashes between Islamic extremist political parties and the Women’s Reform Commission, especially the harassment on social media regarding any posts that update about the Women’s Reform Commission. She adds, ‘If your freedom of expression makes you spread hate speeches against women and other minorities, do you really deserve that freedom?’

Some students had mixed feelings about the current state of the country, including the media and journalism sector. Nibir Neelim and Jubayer Ayomoy were two of them. Neelim mentioned that while the situation has significantly improved since August 2024 and some reforms have been made, things are still far from completely fixed. He brings up the topic of recent cases of mob violence and states that this is not something the student ever wanted. ‘This type of local culture that translates freedom of expression into playing the judge, jury

and executioner themselves makes me feel hopeless and angry,' he says. Juabyer Ayomoy also expressed his opinion in a somewhat similar vein, saying that he was initially disappointed that so many reforms that were immediately necessary were not implemented. Yet, he remains tentatively hopeful. 'As long as the country can remain politically uncontaminated, there's hope. I think the media can play a balancing factor, criticising and holding any political parties of the government accountable.'

However, there are students who have applauded the positive changes brought about by this new Bangladesh post-Awami League regime. Uday Ghosh, from Dhaka University, said that the freedom of expression right now is possibly better than before. 'We have a lot more independent journalism happening in the country right now; journalists who were threatened by the previous government are coming back, and I think that is extremely important in the current situation.' Siam Mahmud, a BRAC University student, also remains hopeful and positive, stating, 'The fact that we can write or say whatever we think now is a huge step from the draconian surveillance of before. We don't even always have to express our opinion; just knowing that we can, without any repercussions, is liberating enough.'

However, the fight continues. Tasneem Khalil, in the previously mentioned seminar, said, 'The media would always speak on behalf of "someone", be it the government or corporate houses. To get out of this, we need to establish journalism platforms that serve the public interest wholeheartedly, and that is where organisations like 'Netra News', a public-interest journalism platform, come in.' He adds that the only way to fight disinformation and misinformation is to create and consume good information. Here we need to emphasise promoting media literacy among the general population of Bangladesh and try to establish opportunities for more independent journalism.

This mixture of emotions, hopes, and disappointments by students who actively participated in the July Movement has been proven to be valid and reasonable. While it is

true that reforms and attempts at reformation have been taken by the current interim government, and the political parties keep on promising to uphold the freedom of expression if they are elected, based on the track record of Bangladeshi socio-political history of censorship during every regime, the population remains sceptical. An 11-member Media Reform Commission was formed in November 2024, headed by senior journalist Kamal Ahmed, which has proposed several reforms in the media sector of Bangladesh, including legal reforms, protection of journalists, rules and regulations on media ownership, and digital media policies (*The Daily Star* Report). However, despite these measures taken, authorities are still fumbling to minimise crackdowns on media professionals, unlawful arrests based on alleged accusations of being pro-Awami League or even just a family member of someone pro-Awami League, and massive cyber harassment on social media by extremist groups of women, minorities, and indigenous people.

Conclusion

Not the End of a Revolution, but the Beginning of One

The impact of media in both the traditional and non-traditional senses during a 21st-century social movement in a South Asian country is undeniable and revolutionary. But it is also a double-edged sword, since the new media, such as social media, have a way of shaping and reshaping public discourse at an alarmingly fast speed. The purpose of this study has been to look at this interconnectedness between social movement and use in a nuanced and critical manner. The study has found that while the traditional media like television channels and newspapers crumbled to uphold free speech under heavy censorship, the non-traditional approaches to shape the public narrative of resistance, like revolutionary art and citizen journalism, flourished in the vacuum. The study has also delved into approaches of media that are very specific to the 21st-century landscape of the digital environment, with a dystopian crackdown on the internet and means of surveillance, as well as using social media to organise and evade such censorship.

Since this research was conducted after a significant amount of time had passed, the lens through which the movement is seen now has become more complex and tenuous. It can be seen in the interviews conducted by the author, where most of the interviewees have expressed their desire to see actual changes and some semblance of socio-political stability and their disappointment in the absence of them. The third chapter of this study has been dedicated to the aftermath of the massive movement, dissecting the harsh reality of communal tension and misinformation campaigns fuelled by the media and the still prevalent crackdown upon journalists and freedom of expression and the thoughts and opinions of student protesters and a senior investigative journalist regarding these situations.

However, due to limited time and resources, the research has some specific limitations. The interviewees for this study were all based in the capital, Dhaka City, failing to take into account the experiences of students and protesters from other urban and rural areas outside of Dhaka. The study could have become more descriptive and nuanced if it took into account the experiences of the civilian population outside of the students and people of lower class, such as rickshaw pullers, residential area guards, hospital staff, etc. Moreover, since the study was heavily focused on the media aspects of the July Movement, it has not been able to consider many other sub-sectors of this movement, such as the gender discourse of the movement, communal and geopolitical tension in the aftermath, political repercussions and extremism, and many more.

In conclusion, the highs and lows of the July Movement and its aftermath are broad-reaching and contain multitudes. In terms of the media environment, some scholars argue that the July Movement has been an instance of the coming-of-age of the Bangladeshi media. The tug of war among the Bangladeshi media outlets, the government, and the audience, has been consistent throughout the movement. While some argue that with the fall of the previous government party, the media has won this war for the better, maturing into a fair media atmosphere. However, with the current instability of the country, the question regarding the media's coming-of-age remains open-ended. The current instances of mob violence, socio-political instability and gender and religious discrimination are extremely concerning, but it is also noteworthy that the situation, in some instances, has been better than it has been in the past decade.

Uday Ghosh, a Dhaka University student, mentioned that despite all the uncertainties and unrest, it is liberating to be able to speak about things that were impossible before. 'While things could definitely be better,' he said, 'now at least we have the opportunity to criticise and condemn without the constant looming threats of forced disappearances and

random arrests.’ Another interviewee from BRAC University agrees with this new sense of freedom, but he also mentions that this newfound ability to criticise the state and political parties should be used for the greater good. He stated, ‘We must remember that the “revolution” is far from over. It is an ongoing fight that we have to continue until everybody has this freedom.’

The threat to freedom of any kind, be it of expression or sovereignty, has remained persistent throughout history. Therefore, the ‘revolution’ to protect and uphold this freedom also remains constant. Such can be said about the July Movement of Bangladesh. While it has somehow brought forth a new set of issues and threats, it has also, on the other hand, made the citizens, especially the younger population of Bangladesh, more aware and critical. These two sides of the aftermath have led to more space for constructive discussion, but also more opportunity for senseless arguments to spark. However, at the end of the day, the ‘revolution’ to uphold a functioning democracy and freedom of speech is not yet complete. Where this will lead after a newly elected political party takes power and public discourse is reshaped again, whether it is an actual win or loss, remains to be seen.

Works Cited

Aahir, Sumain. Personal interview. 29 April 2025.

Al Amin, Saad. “Bangladeshi July Revolution & Visual Representation Impacts: A Film Impact Aspect.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2025,
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5040227>.

Allan, Stuart, and Einer Thorsen. “Introduction.” *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspective*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2009, pp. 1–16.

Ayomoy, Jubayer. Personal interview. 18 April 2025.

Azim, Firdous, and Tabassum Zaman. “Awaiting a new dawn in Bangladesh.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, no. 6, 21 Oct. 2024, pp. 951–961,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2024.2407264>.

Bowman, Shayne, and Chris Willis. “We Media: Audiences Shaping the Future of News and Information.” *Policy Commons*, 21 Oct. 2003,
policycommons.net/artifacts/1939423/we-media/2691192/

Chakraborty, Arunima. Personal interview. 29 April 2025.

Chowdhury, Moiyen Zalal. “Social Media, Social Movement: Bangladesh’s Shahbag Movement and Hefazat-e-Islam.” *Bangabidya: International Journal of Bengal Studies*, vol. 10, Jan. 2018,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326683051_Social_Media_Social_Movement_Bangladesh's_Shahbag_Movement_and_Hefazat-e-Islam.

Correspondent, Staff. “Internet Outage in July: Unity among Journos Played Crucial Role in Publishing News.” *The Daily Star*, 4 Dec. 2024, www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/internet-outage-july-unity-among-journos-played-crucial-role-publishing-news-3768716.

Correspondent, Staff. “Communal Violence: 1068 Houses and Business Establishments Attacked.” *Prothomalo*, 2024, en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/97chuvmupe.

Ghosh, Uday. Personal Interview. 29 April 2025.

Habermas, Jürgen. “Reflections and hypotheses on a further structural transformation of the political public sphere.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 39, no. 4, July 2022, pp. 145–171, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221112341>.

Habermas, Jürgen. “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)*.” *New Critical Writings in Political Sociology*, 1 Oct. 2024, pp. 481–487, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003572923-26>.

Hall, Stuart, et al. “Encoding/decoding.” *Culture, Media, Language Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. Routledge ; in Association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 2006.

Hasan, Mahmudul. “What You Need to Know about Internet Crackdown in Bangladesh.” *The Daily Star*, 13 Aug. 2024, www.thedailystar.net/business/news/what-you-need-know-about-internet-crackdown-bangladesh-3676346.

Hasan, Walid. Personal interview. 6 May 2025.

Hasin, Arpita. Personal interview. 11 April 2025.

Hushen, Md. Dilwar. “Harnessing Facebook by Gen Z to mobilise masses and transform student protest into revolution: A study on quota reform movement 2024 in Bangladesh.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5140216>.

Jarvis, Jeff. “DEATH TO THE MASS.” *The Gutenberg Parenthesis: The Age of Print and Its Lessons for the Age of the Internet*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2023, pp. 173–194.

Kemp, Simon. “Digital 2024: Bangladesh - DataReportal – Global Digital Insights.” *DataReportal*, DataReportal – Global Digital Insights, 23 Feb. 2024, datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-bangladesh.

Khan, Abdul Kabil, et al. “Practices of and challenges for citizen journalism in the mainstream media of Bangladesh.” *Khulna University Studies*, 18 Dec. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.53808/kus.2022.19.02.2213-ss>.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Mahmud, Faisal, and Saqib Sarker. “‘Islamophobic, Alarmist’: How Some Indian Outlets Covered Bangladesh Crisis.” *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 8 Aug. 2024, www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/8/islamophobic-alarmist-how-some-india-outlets-covered-bangladesh-crisis.

Mahmud, Siam. Personal interview. 3 May 2025.

Marof, Mehedi Hasan. “‘Our Lives Don’t Matter’: Bangladeshi Hindus under Attack after Hasina Exit.” *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 13 Dec. 2024,

www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/12/12/our-lives-dont-matter-in-post-hasina-bangladesh-hindus-fear-future.

Mohaiemen, Naeem. “We Wish to Inform You: Censorship in Bangladesh (1972-2024).” *The Daily Star*, 2024, thegreatwave.thedailystar.net/news/we-wish-to-inform-you-censorship-in-bangladesh-1972-2024.

Naji, Cyrus. “The Future of Bangladesh’s Fragile Media Freedom: CGS.” *Bay of Bengal Conversation*, 2025, cgs-bd.com/article/27295/The-Future-of-Bangladesh%E2%80%99s-Fragile-Media-Freedom.

Neelim, Nibir. Personal interview. 26 March 2025.

Okorie, Nelson, et al. “Internet and Citizen Journalism: Perspectives and Issues in T.” *Journal of Language and Communication*, Research Academy of Social Sciences, 1 Jan. 1970, ideas.repec.org/a/rss/jnljlc/v1i1p3.html.

Rahman, Anis. “Print and Electronic Media.” *Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Bangladesh*, Routledge, New York, 2016, pp. 325–339.

Rakib, K M. “জাগরণ, স্লোগানে স্লোগানে.” *Prothom Alo*, 25 Aug. 2024, www.prothomalo.com/onnoalo/znx8mjyqao.

Rakin, Nubair. Personal Interview. 4 May 2025.

Rashid, Raffat Binte. “Graffiti as Protest in Bangladesh Quota Reform Movement | Graffiti vs Regime | the Daily Star.” *The Daily Star*, 24 Aug. 2024, www.thedailystar.net/weekend-read/news/graffiti-vs-regime-3684926.

Report, Star Digital. "Govt Forms 11-Member Media Reform Commission." *The Daily Star*, 18 Nov. 2024,

www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/govt-forms-11-member-media-reform-commission-3755556.

Riaz, Ali, and Fahmida Zaman. "Working Under the 'Sword of Damocles': Experiences of Journalists in a Hybrid Regime." *Masks of Authoritarianism: Hegemony, Power and Public Life in Bangladesh*, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2022, pp. 37–56.

Shahnewaj, Altaf. "যে সুর জনতার." *Prothomalo*, 25 Aug. 2024, www.prothomalo.com/onnalo/2np2nzm7k.

Team, RS, et al. "Spread of Fake News about Bangladesh in Indian Media Outlets." *Rumor Scanner*, 6 Dec. 2024, rumorsscanner.com/en/fact-story-2/rumors-in-indian-media-about-bangladesh/130314.

Tufekci, Zeynep. "Social Movements and Governments in the Digital Age." *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2014.

Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press, 2021.

Unit, Al Jazeera Investigative. "Bangladesh Bought Spyware from Israeli Surveillance Company." *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 19 Feb. 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/bangladesh-bought-surveillance-equipment-from-israeli-company.

Walker, John Albert. *Art in the Age of Mass Media*. Pluto Press, 1983.

Zaman, Fahmida. "Where Is Thy Freedom on the Internet?" *The Daily Star*, 2019,
www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/news/where-thy-freedom-the-internet-18455

41.

Appendix A

Interviewee Name	Interviewee Institution	Role in July Movement
Nibir Neelim	CSE, BRAC University	Activist and organizer
Arpita Hasin	IBA, Dhaka University	Activist and organizer
Jubayer Ayomoy	IBA, Dhaka University	Activist and organizer
Arunima Chakraborty	IBA, Dhaka University	Activist
Sumain Aahir	Peace & Conflict, Dhaka University	Online participation
Udoy Ghosh	Health Economics, Dhaka University	Activist (Mostly virtual)
Siam Mahmud	Economics, BRAC University	Activist
Walid Hasan	BRAC University	Activist
Nubair Rakin	North South University	Activist

Table 1: Information on the Interviewees

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1. Would you kindly tell me your name and the name of your institution?
2. How would you describe your involvement in the protests? Did you actively participate in the protests by going to marches and processions? Or were you mostly active online? (What was a regular day during the protests for you?)
3. How did you keep in contact with your comrades? Was it just social media? Mention if you had any other medium like WhatsApp or Telegram.
4. What was your primary source of news and information during the protests?
5. Were you actively posting on social media in favour of the protest? What type of backlash/threats/risks have you faced due to that?
6. How do you think citizen journalism(the journalism ordinary citizens were doing by posting information on social media and updating everyone on what was happening in their specific area) impacted the flow of information during the protests? You can answer negatively if you think citizen journalism like that was also sometimes used to spread disinformation.
7. Were there any specific news headlines/photographs/videos/social media posts that moved you intensely? If so, then please mention which one, and if possible, describe why it's significant to you.
8. Tell me about your experience with any other form of media during the protests.(Memes, music, literature) Was there any quote/music that inspired you and your friends?
9. In your opinion, how did the internet shutdown affect the protests? How did it impact you, as an activist, ordinary citizen, and student?

10. How did you stay up-to-date with everything and keep in contact with everyone during the internet shutdown? Did you use any offline chat rooms or news portals?
11. Tell us about your experience on August 5. Was it really an “independence day”, from your perspective? Especially as time went on and chaos ensued, scepticism arose. What is your opinion on that?
12. How do you think misinformation and disinformation affected situations post-August 5th? What was your personal experience and do you think there was anything that could've been measures taken by the Interim Gov or any relevant authorities to combat such cyber wars of misinformation and disinformation?
13. Do you think post-August 5th, there has been a significant change in the freedom of the press in Bangladesh? How so?
14. Where do you think we go from here? Do you think we can use mass media for our benefit in Bangladesh 2.0? How so?