

## **Citizen Journalism through Social Media during 2013 and 2018 Mass Movements in Bangladesh and Its Impact on the Mass Revolution of 2024**

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### **Abstract**

Protests have been a potent instrument for attaining justice for the marginalized since human civilization's inception. The proliferation of digital technology largely triggers contemporary manifestations of protest. The phenomenon of citizen journalism, facilitated by diverse social media platforms, has played a pivotal role in recent transformative changes. From the Arab Spring to the more recent anti-discrimination student movement in Bangladesh, social media has significantly shaped a new historical narrative for the demonstrators. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the rise of citizen journalism in Bangladesh, specifically focusing on the protests that took place in 2013 and 2018. The mass uprising that took place in July-August 2024 also witnessed stern influence of citizen journalism, which eventually brought about a revolutionary change in Bangladesh. This study assesses the beneficial influence of citizen journalism achieved through social media platforms in the anti-discrimination student-led movement in Bangladesh, which marked a notable change in the political landscape of the country. An authoritarian dictatorship lasting 15 years had been replaced by a new temporary administration. Consequently, the movement was hastened by the influence of many activities, including hashtags, red-colored profile pictures, and Facebook groups. In the social milieu of Bangladesh, the story of social media has garnered a notably favorable response, mostly driven by Generation Z. Furthermore, this study describes the effects of social media on various

aspects of public affairs in Bangladesh and emphasizes the need to conduct further research to assess the influence of citizen journalism on social media in other areas of governance and policy. Through the eclectic method, literature has been reviewed to analyze the current uprising in the light of citizen journalism. The political landscape in Bangladesh has changed, which will create more opportunities for citizen journalism in the days ahead. In actuality, this represents a paradigm shift in both the communication and journalism domains.

**Keywords:** Bangladeshi Political Movements and Protest, Citizen Journalism, Hashtag, Social Media, Student Movement

## 1. Introduction

Citizen journalism has redefined the definition of mainstream journalism by enabling every citizen to disseminate information through several digital websites, blogs, and social media platforms. This had been considered an alternative to mainstream print and electronic media due to its popularity among the masses. Citizen journalism refers to the journalistic activity of regular people. It means that citizens report on the issues that affect them. Citizen journalism has enabled people to raise their voices on issues that they believe need attention (Noor, 2017). Democratic and participatory journalism are other names for citizen journalism (Baase, 2008). With the introduction of digital platforms, citizen journalism, the activity of regular people obtaining, reporting, and sharing news and information has become more popular (Allan, 2013). Citizen journalism is the production, analysis, and dissemination of news and information by non-professionals for the public's benefit. Individual citizens posting information on blogs, social networks, and online forums; professional news organizations or civic groups planning and overseeing participatory media projects; and social media users commenting, tagging, "liking," and sharing news articles and other content are just a few of the contexts in which it has been used. Supporters highlight how citizen participation in these processes has the potential to democratize, while detractors raise concerns about the accuracy of the data generated, the equity of participation, and the impact on the financial sustainability of professional media. It is one of the newest and most talked-about trends in journalism right now.

It is distinct since it is carried out by ordinary individuals without any prior journalism expertise, as opposed to a journalist with official training. Anyone can now become a citizen journalist because of the Internet and new media technologies, which offer countless opportunities to generate and distribute content for public consumption. There is now an abundance of space on citizen journalism websites, especially blogs and news portals, for topics that were previously inappropriate for traditional media.

Regular users of citizen journalism content therefore believe that it is less biased than news from mainstream media (Noor, 2017). Most significantly, because so many people connect on social media, it serves as a universal platform for these blogs, portals, and websites.

Social media platforms have made it possible for common people to report, record, and disseminate news without the assistance of a professional journalist. This practice is known as citizen journalism. Early in the twenty-first century, it became popular as digital tools made it possible for information to be widely disseminated. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and others have developed into essential tools for political action and mobilization. This had been observed during several protests all over the world. This article primarily examines the utilization of citizen journalism via social media platforms. Within the broader framework of the South Asian region, particularly in Bangladesh, it has been observed that citizen journalism has gained significant importance, especially on social media platforms rather than in individual blogs. Undoubtedly, this connotation has resulted in the emergence of public demonstrations linked to citizen journalism, as observed in 2018 and 2024.

In the context of the unstable political landscape in Bangladesh, which is characterized by violence, people's movements, and the complicated interplay between civil and military administrations, the major purpose of this research is to investigate the development and influence of citizen journalism in Bangladesh during its history. A particular emphasis will be placed on the impact that citizen journalism had during the "July Uprising 2024." The purpose of this study is to investigate how social media platforms have enabled citizen journalism to play a significant part in changing recent political outcomes during 2024. A further objective of this study is to evaluate the shift in the political paradigm and its implications for the future of journalism and communication in Bangladesh. In particular, the study will focus on the potential for citizen journalism to further democratize the distribution of information in the region. The subsequent chapters will concentrate on the dynamics of citizen journalism, its influence on the formulation of mass narratives, the use of social media in this context, and the transformative change in communication, politics, mass solidarity, the fundamental aspect of the united factor of the Bangladeshi people, and the possible opportunities for further involvement in the realm of citizen journalism. This study contributes to the understanding of how digital tools and citizen journalism transform political participation in developing nations. It offers insights for academics, policymakers, and media practitioners on leveraging citizen journalism for democratic engagement in volatile political contexts.

### **1.1. The political reality of Bangladesh: Contemporary history**

After serving three complete terms, the Awami League government commenced its fourth term in ruling Bangladesh. This fourth term witnessed the emergence of the second phase of the quota reform movement during its first year. Based on prior conversations, it is evident that the first phase of the quota reform movement took place in 2018. Hence, the quota reform movement of 2024 might be considered as the subsequent stage of that ongoing struggle. Ultimately, this developed into a movement to overthrow the government. It asserts that while first the movement aimed to change a policy, it eventually evolved into a demonstration to overhaul the entire administrative structure. Therefore, the event is crucial to investigate and highly significant.

Throughout 2018, the movement experienced a temporary decline as a result of certain favorable declarations. Nevertheless, in 2024, the movement resurged when a conflicting instruction was given in contradiction to the desires of the students. The media alone was inadequate for a comprehensive understanding of the wider context of Bangladesh throughout this historical period. It is evident that the media in Bangladesh has experienced an extended period of regulation, or there was a prevalent phenomenon where journalists resorted to self-censorship. This phenomenon arose because any news that presented a credible danger to the governing party frequently resulted in diverse manifestations of harassment for the individuals concerned (Riaz, 2023).

Nevertheless, a notable problem throughout this prolonged era was the inadequate documentation regarding the rigorous supervision exercised over the nation's fourth estate.

Although not always visibly obvious, a thorough examination of several occurrences uncovers a consistent trend of harassment. For example, in the event of the homicide of journalist couple Sagar and Runi, the then judicial system failed to reach a verdict for 12 years. Nevertheless, with the assumption of power by the interim government in Bangladesh, several discrepancies in the management of the murder case by the preceding administration became apparent (Saad, 2024). This indicates the degree to which the government exercised influence over the media. Furthermore, this control was formalized by legal methods, namely through the implementation of the Digital Security Act (DSA), which acted as a mechanism to mandate self-censorship, specifically aimed at online and citizen media (Riaz, 2023).

The essence of the aforementioned debate is that the mainstream media in Bangladesh was subject to a substantial level of control. Furthermore, apart from sheer control, another aim of the administration was to establish its mandate. This required the

strategic use of the media to establish its agenda and mold public opinion appropriately. The Agenda-Setting Theory, initially proposed in 1922, is highly pertinent for comprehending this notion. Walter Lippmann proposed that individuals' perceptions are influenced not by the underlying reality, but by the visual representations provided by the media (Luo & Harrison, 2019). The term "agenda-setting" was initially used by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to assert that the media exerts influence on public perception by choosing which realities to showcase and for what duration. Fundamentally, the media establishes the agenda. Nevertheless, as the internet and social media have become commonly used, the responsibility of determining the agenda has progressively moved towards the individuals themselves (Miller, 2010). The objective of this study is to examine the autonomous ability of citizens to establish agendas and exert influence on policy-making.

The Digital Security Act was designed to exert authority over both journalists and the entire population of the nation (Luo & Harrison, 2019). Consequently, the restrictions imposed by the authoritarian Awami League government, including threats of harassment, enforced disappearances, and manufactured charges, reduced the chances for residents to voice their objections. Nevertheless, the 2024 movement successfully dismantled this ingrained control by leveraging citizen journalism. In his study, Wang (2017) discovered that individuals who engage actively online and carry out their investigations can challenge the agendas established by the media and the government. Furthermore, when the government initiated extensive promotion of news regarding the upcoming quota reform, citizens, based on their previous experiences and evaluating the government's authoritarian inclinations, declined this agenda and began advocating for their own.

Despite early efforts to scare individuals, these worries ultimately decreased as this style of journalism promoted a feeling of unity among the viewers. The collaborative nature of this resulted in the successful countering of personal attacks. As an illustration, when several movement coordinators were wrongfully arrested or held in police custody, the extensive use of social media facilitated the formation of a unified position against the autocratic regime. Diverse modes of activism were also utilized to ensure their liberation, including the proliferation of hashtags such domestically and internationally. This coordinated effort, propelled by the widespread use of hashtags, postings, and comments, was essential in questioning the government's prerogative. The following chart depicts the usage of hashtags in social media during the July uprising of 2024.

**Table 01: Hashtags Used During the Movement to Mobilize People’s Participation**

<b>Hashtags</b>	<b>Number of users on Facebook</b>	<b>Number of users on Instagram</b>
Stepdownhasina	2.7M	100,897
JulyMassacre	293,000	312
Quotareformmovement2024	1 M	23,609
SaveBangladeshiStudents	4.6M	222,962
Alleyesonbangladesh	21,000	8142
RedForJustice	334,000	906
RememberingOurHeroes	101,000	22,014
StandAgainstInhumanity	226,000	4,557
StudentDeserveJustice	1000	104
Studentprotestbd	1000	43

*Source: Kassem et al., 2023*

Citizen journalism often works in a reverse manner, influencing mainstream journalism and shaping media agendas. For instance, Luo and Harrison (2019), in their study on the context of China, demonstrated that over time, even the government began to feel pressured to alter the news patterns of its controlled media. This pressure arose because the widespread presence of citizen journalism and the growing trend of media boycotts threatened the profitability of media houses, creating concerns about significant financial losses (Luo & Harrison, 2019). The impact of such reverse agenda-setting capabilities in Bangladesh's context, particularly in influencing policy changes, will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Citizen journalism must be understood beyond individual social media posts; it extends to practices such as re-posting, tagging, rating, modifying, linking, and commenting (Goode, 2009). The 2024 movement initially began with the demand for "Reform Quota." During this period, we witnessed the emergence of several Facebook groups, such as the "Baisamya Birodhi Chhatra Andolon." Initially, the social media-based groups seemed to be a usual social media group site with no apparent vision. But as explained in the previous explanations of timeframe, as time went by social media-based citizen journalism turned out to be the cornerstone of successful regime change in Bangladesh. The following section focuses on the paradigmatic shift in the context of Bangladeshi politics which is an outcome of social media-based citizen journalism.

## **2. Objectives**

1. To discuss the development of citizen journalism in Bangladesh. Particularly, focusing on its evaluation in the 2013 and 2018 protests followed by the mass revolution of 2024.

2. To explore the influence of social media platforms and assess the role of citizen journalism in shaping the political discourse and public narratives in mass protests.
3. To analyze how social media platforms contribute to mobilizing the citizens and empower the youth to make solidarity between them to continue the movement.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned for much of his life by Mussolini, took the idea of hegemony in his Prison Notebooks with his widely influential notions of ‘hegemony’ and the ‘manufacture of consent’ (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci saw the capitalist state as being made up of two overlapping spheres, a ‘political society’ (which rules through force) and a ‘civil society’ (which rules through consent). This is a different meaning of civil society from the ‘associational’ view common today, which defines civil society as a ‘sector’ of voluntary organizations and NGOs. Gramsci saw civil society as the public sphere where trade unions and political parties gained concessions from the bourgeois state, and the sphere in which ideas and beliefs were shaped, where bourgeois ‘hegemony’ was reproduced in cultural life through the media, universities and religious institutions to ‘manufacture consent’ and legitimacy (Heywood, 1994). In the context of Bangladesh, hegemonic structure has been used to manipulate consent of mass people. It is interesting to note that a portion of civil society of the country has been integral part of the manufacturing of consents which apparently allowed the former regime to be in power by force. The notion of Gramsci’s (1971) hegemonic landscape has been witnessed to different extents in the context of Bangladesh.

The political and practical implications of Gramsci’s ideas were far-reaching because he was warned of the limited possibilities of direct revolutionary struggle for control of the means of production; this ‘war of attack’ could only succeed with a prior ‘war of position’ in the form of struggle over ideas and beliefs, to create a new hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). This idea of a ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggle – advancing alternatives to dominant ideas of what is normal and legitimate – has had broad appeal in social and political movements. It has also contributed to the idea that ‘knowledge’ is a social construct that serves to legitimate social structures (Heywood, 1994). In the case of Bangladesh’s 2024 uprising which is also labelled as ‘Monsoon revolution’ or ‘Student uprising’, the same idea of ‘counter hegemonic’ struggle can be witnessed. The narrative of ‘Mujibism’ (The political narrative carried out by the former Awami regime, which focuses on the individual charismatic leadership of Sheikh Mujib; one of the founding leaders of Bangladesh) has been verily rejected by protestors. The counter hegemonic narrative proliferated quite abruptly during the

revolution and it was quite astonishing to witness the reach of new knowledge construct in such a short time because anti-Mujibism is something which had been quite unimaginable in Bangladesh even a month ago the protests took place.

In context of Bangladesh, the ‘war of attack’ succeeded over ‘war of position’ but in an abrupt manner which the on-field protestors could not even reciprocate while the mass uprising of Bangladesh was taking place in 2024.

#### **4. Methodology**

This research article uses the method of qualitative analysis focused on an extensive literature study and description of secondary data to understand how citizen journalist affects various protests, especially those by students. The process is supposed to integrate the most up-to-date information, submit every point of view to scrutiny and result in a comprehensive understanding. We conducted a comprehensive systematic search through academic databases including JSTOR, Google Scholar and Scopus for relevant articles. Research was identified by using keywords like citizen journalism, protests, student-led movements, social media activism and reflections on the media's impact. Time period was not limited in the search to include both past and present perspectives. Relevancy, credibility and quality of publication context were criteria selected for literature selection. Emphasis was placed on peer-reviewed journal papers and books, and reports from reputable organizations. Specific attention was paid to studies that specifically looked at citizen journalism and its role in protests and movements. Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed sources, opinion-based evidence and studies that were unrelated to the study objectives. The paper mostly focused on the social media ventures of different student led protests in Bangladesh. This has limited the broader aspect of citizen journalism which has a scope of further research.

#### **5. Analysis and Discussion**

This part attempts to address the research objectives of this research narratively.

##### **5.1. Development of citizen journalism in Bangladesh**

Citizen journalism in Bangladesh began its trajectory after 2010, and it gained prominence with the protest of 2013 in Shahbag. This movement exhibited several distinctive characteristics. The movement successfully directed large-scale mobilization by advocating for the imposition of execution punishment for war criminals in 1971. Significantly, the movement did not oppose the political party; instead, it served as a prominent political manifesto of the ruling party Awami League at the time. This movement immediately confronted the prevailing political culture of Bangladesh (Haque, 2013). The aforementioned movement significantly



contributed to the proliferation of 'online activism' across various social media platforms. The campaign was initiated on February 5<sup>th</sup> of 2013 against Abdul Quader Molla, the Assistant Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JI), who is currently being tried as a war criminal and has been sentenced to a minor life term by the International War Crime Tribunal (ICT). The verdict caused great shock throughout the entire nation, particularly among the younger generation. Molla faced allegations of committing 344 murders during the independence movement, sexually assaulting minor and assassinating intellectuals.

After being transmitted by the media, this news rapidly disseminated on social media, eliciting a strong and passionate response from the public. The entire nation exploded in indignation, adamantly rejecting the decision. An overwhelming number of statuses on Facebook called for Molla to be executed by hanging. The inaugural demonstration was initiated by the Blogger an Online Activist Network (BOAN). Facebook group Human Chain organized a protest rally at 3.30 pm in front of the National Museum, Shahbag on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013. Another Facebook event was organized by Jatiya Sharthe, a blogger and internet activist affiliated with BOAN. The two groups consolidated at about 6.00 pm and obstructed the Shahbag junction, a significant junction in Dhaka (Chowdhury, 2018).

Initially, the human chain comprised 120 individuals, predominantly bloggers, internet activists, journalists, student leaders, online opinion leaders, young intellectuals, and a few pedestrians. Subsequently, when prominent worldwide transmission networks such as NDTV, BBC, and Al Jazeera, as well as local broadcasters including Bangladesh ATN news and Channel I, started reporting on the event, it garnered a remarkable number of participants and sympathizers. The Shahbag movement was transitioning into the largest social media phenomenon in terms of its dissemination among the Bangladeshi grassroots and the Bengali diaspora. Shahbag was evolving into an internet-based platform for mobilization. Shahbag was one of the pivotal components to draw attention in social media even throughout the international platform. People from all corner of the globe started to learn about the movements and these acts turned the protest as the first digital media protest in Bangladesh.

From February 5th to 8th, 2013, there was no apparent focal point of the movement. Instead, many statuses and comments from individuals were generating significant disturbance on Facebook. On February 8th, 2013, Gonojagoron Mancha was established and subsequently, the leadership saw several changes (Chowdhury, 2018).

While the Shahbag group initiated the protest via social media, the situation deteriorated when the 'Basher Kella', a Facebook group affiliated with JI, disseminated digitally altered images of Saydee's visage on the moon. This propaganda originated as a widespread demonstration held throughout the districts, particularly in areas where JI had a significant presence. The police slew hundreds of demonstrators throughout that period. An ostensibly 'apolitical' and 'non-violent' social media-based campaign transformed into a manifestation of physical and political protest. The Shahbag movement in Bangladesh could be considered as the initial surge of social media activism (Chowdhury, 2018).

Following the establishment of the Digital Security Act, 2018, Amnesty International proclaimed it to be an aggression against freedom of expression unparalleled in severity to any other legislation in existence. The Deputy South Asia Director at Amnesty International stated that the Digital Security Act criminalizes many forms of freedom of expression and imposes heavy fines and prison sentences for legitimate forms of dissent (Khan et al., 2022).

For the past eight years, the Bangladesh Government about the budding ICT ACT, which is a legal precursor to The Digital Security Act, has allegedly detained more than a thousand people. This act has repeatedly faced hammers for basic human rights violations, stifling of freedom of expression, and media liberties as Article 39 of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh claims to follow democracy and the rule of law. Where the freedom of speech is a fundamental human right and the Act has dented the coherence of the nation's regular practices, which sparked public outrage. Ahmed Kabir Kamal, a prominent cartoonist alongside Mushtaq Ahmed, an author, were arrested in 2020 under the DSA. This incident sparked public fury and calls for justice.

In 2018, the students of the University of Dhaka initiated a large-scale protest against a discriminatory preferred quota system that afforded a specific group of individuals an advantage over all students in the government job recruitment process. This marked the second wave of the social media-based movement known as the Quota Reform Movement. Furthermore, social media has played a significant role in shaping this movement. A survey conducted in Dhaka city reveals that 22 million individuals use Facebook, positioning it as the second most popular user of the platform (Ovi, 2017).

Another case of citizen journalism is the world-renowned Bangladeshi photojournalist turned social activist, Shahidul Alam's arrest back in August 2018, which led to widespread protests, both online and offline. Alam was apprehended for making "inflammatory comments" regarding a student protest that was sparked due

to a road accident in Dhaka and fueled by the rampant political corruption and mismanagement in the country. Later, the protest spread as the Road Safety movement 2018 (Sharmin, 2024). In between the movement, he managed to capture footage of the protests, which he later highlighted on social media, increasing the already high tensions within the country. During this time and due to Alam's arrest, the nation witnessed a massive surge in online activism. Right-wing government proponents took to platforms like Twitter and Facebook to voice their disagreement and demand freedom for the activist, globally FreeShahidulAlam began to circulate gaining traction and garnering support from everyone around the world (Ahmed, 2018).

Many media stations and NGOs turned to Twitter to promote the arrest of Alam and filed requests with the government to remove the unjust detention. Human Rights Watch reported that the active member of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party was denied bail and condemned the government for abusing power and silencing activists. This is a major example of how the practice of citizen journalism plays a pivotal role in making the governments accountable to the citizens (Islam, 2020).

One of the laws the Bangladeshi government passed to address cybercrimes and digital crimes is the Digital Security Act of 2018. The act aimed to address the significance of digital environments and the potential hazards they represent to national security, public order, and individual privacy. The act combines many laws into a single legislation and has particular provisions addressing digital crimes including defamation on digital platforms, hacking, and the dissemination of false information (Hasan, 2021).

The act's main objective is to prevent wreckage from occurring online. Despite this, journalists and other stakeholders have strongly criticized the Act for including clauses that limit the right to free speech and expression. Critics have specifically objected to Sections 25, 29, and 31 because to their vague syntax, which they believe might be misinterpreted and used to evaluate dissent or challenge governmental authority. It is said that some clauses allow law enforcement to arrest and punish individuals based only on their own personal interpretation of what exactly comprises these violations (Rahman & Islam, 2020).

## **5.2. The influence of social media platforms and the role of citizen journalism in shaping the political discourse and public narratives in mass protests**

The DSA's defamation grounds under Section 29 and the ban on "spreading false news" under Section 25 have become the standard means of putting a stop to critics, journalists, and activists, which has caused social media users to self-censor their words and actions, thereby jeopardizing democracy-in-action on the Internet (Ahmed,

2020). The Effects on Grassroots Movements: The DSA most severely targets grassroots movements that rely on social media to act collectively and be seen, so activists who attempt to advocate for worker rights or environmental destruction may be silenced based on the act (Chowdhury & Mahmud, 2022).

The conflict between freedom and security is a key component of DSA. The Act's advocates argue that it is necessary to preserve order in the world of digital media, particularly in an atmosphere where false information has the potential to promote violence or undermine society. Critics draw attention to the Act's abuse as a political control mechanism, which limits the very freedoms that are vital for a democracy (Hasan, 2021).

The DSA reflects larger patterns of digital authoritarianism, in which governments use legal frameworks to control online space and stifle opposition. This is comparable to trends observed in other nations that target internet activity, such as Malaysia's Sedition Act or India's Information Technology (IT) Regulations (Rahman, 2019).

The use of social media as a protest platform in Bangladesh is severely restricted by the Digital Security Act of 2018. Its execution has frequently harmed freedom of expression and democratic participation, despite its declared goals of preventing cybercrime and protecting digital spaces. This dichotomy emphasizes the necessity of a comprehensive plan for digital governance that safeguards against harm without suppressing dissent or violating basic rights (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

### **Quota Reform Movement 2018: Historical Timeframe**

***Table 02: The Historical Timeframe of Quota Movement 2018***

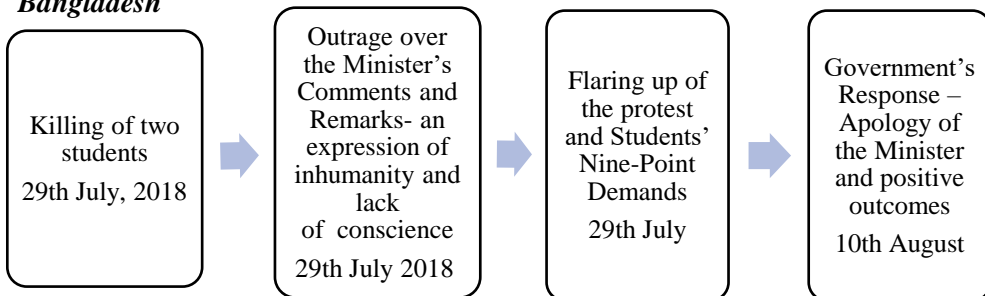
<b>Dates</b>	<b>Events</b>
31 <sup>st</sup> January 2018	A student and two journalists from the University of Dhaka filed a writ to high court a student and two journalists from the University of Dhaka filed a writ to the high court.
5 <sup>th</sup> February 2018	A bench of the high court turned down the writ and remarked it was wrong.
14 <sup>th</sup> February 2018	Students formed a Facebook group and staged a protest in front of the public library and formed “Bangladesh Sadharon Chhatra Odhikar Songrokkhon Parishad” (Bangladesh General Students’ Right Protection Committee) And they started the protest with 5 specific demands

4 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	Students from different colleges and universities staged a human chain and began suspending classes and exams to join the movement
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	Staged protest sweeping the street while hanging their certificates on their shoulders to show their nonviolent mechanism of protesting.
8 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	The movement met with police brutality
11 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	Teachers stand against the brutality of police and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina commented on posts of social media to shed the facts.
16 <sup>th</sup> April	3 leaders were arrested.

*Source: Prothom Alo, 2018*

On July 29, 2018, following the tragic road accident in Dhaka resulting in the deaths of two students, students from schools and colleges nationwide began protesting the corruption in this sector of Bangladesh using social media. Facebook and YouTube, among other social media tools, effectively mobilized this campaign by coordinating and disseminating their objective through a triumphant demonstration. Initially, the campaign originated on social media and evolved to encompass the streets of Dhaka and the capital, consequently, the entire nation. This is how the 2018 Road Safety Movement emerged as one of the most notable student-led protests in recent Bangladeshi history. Bangladesh is acknowledged as one of the most mortality-prone countries globally for pedestrians. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that over 21,000 individuals lose their lives in traffic accidents annually. An incident in 2018 resulting in the deaths of two students deeply unsettled the entire nation.

***Figure 1: Flowchart Showing the Advancement of July Uprising 2024 in Bangladesh***



*Source: The Daily Star, 2018*

## Road- Safety Movement 2018: Building Block for the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh

*Table 03: Development of the Road- Safety Movement 2018*

Dates	Events	Factors which proliferated the movements (Social media)	Outcomes of the movement
29 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Death of 2 students in a horrific road accident	Students across the country started protesting against the roguery of transport sector through social media	People in the capital and the whole country supported the protest
4 <sup>th</sup> August, 2018	Protest became robust, clashed with Law enforcement Agencies and Bangladesh Chatra league (BCL)	School, college students started gaining back from University students	The mainstream media failed to get update and had to rely on Social Media (Facebook, YouTube)
6 <sup>th</sup> August, 2018	Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved the draft of the Road Transport Act 2018 with the maximum penalty of five years in jail and a TK 500000 fine for fatal road accidents	Factors such as killers of the students must be brought to justice, footbridges must be built on roads adjacent to all educational institutions, speed breakers must be set up on roads in accident-prone areas, and unfit vehicles and driving without a license must be banned (The Daily Star, 2018).	On December 2, 2019, the Dhaka court gave life imprisonment to the drivers on the death of Rajib and Diya (Killed 2 students)

*Source: Monamee, 2018*

During this movement, the mass realization of using citizen journalism as an effective tool alternative to the mainstream media and the effective usage of social media emerged.

### **5.2.1. External factors impacting local, mass, and social media in Bangladesh**

The media of Bangladesh has been dominated by the businessmen-politicians for a long period. The mainstream media, TV channels, and newspapers have always been dominated and are being used as shields by their owners. As a result, citizens lost their trust in the media, and they started to become the voice of the public, hence, citizen journalism emerged in Bangladesh. During the July Revolution, the media had been stagnant for this period. At the same time, the media was completely occupied with ensuring the security of their guardian and even after the revolution, they remained silent and refrained from disseminating the truth. In recent years, the lack of regulatory framework in journalism has been noticed tremendously. A regulatory framework that ensures ethical standards, accountability, and professionalism is the demand of the current era for reforming the country as Bangladesh 2.0 (Mishu, 2024). The media had remained ineffective and passive due to the fear of the ruling party for 15 years but now it is high time they can utilize their full potential with the freedom to continue to work for the voiceless. Nevertheless, change in such a long-dormant system will be time-consuming and slow but this movement taught us anything is possible and true, and accountable media can ensure a post-corruption, post tyranny, post-inequality Bangladesh 2.0. Since, the journey has just begun, the media has a pivotal role to play to shape the country's future (Turzo, 2024).

While the regular broadcast media could not show the unity of youth, digital platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Telegram not only empowered the voices of the mass people but also challenged the legitimacy of the autocratic government, the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, promoted democratic resilience by overthrowing the government on 5th August 2024. This revolution established a landmark moment by illustrating the potential of social platforms by bypassing government-controlled mainstream media. Personal individual narratives in social media particularly when the two students Mir Mugdho and Abu Sayeed were shot during the protests. These emotive stories influenced to intensifying collective empathy in rendering the protests more massive and successful against the government (Nazrul, 2024).

A research program manager titled the revolution "A Double-Edged Sword" and discovered that social media has both positive and negative consequences. It emphasized the dual nature of social media. In the light of the above, on a positive note, digital media has played a pivotal role for being used to organizing protests, raising voices against the odds, and sidestepping the mainstream traditional media, and they mobilized people from all over the country. It brought the chance for the activists to share information and build the movement. It also helped to build the support of the masses within a very short period. On the negative side, the users can

be manipulated and can share disinformation or false news to undermine the protests (Sigurdson & Iyer, 2024).

Social media played a pivotal role in overthrowing Hasina's regime during the July revolution of 2024, which is more likely, called the Monsoon Revolution. The former ruling party AL had 1000000 activists in the field to manage the movement but they failed to counter public opposition, which was through memes, logic, and irony to challenge the government's propaganda in cyberspace. Social media effectively countered all propaganda from the Awami League and spread the proper information around the whole country during the July Revolution. However, in the aftermath of the revolution, the Awami League and the other political parties spread numerous misinformation, rumors, and structured propaganda about the Yunus Government over the digital media.

Nahid Islam (now an advisor to the Yunus Government), the chief coordinator of the Monsoon Revolution, announced a one-point demand for Hasina's resignation on August 3 (Time, 2024). On that night, Bangladesh student League, a student wing of Bangladesh Awami League posted different old videos to spread the false news that they had taken control of Dhaka city and all the coordinators of the movement had fled the country. Later, the students, youth activists, and journalists assured that the video was nothing but a rumor, which turned into meme content for the contemporary social media platforms in Bangladesh (Dismislab, 2024).

Since the Yunus Government had taken control in the administration, some of the Indian media falsely claimed the attack on minorities done by the Muslim citizens of the country. After Hasina's departure, a member of parliament during the controversial 2018 and 2024 elections Mashrafe Bin Mortuza's house got burned due to public outrage which was falsely reported as the popular cricketer of Bangladesh men's cricket team, the house of Liton Das, a member of the Hindu community. After that, Durgapuja, the largest festival for the Hindu community of the country has become the real challenge for the Yunus government. Between October 6 and 12, 14 rumors spread by social platforms (CNN, 2024).

On August 28, Sarah Rehnuma, a 32-year-old newsroom editor at Gazi TV, committed suicide due to her complicity of conjugal life but Sajeeb Wazed, the son of Sheikh Hasina played the key role in spreading structured false news as it was a politically motivated murder claiming that as 'another brutal attack on freedom of expression in Bangladesh' (Dhaka Tribune, 2024).

The political environment has been termed as "rumor night" in social media.



Due to the political incidents, the country's citizens voluntarily took the initiative where one can crossmatch the news and its validity. They felt the necessity of doing this after the murder of a government lawyer during the recent arrest of an ISKCON leader while he was provoking the country's Hindu community (Swadhin, 2024).

### **5.3. The role of social media platforms contribute to mobilizing the citizens and empower the youth to make solidarity between them to continue the movement**

In recent years, social media has been widely employed to effect substantial changes in various phenomena in the surroundings, owing to its immense popularity. Irrespective of whether it is a revolution or a routine event, social media has been instrumental in directly collecting public opinion. Throughout the Arab Spring, a series of pro-democracy demonstrations, and in further contemporary events, we have observed the influential nature of hashtags. Protests were initiated by students from schools and colleges following the tragic deaths of Diya and Rajib in a road accident caused by a consortium of two buses on July 29, 2018. The campaign gained traction via social media and the involvement of university students when the former Shipping Minister and executive president of the Bangladesh Road Transport Worker's Federation made a light-hearted observation, "A road accident has resulted in the loss of 33 lives in Maharashtra, but they fail to address it in the same manner as we do." That was exceedingly abhorrent and a manifestation of cruelty. Following that remark, students, incensed by the occurrence, actively participated in the demonstrations, insisting on adequate punishment for the driver and an apology from the minister.

For over 15 years, the Awami League administration has exerted control over the media, disseminating news in alignment with their agenda. Consequently, public trust in mainstream media has diminished, to the extent that even demonstrators have been unwilling to engage with the media. Consequently, social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube that have played a very influential role, rendering the media dependent on these channels. The entire campaign is coordinated and executed via social media platforms (Parvez, 2022).

Upon the participation of university students, the protest accelerated on August 4th, 2018. On the same day, the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL), a student organization supporting the Awami League, and Law Enforcement Agencies engaged in a confrontation with the general students. This incident provoked unrest among school and college students, leading to a widespread movement that spread throughout the entire country through social media (BBC News, 2018).

Subsequently, the demonstrating students have not only obstructed the primary roads in the city but have also been autonomously enforcing traffic rules, including the verification of driving licenses, car registrations, and fitness certifications (Daily Star, 2018).

The movement concluded on August 6, 2018, when the Cabinet Division, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, endorsed the draught of the Road Transport Act 2018. The legislation stipulates a maximum prison sentence of 5 years and a fine of TK 500000 for fatal accidents (Mamun, 2018). On December 2, 2019, a Dhaka court imposed a life sentence on the drivers in connection with the fatalities of Rajib and Diya (risingbd.com, 2019).

In the current era of social media, it occasionally eludes the conventional media. In contemporary times, the publications of irate individuals on social media platforms function as catalysts for social movements (Van Dyke et al., 2004). The potential of social media interaction lies in its ability to enhance community cohesion, establish a robust offline movement strategy, and create a collective sense of identity (Harlow, 2012). Leveraging social media to bolster social movements may stem from a distrust of conventional media and its limited availability contemporary times, individuals from many segments of society, including the general public, influential individuals, adversaries of the ruling party, and even various global movements, are using the internet-based media platform known as social media to engage in mutual interaction. The 2018 road safety campaign originated with the Facebook posts by students from Shaheed Ramijuddin Cantonment College in Dhaka. They published photographs of a demonstration to demand justice for their classmates Diya and Rajib, who were killed by a caravan of two buses. The photographs quickly gained widespread popularity and students from different regions of the nation actively participated in the campaign via social media platforms. Thus, the question naturally arises as to why the demonstration was ignited by social media rather than conventional media. The solution resides in a few particular factors. The video clip capturing the peculiarly jocular remark made by the minister gained widespread popularity on both Facebook and YouTube. Despite the absence of legislation to guarantee justice, students from all backgrounds endorsed the movement (Parvez, 2022).

Ultimately, this movement laid the foundation for the most significant and impactful movement in the history of Bangladesh, known as the 'Anti-discrimination Student Movement' of 2024. This movement was driven by the desire to protest against the authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hasina, with a single crucial demand: the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This movement also demonstrated a successful culmination within the realm of social media-based citizen journalism.

### **5.3.1. The shift in political discourse**

Since the country gained its independence in 1971, at least three significant adjustments in the political paradigm have occurred. The mass revolution that happened in the 1990s, political conflicts and the subsequent political upheavals that occurred in 2007, and the revolution that took place in July 2024 were all movements that took place with the intention that the nation would institutionalize democracy and assist its economy develop while simultaneously serving its people. However, the results of the popular movement in the 1990s and the change in the political dynamic in 2007 did not turn out as anticipated. Furthermore, there is a qualitative difference between the revolutions and movements that occurred in 2010 and 2024, as well as in 1990 and 2007. These political movements, which occurred in the 1990s and 2007 respectively, were organized under the umbrella of mainstream politics. During those years, the most prominent political opposition parties were responsible for serving as the leadership and management of the opposition. On the other hand, the mass rebellion that took place in 2024 was not organized by a political party that is well-known or considered to be mainstream in the country. However, the campaign was organized by ordinary students at the University of Dhaka, who supposedly began to demand a discrimination-free quota system for admittance into government employment. The opposition political parties did not participate in the protests until after a certain period had passed. Since the Hasina regime, which had been in power since 2009, had been accused of corruption, abduction, and the absence of freedom of press and freedom of expression, the protest evolved into a movement that was opposed to the government. It is a paradigmatic shift in the political scene of Bangladesh that the revolt that took place in July 2024 took place. This is because the major opposition political parties in Bangladesh were unable to produce a plan or a roadmap to overthrow the dictatorship, even though they had been working very hard to do so over the previous 15 years.

Without regard to whether it is a democratic or a military government, the administration of the state of Bangladesh has been characterized by anarchy, oppression, and exploitation. Over time, the situation has not improved. As a result of persistent partisan meddling and manipulation by political actors with impunity, the majority of national institutions, including the civil service, the military, and the judiciary, have been systematically deployed to serve the interests of those who have successfully "captured" state power through whatever means possible. As a consequence of this, any unanimity that had arisen among the people of Bangladesh about the idealistic question of the actual or perceived national identity of the people during the struggle against the Pakistani military during the nine-month independence war in 1971 has been eroded over time. At the societal-political level, the weak state of Bangladesh has sustained an identity crisis despite the repeated propaganda in one

form or another by the political elite in the government to create a monolithic identity for the people of Bangladesh (Huque & Akhter, 1987; Murshid, 1995, 1997; Osmany, 1992). In the first place, it is claimed to be the first of its sort because the mass uprising that took place in July 2024 was primarily made possible thanks to the presence of students and members of the generation known as "Generation Z." The government underestimated the power of younger people who are not voters, overestimated the power of opposition political parties, which came as a surprise to the Hasina regime when they witnessed that their 15 years of constant pressing down on political opponents were not enough, and the transcending of the revolution spirit without having any linear political ideology, approach, or banner. This occurred at a time when the country was almost adapting itself to comply with a fascist regime. The government's actions made it possible for the movement to begin with a quota movement and then apparently transform into a steeping down movement. Although it demonstrates the power of the Bangladeshi people's unity, it also presents challenges. This is because the national solidarity of the country was not made possible in its history. This was because the history of the country's liberation war was distorted, there were multiple fragmentations in political mobilization, and there was an existence of completely different political spectrums. During the year 1971, the people of the country joined together to protest the prejudice that was committed by Pakistani offenders. In the year 2024, the people of the country came together to protest the discrimination that was committed by a fascist administration. Because the discrepancies were made apparent within a few days of independence, the outcomes of 1971 were not fruitful in a sense. On the other hand, it is anticipated that the outcomes of the revolt that took place in 2024 will be successful because there appears to be a new essence of social contract among the citizens of the country. Nevertheless, because there are no political forces that are considered to be mainstream, the newly anticipated social compact can be regarded as a source of optimism. The situation may become much more dire if the major political forces begin to impose the "divide and rule" narrative, which has been a simple means of gaining control of the nation ever since the time of the British. However, the dynamic and interconnected ecosystem of 'Generation Z' and the accompanying degree of flexibility, degree of adaptability, and realizing the ground truth of nationally sensitive topics pose a significant question mark to the outcomes that are anticipated to result from the uprising that will take place in July of 2024.

## **6. Conclusion**

The political landscape of Bangladesh is characterized by several factors, including but not limited to violence, revolution, people's movement, hopes for changes in the system, and a volatile relationship with both the civil and military administrations. The concept of citizen journalism is a relatively young phenomenon when viewed

from the perspective of the political history of South Asia. The mainstream media was the primary source of information for South Asia, which is the region that is home to one-quarter of the world's population of people. The mainstream media outlets, on the other hand, were found to be partisan, biased, and ineffective against the backdrop of the turbulent political landscape. It is in this context that the concept of citizen journalism makes its debut. In this regard, the blessing that has been successfully utilized in public demonstrations has only been augmented by the addition of social media content. Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated how the function of citizen journalism has developed over the course of time and how social media has been utilized as a platform. In the context of Bangladesh, it has been observed that the involvement of citizen journalism has been greater than the role of mainstream media outlets. This is the case. In addition, the successful dynamic of citizen journalism through social media led to the successful termination of the "July Uprising 2024," which ultimately ended in the successful transition of the regime. There has been a shift in the political paradigm in Bangladesh, which will open up additional areas of possibility for citizen journalism in the days to come. This is, in fact, a paradigm change in the field of journalism as well as the sphere of communication.

## **7. Limitations and Further Research**

This article primarily examines the favorable accounts of social media engagement during the student-led protests in Bangladesh following 2010. This text explores the consequences of citizen journalism during the era of social movements. However, it fails to emphasize the specific situation of numerous instances of false information and rumors that were spread by various media outlets, therefore compromising the progress of the movements. Critical analysis can be conducted to ascertain the drawbacks of citizen journalism. Furthermore, this research is deficient in significant quantitative data that may be gathered through surveys to assess the particular influence of citizen journalism on the formation of public opinion. Furthermore, this study primarily focuses on the temporal aspect of protest, emphasizing the need for more research to assess the consequences of protest concerning citizen journalism in shaping policy and governance.

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