Digital Media Technologies and Political Mobilization in Bangladesh: A Structural Analysis of Social Media-Driven Collective Action

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Abstract

Digital media's rapid diffusion has fundamentally reshaped political communication and mobilization in the Global South, and Bangladesh is a timely case of digitally mediated collective action. Over the past decade, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and encrypted messaging apps have shifted from informal communication tools to critical infrastructures for political processes, protest organization, and identity formation. This transformation unfolds within a contested socio-political environment marked by disputed democratic practices, youth-led activism, state surveillance, and regulatory restrictions. While existing scholarship has documented the visibility of online activism in Bangladesh, it has paid less attention to the structural mechanisms through which digital technologies enable, constrain, and reconfigure political mobilization.

This paper offers a structural examination of social media–based collective action in Bangladesh, focusing on how technological affordances, networked social relations, and political opportunity structures interact to produce contemporary forms of mobilization. Drawing on collective action theory, networked social movement perspectives, and digital public sphere models, it situates Bangladeshi digital activism within broader regional and global dynamics while foregrounding its specific contextual conditions. The study synthesizes empirical insights from prior research on quota reform movements, youth activism, diaspora mobilization, and episodic protest cycles to show how social media facilitates collective identity formation, accelerates information diffusion, and lowers participation thresholds for protest.

The analysis argues that digital technologies do not merely expand participation; they reshape mobilization through decentralized leadership, symbolic participation, and hybrid online–offline repertoires. At the same time, vulnerabilities—including misinformation, surveillance, and unequal access—shape the durability and outcomes of collective action. By using Bangladesh as a case, the paper contributes to debates on digital activism in developing democracies and offers theoretical and policy-relevant insights into the shifting relationship among technology, power, and political mobilization.

Keywords : *Digital technologies of the media; political mobilization; social media; collective action; digital mobilization; youth movements; Bangladesh, politics communication.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The ubiquity and flux of new digital media technologies has instigated radical changes in the landscape of political mobilization across the globe, reorganizing the ways in which people gain access to information, build political identities, and engage in action in the collective. The social media platforms have become alternative platforms of

political expression and mobilization in the Global South, where the conventional media system is often bound by limited political milieus (Pardosi, Muttaqim, & Sugeng, 2024). The case of Bangladesh is a particularly enlightening example of how the pace of digitalization is overlapping with the long-standing tension around the issue of democratic government, civil society, and state control.

The last 10 years have seen a significant growth in internet penetration and social media adoption in Bangladesh and more so in youth population groups. The social media like Facebook have since become central to political communication and have allowed people to share information, voice their complaints, and coordinate collective action at a speed and scale never seen before (Anowar, 2024). These trends coincide with a series of high-profile political movements such as the quota reform movement, road safety movements, and more recent movements organized and publicized through digital platforms by young people (Hasan, Biswas, and Ahsan, 2020; Sharmin, 2024; Uddin, 2024).

Academic literature is pointing to the fact that social media technologies are not just acting as a neutral channel of communication but they are also directly influencing the form and process of political mobilization. Digital platforms shape the profiles of their participants, the structure of the movements and flow of political messages through algorithmic amplification, networked connectivity, and symbolic participation affordances (Caren, Andrews, and Lu, 2020; Cheng, Lui, and Fu, 2024). Such dynamics are also compounded by legislation in Bangladesh, online monitoring, and ad hoc curbs on web speech, which creates a controversial digital public space (Shewly, 2025).

Although the growing body of research on digital activism in Bangladesh is impressive, the literature available is largely comprised of descriptive narratives of a particular movement or platform use trend. As a result, systematic structural analyses that probe the interaction of digital media technologies with social and political structures to enable collective action are therefore in a gap. It is critical to bridge this gap in order to fully understand the achievements of digitally-driven mobilization, as well as its shortcomings and its long-term consequences of democratic involvement.

Digital Media Technologies and Politics of Transformation of Political Mobilization

The nature of relationships between media technologies and political mobilization has been long recognized in the fields of political communication research and social movement research. The traditional theories of collective action assume that organizational centralized leadership, formal organizations, and mobilization of resources are the antecedents of prolonged political participation. However, with the emergence of networked digital media, such assumptions have been shaken due to decentralized, horizontally structured movements that exist in the online and offline worlds (Shafi and Ran, 2021).

This is because social media sites lower the coordination cost and allow people to join activism without much risk or commitment. This is often termed as connective action, which is a precursor of individualized interaction and symbolic involvement as opposed to conventional membership organizing (Valenzuela, Correa, and de Zuniga, 2020). Young people in Bangladesh have been especially tempted by such low-level engagement, which allows them to express political dissatisfaction with institutional forms of politics but is extremely active on social media (Samrin, 2024; Chen and Stilinovic, 2020).

At the same time, online platforms enhance the speed at which collective identities are formed by spreading out common discourses, visual images, and emotional displays on large scale. Empirical data on the Bangladesh movements, as well as Facebook groups, hashtags, and viral posts, show that an illusion of virtual community can be created even when the participants are located on different continents (Ansar and Khaled, 2023; Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman, 2025). These are processes that go beyond the realm of communication and function at the structural level of influencing the networks through which mobilization occurs and embedding power relations therein.

However, researchers warn against the overly positive approaches in understanding digital activism. Algorithms, misinformation, and unequal access are initial infiltrating factors in social media settings, thus having the potential to distort political communication and increase social inequalities that exist (Sarwar et al., 2023; Rachimoellah, Lubis, and Utimadini, 2024). In Bangladesh, the issues are exacerbated by governmental monitoring of the Internet space and regular prosecution of online activism,

which makes one question the viability and effectiveness of social media-based mobilization (Kabir, 2023; Shewly, 2025).

Political Mobilization in Bangladesh: The past and the present

Mass movements, student activism and civil society participation have historically influenced the political mobilization in Bangladesh. Since the Language Movement of the 1950s up to the pro-democracy demonstrations of the late twentieth century, collective action has been part of the political development of the country (Rahman and Masud-All-Kamal, 2024). The traditional structure of these movements was based on physical places including campuses, streets, and community centers and the coordination of these movements was based on face-to-face contact and print media.

With the introduction of the digital technologies of media, the concept of political mobilization has been infused with new space and time. The modern movements are becoming more and more cultivated in hybrid space, where the activity in the online demonstrations supplements (and sometimes replaces) the offline protests (Caren et al., 2020). As an example, a quota reform movement depicted how Facebook was used as an organizing machine, which allowed activists to spread the information, plan protests, and present demands inaccessible to traditional media platforms (Hasan et al., 2020; Uddin, 2024).

Likewise, the 2018 road safety movement highlighted the importance of using social media to maintain the general attention of people and engage youth in protests, although the offline protests were suppressed (Sharmin, 2024). Such instances are an illustration of how digital platforms may momentarily expand the political opportunities space by making marginalized voices heard and mobilizing quickly. Nonetheless, they also reveal the weaknesses in terms of fragmentation, lack of leaders, and being susceptible to counter mobilization.

The experience in Bangladesh is no exception, as the digital activism is now a characteristic form of social movements in South Asia and other developing countries (Sato, 2024; Dey, 2020). According to comparative studies, digital media technologies enhance visibility and participation, but their ability to produce meaningful change in

politics is conditional on the high-level institutional and structural aspects (Malik, 2022; Bashri, 2021).

Research Problem and Objectives

Although the use of social media activism has grown in prominence in Bangladesh, there is no evidence that the current scholarship has sufficiently explored the structural aspects of the digital political mobilization. Many works focus on individual platforms, or single events, without establishing them in an overall analytical approach that takes into account technological affordances, network structures and political constraints. This omission lacks the comprehensive comprehension of how digital media technologies transform the processes of collective action in the long-run.

A scarcity of an analytical study that explains the manner in which the social media technologies combine with the social and political situations in producing specific types of political mobilization in Bangladesh is the main issue of this exploration. Such subtle understanding of such interactions is important in assessing the transformative potential of digital activism and its constraints in semi-democratic, controlled environment.

Based on that, the main purposes of this research are to:

Research Question: How did the digital media technologies influence the political mobilization in Bangladesh in terms of structure?

• Determine the role of social media in the development of collective identities and the processes of participation.

• Find out the possibilities and limitations of the social media driven collective action.

• Place the Bangladeshi digital activism in the wider theoretical discourses of networked social movements.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a number of contributions to the body of knowledge related to the study of political communication, social movements and digital activism. To begin with, it proposes a structural viewpoint which goes beyond descriptions of online activism, thus, examining the underlying mechanisms that mold its mobilizing

consequences. Second, the paper enhances the existing empirical understanding of digital political mobilization in third world democracies, such as Bangladesh, which is a poorly represented field of inquiry in the academic literature (Pardosi et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2024).

Practically, the findings can offer practical information to policy makers, civil society players, and designers of digital platforms that would like to encourage inclusive and democratic modes of political participation. The recognition of the structural power of digital media technologies to mobilize can guide plans that address the risks of misinformation, surveillance, and digital exclusion and at the same time enhance the positive possibilities of online civic engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background of Digital Political Mobilization

The academic study of political mobilization has long been based on the collective action theory, which prefigures the relevance of collective grievance, organizational resources, and leadership organizations in the organization of political action. Classical models assumed that mobilization required formal organizations and centralized coordination in overcoming common action problems. However, the rise of digital media technologies has shaken these assumptions essentially by means of decentralized and network-based modes of participation (Shafi and Ran, 2021).

Network society theory is becoming a more and more popular reference in the modern-day scholarly community to describe the transformation of political engagement under the impact of digital infrastructure. In this paradigm, communication networks contain power and the politics is conducted through the flow of information and not a chain of command. The social media networks present horizontal connectivity, thus making people take part in collective action without membership or long-term commitment (Caren, Andrews, and Lu, 2020). This shift is especially relevant to semi-democratic settings, including Bangladesh, where the level of institutional trust is low, and formal political involvement is often seen as useless (Rahman and Masud-All-Kamal, 2024).

The social identity and collective efficacy perspectives also add to the theoretical understanding of digital mobilization. By relying on the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), Ali (2025) states that grievances alone are not the driving force of participation, but the feeling that people have of belonging to a group and the possibility of the group to make a change. Digital platforms serve as central platforms of supporting such psychological processes through allowing repetition of interactions and emotional expression and symbolic alignment between the participants. In Bangladesh, the online space has become habitual site of creating and sustaining collective identities by sharing stories of injustice and struggle (Abir, Chowdhury, and Rahman, 2025).

All of these theoretical approaches indicate that digital political mobilization should be understood as a process built in structure, which is influenced by technology affordances, social networks, and politics, as opposed to an extension of offline activism.

Digital Media and Political Mobilization Global and Global South

Digital media technologies have been recognized all over the world as the source of new types of political engagement, particularly among the youth. Research on a variety of settings proves the hypothesis that social media networks reduce the barriers to participation, allowing people to swamp politics by likes, sharing, and commenting, which in turn can culminate in actual protest attendance (Valenzuela, Correa, and de Zuniga, 2020; Chen and Stilinovic, 2020). These trends are especially common in the Global South, where digital platforms are likely to substitute inadequate access to more traditional political forms (Pardosi, Muttaqim, & Sugeng, 2024).

The networked movements among developing countries have been studied by highlighting how trust, peer-to-peer communication and informal leadership play a role in maintaining the mobilization. Bashri (2021), in discussing the civil society movements in Sudan, shows how social media helps in creating so-called circles of trust that help to mobilize quickly without going through the governmental institutions. Similar processes can be noticed in Bangladesh, where digital platforms are faster when it comes to mobilization in the upheaval associated with political risk and surveillance (Kabir, 2023).

Nevertheless, the ambivalent character of digital activism is also highlighted by scholars. Social media increases visibility and engagement, but at the same time, it adds

some vulnerabilities in the form of misinformation and platform dominance and digital inequality (Sarwar et al., 2023; Rachimoellah, Lubis, and Utimadini, 2024). These contradictions underscore the need to have structural analyses to study the manner in which digital media are both enabling and limiting political mobilization.

Youth Activism, Collective Action and Social Media

Youth participation takes one of the key places in modern digital activism. Social media is extremely over-represented by young people, and they early adopt novel communication media. Digital media have been used by youth-based movements in Bangladesh, which have been persistent in voicing grievances, rallying supporters, and disrupting prevailing narratives of political life (Samrin, 2024; Sato, 2024).

Empirical research has shown that social media supports youth political participation because it offers platforms of political education, discussion with peers, and the development of identity. According to Chen and Stilinovic (2020), digital platforms are informal civic classrooms where users can learn political information and socialization to participate in political processes. Examples of this process in Bangladesh include the quota reform protests and road safety movements, in which social media has been at the center of the process of forming youth participation (Hasan, Biswas, and Ahsan, 2020; Sharmin, 2024).

At the same time, the activism of young people on social media is often episodic in nature, not regular. The analysis of youth-led digital movements by Malik (2022) indicates a tendency to rise and fall rapidly when the mobilization is organized by youth, which can also be interpreted as a cycle of protests in Bangladesh. These processes raise critical concerns about the political implications of youth activism in the social media in the long term.

Bangladesh and Political Mobilization through Digital Activism

Bangladesh is a situation with abundant empirical data on digitally mediated collective action. There is an increasing literature in the role of social media sites in creating significant political movements in the nation. The quota reform movement is an example of how Facebook served as an organizational structure and as a symbolic place to express collective needs (Hasan et al., 2020; Uddin, 2024). Similarly, the research on

the 2018 road safety movement shows how the online networks were able to maintain mobilization, even under physical censorship and media limitations (Sharmin, 2024).

In addition to local activism, transnational political action is also made possible by the online platforms. Ansar and Khaled (2023) emphasize the fact that a Rohingya digital diaspora has emerged, where digital spaces allow forming collective identity and political activism between countries. Kabir (2023) also shows the extent to which the Bangladeshi exiled dissidents use social media to engage the domestic political discourse and therefore reveals how digital mobilization is trans spatial.

Recent research highlights the importance of platform design and experience in the mobilization results. Arif Billah and Rahman (2024) state that interface simplicity, sharing mechanisms, and algorithmic visibility are some of the features that have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of digital activism in Bangladesh. This conclusion adds to the urgency of studying not only social actors, but also technological structures in the process of political mobilization analysis.

Table 1: Summary of Key Literature on Social Media–Driven Political Mobilization in Bangladesh

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Contribution to This Study
Hasan, Biswas, & Ahsan (2020)	Quota reform movement	Demonstrates Facebook's role in mobilization and framing
Sharmin (2024)	Road safety movement	Shows evolution of user behavior during protest cycles
Anowar (2024)	Digital activism	Highlights transformation of organization and awareness
Samrin (2024)	Youth engagement	Explains youth political participation via social media
Abir, Chowdhury, & Rahman (2025)	Collective identity	Illustrates Facebook's role in identity formation

Source: Compiled from Hasan et al. (2020), Sharmin (2024), Anowar (2024), Samrin (2024), and Abir et al. (2025)

This table is a synthesis of the most fundamental empirical research on Bangladeshi digital activism, which shows the way in which social media sites always

operate as organizational, communicative, and identity-forming frameworks. It helps the argument introduced in the study that the digital media technologies are the structural determinants of the political mobilization in Bangladesh instead of the individual aspirations.

Research Gaps

Although there is vast literature on the issue of digital activism in Bangladesh, the current literature is disjointed, as most of the works concentrate on single movements or platforms. There are very limited studies that focus on integrative structural approach in order to determine the physical interaction of technological affordances, social networks and political constraints over time. Additionally, though the importance of youth participation in politics is generally accepted, its connection to the process of collective identity formation and the perspectives of political results is not thoroughly studied. To fill these gaps, there is a need to treat the multi-layered concept of digital political mobilization through a conceptual framework.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

This paper follows an approach of structural framework, which conceptualizes political mobilization through social media as a result of interactions between technological, social and political structure. The framework embraces digital platforms as active forces instead of accepting them as inert tools that can influence patterns of participation, information flows and power relationships.

On the technological feature, platform affordances, which include algorithmic amplification, network connectivity, and symbolic participation, have an impact on the spreading of political material and engagement of users with collective action (Cheng, Lui, and Fu, 2024; Su, Chan, and Paik, 2022). These technological impacts are mediated through social structure (organized as peer networks, collective identities and relations of trust), which influence the subject people that are mobilized and the mode of mobilization (Ali, 2025; Bashri, 2021). The results of mobilization are also preconditioned by political structures, which include state regulation, surveillance, and opportunity limitations, which facilitate or limit digital activism (Shewly, 2025; Kabir, 2023).
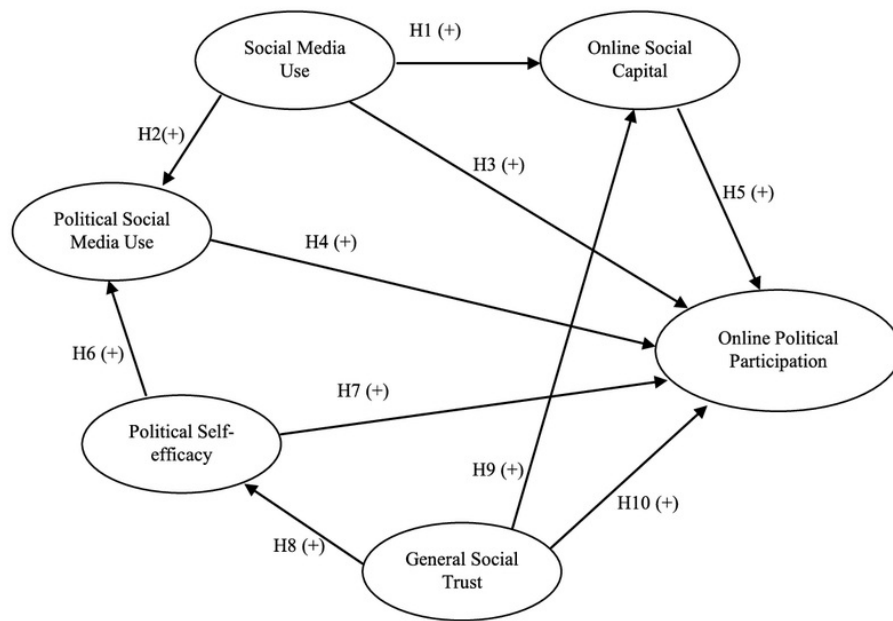
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Social Media Driven Political Mobilization in Bangladesh

Source: Developed by the author based on Ali (2025), Caren et al. (2020), and Shewly (2025)

The figure depicts how the digital media technologies engage with the social and political structures to generate political mobilization in Bangladesh. It presents in a visual form the essence of the argument of the study that the collective action is a consequence of such a dynamic interaction between platform, network and context of governance and not of individual technological or social phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Analytical Orientation

The research design selected in this study is a qualitative dominant mixed methods research design where structural analysis is the major methodology strategy that will be used to study political mobilization, based on social media in Bangladesh. This strategy would be especially appropriate in capturing the intricate associations among digital technologies of the media, social networks, and political restrictions which define the current collective action in semi-democratic settings. Although qualitative approaches form the analytical gist of the study, selective quantitative descriptive indicators are

included in the study to enhance the interpretation of the patterns of structural participation and diffusion.

Structural analysis allows the study to go beyond the descriptions of events or platforms and instead the manner in which digital media technologies are socio-technical infrastructures that define the processes of mobilization. According to previous literature, social movements of the digital era are complex adaptive systems where technological affordances, social identities, and political opportunity structure interact as a continuous process (Shafi and Ran, 2021; Caren, Andrews, and Lu, 2020). An approach is crucial to comprehend the dynamics of empowerment and control in a specific case, where the digital platforms can be seen as other public spheres, and democratic conditions are limited in Bangladesh (Shewly, 2025; Rahman and Masud-All-Kamal, 2024).

The qualitative superiority of the design indicates the meaning-making, discourse creation, and construction of collective identities focus of the study. These are the dimensions of digital activism, in which symbolic engagement and framing of the narrative often go before or replace formal organization (Ali, 2025; Abir, Chowdhury, and Rahman, 2025).

Data Sources and Case Sample

The main data sources of the research will include publicly available social media resources about the key moments of political mobilization in Bangladesh. They consist of Facebook posts, comments, shared images, hashtags, and video contents related to movements like the quota reform protests, youth-led campaigns on road safety, and recent digital mobilizations that are reported in the current scholarship (Hasan, Biswas, and Ahsan, 2020; Sharmin, 2024; Uddin, 2024). These instances were chosen as they are some of the high-intensity episodes of social media-based collective activity that have been extensively discussed within the context of Bangladesh.

Peer-reviewed scholarly research, doctoral research, and recorded accounts of the digital activism in Bangladesh are all considered as secondary qualitative sources. These sources can put the observed patterns into a contextual perspective and allow triangulating them (Anowar, 2024; Samrin, 2024; Ansar and Khaled, 2023). Quantitative descriptive measures, e.g., frequency of posts, sharing patterns and intensity of engagement, are

introduced when available in the reviewed literature as supporting qualitative interpretation of the dynamics of mobilization (Valenzuela, Correa, and de Zuniga, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2023).

Such a mix of sources of data enables the study to include the discursive and structural aspects of political mobilization and be sensitive to ethical issues related to digital research with politically sensitive settings (Kabir, 2023).

The content and discourse analysis is qualitative

The major analytical methods that will be used in this research are qualitative content and discourse analysis. The recurrent themes, frames, and symbolical parts in the social media are identified through content analysis i.e., a narrative of injustice, a call to action, and a depiction of collective identity. The discursive analysis is used to supplement this method by analyzing how language, images, and patterns of interaction help to create political meaning and legitimacy in the digital space (Dey, 2020; Cheng, Lui, and Fu, 2024).

These approaches are especially useful in the manner in which they not only capture the ways in which digital platforms enable low-threshold participation by also enabling the development of shared identities. The existing literature proves that online discourse is a key to converting personal complaints into a political statement, particularly when such movements are organized by young people (Chen and Stilinovic, 2020; Samrin, 2024). In nations with limited chances to organize offline protests (e.g. Bangladesh), digital discourse can serve as a mobilizing force and a place of political opposition (Sharmin, 2024; Shewly, 2025).

Table 2: Analytical Dimensions and Data Sources Used in the Study

Analytical Dimension	Data Source	Relevance to Research
Collective identity formation	Social media posts and narratives	Explains how shared meanings emerge
Mobilization framing	Hashtags, slogans, visual content	Reveals grievance articulation
Participation structure	Engagement patterns from literature	Indicates diffusion and reach

Political constraints	Secondary academic analyses	Contextualizes state influence

Source: Developed by the author based on Hasan et al. (2020), Sharmin (2024), Ali (2025), and Cheng et al. (2024)

The given table clarifies the correlations between specific dimensions of analysis and the related sources of data, which strengthens the logic of structure in the study. It shows how qualitative materials can be incorporated into the selective quantitative indicators to examine the processes by which digital media technologies can affect political mobilization in Bangladesh.

Application of Quantitative Descriptive Indicators

Despite the qualitative nature of the study, quantitative descriptive indicators are used to support the structural interpretations. These indicators include reported levels of engagement, rate of diffusion of protest-related content, and relative prominence of platforms that have been recorded in the previous scholarship. They are not utilized to cause a specific outcome but are used to put the qualitative data into context and emphasize structural regularities in participation (Valenzuela et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2023).

This selective combination is in line with the postulates of mixed-methods research, where qualitative understanding is allowed by the basis of observable participation patterns without necessarily reducing complex political behaviour to a collection of numerical indicators. This approach is a viable and morally correct step in strengthening qualitative research in Bangladesh, where only platform-level data is available (Rachimoellah, Lubis, and Utimadini, 2024).

Structural Analytical Model

The structural approach used in this study theoreticalises the concept of political mobilization as the result of the interactions of digital media technologies, social structures and political conditions. The digital platforms provide the visibility, connectivity and symbolic participation, and the social networks mediate the trust, identity and the intensity of engagement (Bashri, 2021; Ali, 2025). Political systems, including regulation and monitoring identify where digital mobilisation would be converted into long-term collective action (Kabir, 2023; Shewly, 2025).
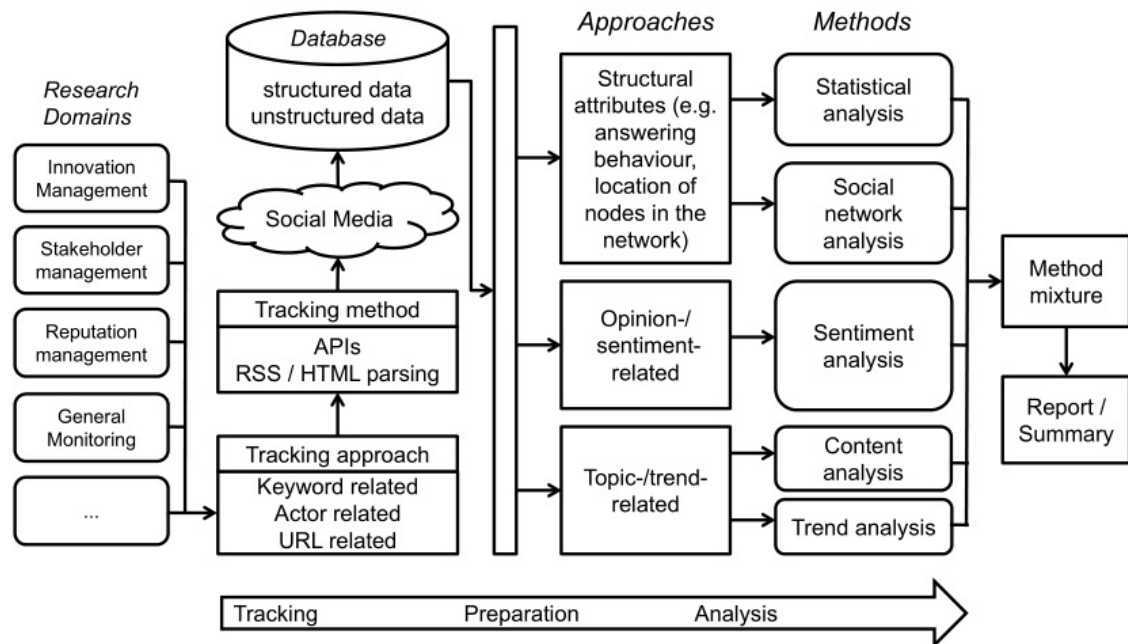
Figure 2 Structural Analytical Model of Social Media–Driven Political Mobilization

Source: Author's illustration based on Shafi and Ran (2021), Ali (2025), and Caren et al. (2020)

The diagram shows the interaction between qualitative and quantitative elements in the structural analysis that is conducted in this paper. This description supports the argument according to which political mobilization is based on interpretive and structural processes, rather than independent platform measures, which highlight the hybrid nature of digital activism in Bangladesh.

Ethical Considerations

Considerable to the politically sensitive nature of digital activism in Bangladesh, the ethical concerns are a fundamental part of the methodological design. Only publicly available materials of social media that have previously been reported in previous study are included in the study, and the study intentionally avoids any attempt at determining who the individual user is. This methodology is within the current level of ethics regarding digital research that is carried out in politically limited settings (Kabir, 2023; Shewly, 2025).

FINDINGS / RESULTS

Structural Patterns of Political Mobilization through Social Media

The findings of the empirical research show that political mobilisation in Bangladesh through the digital media follows specific structural set ups that are determined by the platform affordances, network dynamics and political constraints. The social media sites, especially Facebook, serve not only as communication tools but also as organisational systems which enable grievances of individuals to be easily consolidated into grouped political activism. In the reviewed movements, mobilisation has generally been decentralised in its initiation, whereby no particular formal leadership setup controlled the initial stages of a collective action. Rather, power was spread among network hubs of visibility of users, activist pages, and informal coordinators, thus validating the findings of leaderless or weakly centralised movements reported in previous literature (Hasan, Biswas, and Ahsan, 2020; Shafi and Ran, 2021).

Qualitative content analysis demonstrates that mobilisation takes place in repetitive discursive stages. The first step in problem articulation is often initiated with emotionally charged accounts such as the sense of injustice, corruption, or state failure which are then propagated at an exponential rate through sharing and commentary. These stories are then turned into a call to action, often through the moral or civic prism highlighting collective duty, in particular, among the young people (Samrin, 2024; Anowar, 2024). This development corresponds to the structural logic in Section 3, in which digital media content is subject to the interaction with the processes of social identity to foster collective action.

Importantly, the results indicate that the intensity of mobilisation is highly correlated with the visibility mechanisms, which are entrenched in the social media platforms. Peer endorsement and algorithmic amplification support some stories to take over the digital common space, thus, influencing the modes of participation and activism temporal peaks (Sharmin, 2024; Sarwar et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this very dependence on visibility on the platform creates volatility, which may result in episodic mobilisation, but not sustained mobilisation.

How Social Media Platforms Traffic Mobilisation Dynamics

The post describes how platform-specific affordances are the core of political mobilisation organisation. Facebook is the most popular platform as many people in Bangladesh use it and can combine text, visuals, and live content. The analysis of the quota reform and road safety movements shows that Facebook pages and groups served as quasi-organisational spaces that helped to coordinate, establish agendas, and represent symbols (Hasan et al., 2020; Sharmin, 2024).

Visual contents like pictures of the protests, infographics, and short videos served a rather salient role in maintaining the engagement. These contents reduced the complicated political messages into readily distributable portions, thus increasing emotional appeal and strengthening of collectivism (Abir, Chowdhury, and Rahman, 2025). Discourse analysis also indicates that hashtags and slogans worked as binding symbols, allowing the dispersed participants to identify with a common cause without direct contact, which is a pattern of symbolic participation being witnessed with other online movements (Su, Chan, and Paik, 2022).

At the same time, the results highlight that the platform design and user experience have a considerable impact on the outcomes of mobilisation. The simplicity of the interface, the shareability of the content, and the use of the algorithmic promotion of the most popular content were found to influence the voices that achieve dominance, reflecting the significance of the UX aspects of the practice in Bangladeshi activism online (Arif Billah and Rahman, 2024). These organizational characteristics strengthen intra-movement inequalities, giving an advantage more digital savvy actors and high-visibility accounts.

Table 3: Observed Structural Features of Social Media–Driven Mobilization in Bangladesh

Structural Feature	Empirical Observation	Supporting Studies
Decentralized coordination	Absence of formal leadership	Hasan et al. (2020); Shafi & Ran (2021)
Collective identity framing	Shared narratives and symbols	Abir et al. (2025); Ali (2025)

Rapid diffusion	High-speed sharing and engagement	Sharmin (2024); Valenzuela et al. (2020)
Episodic intensity	Peaks followed by decline	Malik (2022); Sarwar et al. (2023)

Source: Synthesized from Hasan et al. (2020), Sharmin (2024), Ali (2025), Malik (2022), and Sarwar et al. (2023)

The current table summarizes the main structural features found in major digital mobilizations in Bangladesh. It shows how decentralized coordination, identity based framing and quick diffusion have a collective effect on the structure of political mobilization, and in turn tend to reinforce its episodic nature. These empirical data support the analytical framework developed structurally as stated in Section 2 and 3.

Internet-Offline Connections and Mobilization Results

The major observation of the current research study is the interdependence between onlineness and political activity in the offline environment. Despite the fact that high rates of digital involvement were observed among the movements under analysis, the transfer of the corresponding engagement to the offline mobilisation that was to be sustained showed a high degree of heterogeneity. As an example, the quota-reform movement, through online coordination, efficiently boosted mass street protests, which points to a strong online-offline connection (Hasan et al., 2020; Uddin, 2024). Conversely, the other movements depicted an extreme visibility on the internet but did not have equal continuity on the ground, which highlights the limitations of the digitally mediated participation.

This kind of variability is most developed by structural conditions and not individual motivation only. The political opportunity structures, including state reactions and regulatory demands composing it, are a decisive factor of the results of the mobilization. Increased surveillance and detention of activists and restrictions on digital acts of expression continuously slowed the force of mobilisation and increased the sense of precarity of digitally encouraged collective action in constraining environments (Kabir, 2023; Shewly, 2025).

In addition, the findings also indicate that a youth participation, despite being central in digital mobilisation does not in any way always lead to an institutional political participation. Many of the young participants proclaimed political awareness and unity in the online space, but retained the distrust of formal political institutions, which aligns with the existing pre-existing literature on youth activism in Bangladesh and other comparable environments (Samrin, 2024; Chen & Stilinovic, 2020).

Constraints, Risks and Counter-Mobilization

The discussion lists various structural limitations that limit the effectiveness of mobilisation through social-media. Misinformation and counter-narratives are also common products of the protest cycles thus eroding movements coherence and deteriorating intra-participant trust (Sarwar et al., 2023). In addition to that, the algorithmic suppression and content-moderation processes sometimes limit the exposure of activist content, highlighting the fact that mobilization depends on the platform regulation (Cheng, Lui, and Fu, 2024).

The interventions at the state level also had an additional impact on the mobilization paths. Online surveillance and legal repression aimed at the dissent on the Internet created an atmosphere of insecurity, even some of the participants began to instill self-censorship mechanisms or withdraw (Kabir, 2023). These comments highlight the dual nature of digital media technologies as both facilitating and constraining political mobilisation thus confirming the argument that digital activism needs to be contextualised within the broad political and institutionalism (Rachimoellah, Lubis, & Utimadini, 2024).
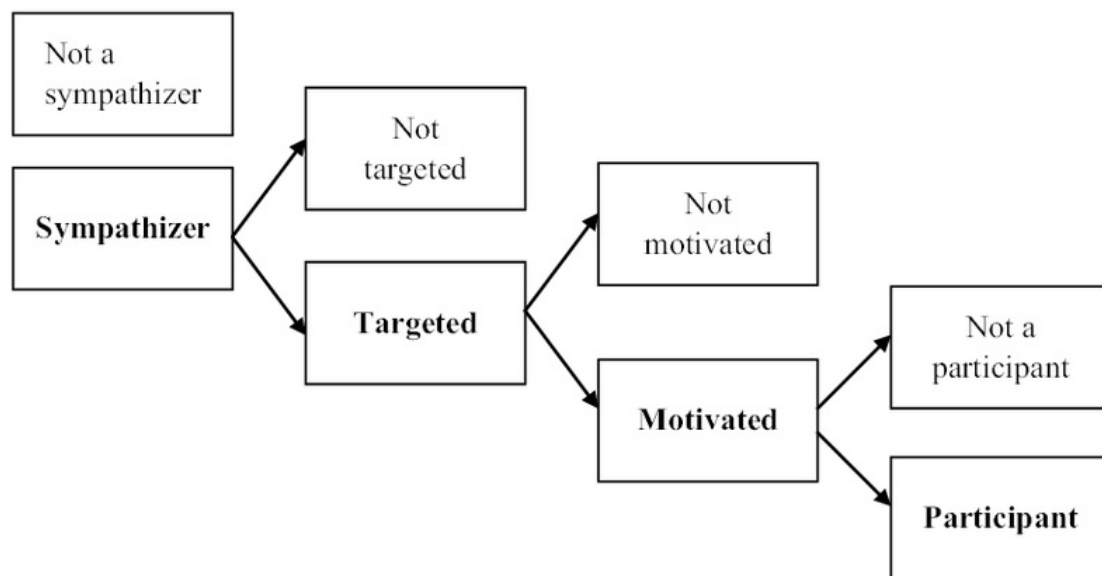
Figure 3: **Observed Mobilization Flow in Social Media–Driven Collective Action**

Source: Author's synthesis based on Hasan et al. (2020), Sharmin (2024), and Ali (2025)

The figure shows how the social media-spurred political mobilization in Bangladesh has been observed to take place, starting with the expression of grievance, followed by offline mobilization, or deflation. It creates a visual support of the fundamental result of the study that although mobilization is successfully launched and enhanced through digital platforms, structural constraints usually dictate whether collective action persists or fades away.

Summary of Key Findings

Altogether, the results prove that digital media technologies have a fundamental transforming effect on the political mobilization in Bangladesh since they introduce the ability to organize the mobilization process at the decentralized level, to spread quickly, and to participate based on the identity. But it is these very structural characteristics that make it volatile, fragmented and prone to political manipulation. These findings confirm the theoretical construct formulated in the previous part of the research and give the subsequent empirical basis to the discussion of interpretation.

DISCUSSION

Understanding Digital Political Mobilization Structurally

The qualitative data used in Section 4 supports the main hypothesis expressed in Section 1 and 2: digital media technologies represent a radical reorganization of politics mobilization processes in Bangladesh, and not just an extension of the traditional modalities of participation. Treated in the framework of a structural analytical paradigm outlined in Section 3, the social media serves as a socio-technical system that alters the articulation of complaints, formation of identities, and organization of action.

In accordance with the theories of the network society and modern models of collective action, the results prove that decentralized coordination and symbolic participation are the driving forces behind mobilization, but not the formal organizational leadership (Caren, Andrews, and Lu, 2020; Shafi and Ran, 2021). The structural change in Bangladesh, where the traditional political institutions are often taken with a grain of salt, allows citizens, especially youth, to participate in the political processes without depending on the party structures or the civil society organisations (Samrin, 2024; Rahman and Masud -All-Kamal, 2024).

However, the discourse should go beyond hymn-like narratives of the digital activism. The dynamism of mobilization as seen in different movements is captured through the episodic nature of its structure, which emphasizes the structural instability of participation based on platforms. Visibility-based engagement generates the wave of collective action and also more quickly falls into decline when the attention of the algorithm shifts or the political pressure increases (Sharmin, 2024; Sarwar et al., 2023). This fact is consistent with the literature on hybrid media systems worldwide that highlights that digital platforms both promote and limit political participation at the same time (Caren et al., 2020).

Generationality, Youth Involvement and Figurehead Involvement

One of the most critical contributions of the research is the explanation of how the collective identity is formed as a part of digitally mediated mobilization in Bangladesh. Based on the Social Identity Model of Collective Action, the results prove that social media sites generate identity congruence by providing repetitive symbolic exchange,

emotional appeal, and common stories (Ali, 2025). Such processes were especially relevant in youth-led movements, where the participation often occurred as a response to moralization and generational unity and not due to instrumental political goals.

The high presence of symbolic participation, including posting, the use of hashtags, and spreading visual materials, supports the hypothesis that digital activism reduces the level of engagement barriers and broadens the understanding of what the political participation can cover (Valenzuela, Correa, and de Zúñiga, 2020). This process has made it possible to mobilize the masses in Bangladesh despite oppressive political regimes, which the quota reform and road safety movements have demonstrated (Hasan, Biswas, and ∴ Ahsan, 2020; Sharmin, 2024).

At the same time, the discourse brings into focus a structural conflict between identity based mobilization and long term political transformation. Digital platforms are effective in the creation of collective consciousness, but not as effective in long-term organisational abilities. This trend is similar to similar Global South settings, as youth-led digital movements often fail to transform the symbolic involvement into the material institutional change (Malik, 2022; Bashri, 2021).

Table 5 : Structural Effects of Digital Media on Collective Identity and Participation

Dimension	Observed Effect in Bangladesh	Supporting Studies
Identity formation	Rapid alignment around shared narratives	Ali (2025); Abir et al. (2025)
Youth participation	High engagement, low institutional trust	Samrin (2024); Chen & Stilinovic (2020)
Symbolic action	Emphasis on sharing and visibility	Valenzuela et al. (2020); Su et al. (2022)
Sustainability	Declining engagement over time	Malik (2022); Sharmin (2024)

Source: Synthesized from Ali (2025), Samrin (2024), Valenzuela et al. (2020), and Malik (2022).

This table brings empirical evidence of the study on par with the conventional theoretical frameworks regarding identity-based collective action. It provides an example that digital

media, despite its efficacy in supporting collective identity and encouraging young people engagement in Bangladesh, is structurally limited by the dynamics in the platform and lack of avenues to sustained interaction.

Platform Power, Visibility, and Political Constraints

The discussion also explains how platform power affects the results of political mobilization. As demonstrated in Sections 3 and 4, platform affordances such as algorithmic amplification and the interface design impact the visibility of specific narratives and how participation can be achieved in a very significant way. This fact supports the argument that digital platforms are not passive spaces but rather political actors that influence the mobilization process (Cheng, Lui, & Fu, 2024; Arif Billah & Rahman, 2024).

In Bangladesh context, legal restrictions in the form of surveillance, legal regulation and content moderation are dependent factors contributing to the dependency on platforms. The results indicate that these restrictions affect digitally mediated movements more significantly because an online presence both draws attention and causes state suspicion (Kabir, 2023; Shewly, 2025). This dynamic consequently increases the structural susceptibility of mobilization based on social media, particularly within semi-democratic markets in which digital spaces are being used as a competed social space.

The interaction of platform governance and state power brings out one of the key findings in this question: digital media technologies reorganize political opportunity structures and leaves structural inequalities and power asymmetries intact instead of eliminating them. Instead, they shift the battle of politics into networked milieus whereby visibility, power, and opposition are in-community (Rachimoellah, Lubis, & Utimadini, 2024).

Table 6: Opportunities and Constraints of Social Media–Driven Mobilization in Bangladesh

Structural Aspect	Opportunities	Constraints
Platform affordances	Rapid diffusion and visibility	Algorithmic suppression

Participation	Low entry barriers	Shallow engagement
Political space	Alternative public sphere	Surveillance and regulation
Mobilization outcome	Mass awareness	Limited institutional impact

Source: Developed from Cheng et al. (2024), Kabir (2023), Shewly (2025), and Sarwar et al. (2023)

This table is a synthesis of the duality of the digital media technologies as manifested by the study. It portrays that the very structural characteristics that facilitate political mobilisation in Bangladesh create limitations that inhibit its effectiveness in the long-term thus strengthening the core argument in the study on the ambivalence of digital activism.

Placing Bangladesh in Greater Digital Activism Discussions

The case of Bangladeshi people would be understood as consistent with and expanding the current research on digital activism in the Global South when it is placed in the context of wider discussions. Also, like movements elsewhere in South Asia and the world in general, digital mobilisation in Bangladesh is youth-led, decentralised, and driven by social media platforms (Sato, 2024; Pardosi, Muttaqim, & Sugeng, 2024). Nevertheless, the degree of political domination and the pivotal role of Facebook as an organisation mobilising infrastructure makes Bangladesh different to most other similar settings.

The results are also in line with transnational studies of digital activism that highlight the value of online networks to maintain political activism across national borders (Ansar & Khaled, 2023; Kabir, 2023). What these reflections point to is the necessity of conceptualising political mobilisation as more trans-spatial especially in those situations that are characterised by the presence of migration and in the activities of the diaspora.

Summary of Discussion

To recap it all, the discussion shows that political mobilisation in Bangladesh caused by social media can be best interpreted as the structurally intertwined process with references to digital platforms, social identities and political limitations. Though digital media technologies widen the possibilities of participation and expressing, they introduce

new possibilities of vulnerability and control. Using the theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions as discussed in Sections 1 4, this discussion contributes to the research contribution on the understanding of the complex relationship between digital media and political mobilisation in developing democracies.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Key Findings

This paper was conducted in a bid to examine the impact of digital media technologies on political mobilization in Bangladesh using a structural analytical approach. Based on the theoretical background provided in Section 1 and the literature on Bangladesh considered in Section 2, the evidence reveals that social media sites are not only communication channels, but also structuring space rearranging the processes of political participation, formation of collective identities, and mobilizations.

As it can be seen in the empirical respondences in Sections 4 and 5, collective action using social media in Bangladesh has been typified by speedy dissemination, decentralised coordination, and strong symbolic interaction, especially among young people groups. Digital platforms reduce entry barriers to politics and allow individuals to express grievances and conform to collective stories and take part in mass mobilization despite limited democracies (Ali, 2025; Samrin, 2024). These structural characteristics, however, also make mobilization episodic and weak, since the sustained commitment is not always attained without formal organisational structures as well as institutionalised channels of political change (Malik, 2022; Sharmin, 2024).

The combination of qualitative content and discourse analysis with some quantitative indicators in the form of selective, as described in Section 3, allowed the study to capture both the meanings that were contained in the digital political communication and the larger structural patterns of the participation and diffusion. This multi-method was especially useful in clarifying the way of interaction between the digital media technologies and social and political systems in the Bangladeshi context.

Theoretical Contributions

The paper makes a number of important theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge in digital political mobilisation. To start with, it expands the network society and collective action theories by revealing the combined influence of platform

affordances, algorithmic visibility, and political constraints to determine the outcomes of mobilisation in the context of a developing democracy (Caren, Andrews, & Lu, 2020; Cheng, Lui, & Fu, 2024). Instead of considering digital media as neutral infrastructures, the findings highlight their active mediating force of their structuring that mediate power, visibility and participation.

Second, the study contributes to our knowledge of the topic of identity-based mobilisation by demonstrating how collective identities in Bangladesh are created and maintained by symbolic interaction and emotional appeal on social media platforms. These processes enable high-scale participation, but they also create incentives towards the forms of participation that put a higher value on visibility rather than institutional effects (Valenzuela, Correa, & de Zuniga, 2020; Ali, 2025). This knowledge narrows the current models of digitally facilitated collective action by prefiguring the conflict between symbolic involvement and structural change.

Lastly, the study provides a context-sensitive approach by taking a structural analytical approach that can intersect political realities in the world and global theories of digital activism. This way, it addresses requests to conduct more empirically-based studies regarding digital political mobilisation in the Global South (Malik, 2022; Sato, 2024).

Implications to Policy and Practice

These implications on policymakers, civil society actors, and digital platform governance are of great importance. To the policymakers, the findings highlight why they should consider digital platforms as very important political spaces and not a marginal communication tool. Any effort to curb political expression on the internet without discussing the underlying political dissatisfaction is likely to make more citizens, especially the youth, who use the internet even more disengaged Kabir, 2023

In the case of civil society organisations and other activist groups, the study reveals that it is essential to connect online mobilisation with the capability of the organisation at the offline level. In as much as social media also facilitates mobilisation within a short period, lasting political change needs institution-based approaches that go beyond digital exposure. Online coordination, combined with grassroots organisation, could be developed into hybrid forms of activism, which would potentially increase the

effectiveness of political movements in Bangladesh in the long term (Hasan, Biswas, & Ahsan, 2020; Pardosi et al., 2024).

On the platform level, the results support anxieties about the issue of algorithmic governance and content moderation practices that define the politics of participation in opaque formations. Additional details about platform governance might help to address some of the identified structural limitations in this paper (Cheng et al., 2024; Arif Billah and Rahman, 2024).

Limitations of the Study

Although it has made contributions, this study has a number of weaknesses which deserve to be mentioned. Reports of privacy of political communication, which made use of encrypted messages, were not recorded because the analysis relied on the qualitative analysis of publicly available social media content. Moreover, the structural approach is also deep and rich in context, but causal generalisation of different political contexts is also not possible.

The research design to study the key political mobilisation events in Bangladesh could also limit the ability of the research to identify quotidian digital political mobilisation practices that take place during non-contention phases. The limitations could be overcome in future research through the inclusion of longitudinal research designs and comparative research.

Future Research recommendations

The next-generation research in this field ought to follow up on the study by exploring the manner in which new digital platforms and technologies are altering the nature of political mobilisation in Bangladesh and similar situations. Further comparative research on South Asian nations might assist in understanding the effect of the difference in political structure and platform regulation on the mobilisation process. Furthermore, combining both ethnography and digital traces information could result in a better understanding of the mechanisms by which people explore the risks and opportunities of digital politics with limited democratic opportunities (Ansar & Khaled, 2023; Rachimoellah et al., 2024).

Concluding Remarks

To sum up, this paper shows that digital media technologies have taken centre stage in the mobilisation of politics in Bangladesh, and have changed the structure,

experience and limitations of collective action. The research contains a structurally informed perspective on social media-based political mobilisation that cuts across theoretical, empirical, and methodological understanding created throughout Sections 1 to 5 that avoids technological determinism. The results indicate both the potential transformative nature and the natural constraints of digital activism, hence making contributions to the wider discussions of democracy, participation and power in the digital era.

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