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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**DIGITAL ACTIVISM: SOCIAL MEDIA’S ROLE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the transformative role of digital activism in contemporary social movements, focusing on how social media platforms facilitate collective action and political change both in Bangladesh and globally. Through case studies—including the Shahbagh Movement (2013), the Road Safety Movement (2018), and the July Revolution (2024) in Bangladesh, alongside global movements such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and the Hong Kong protests—it explores how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram enable decentralized mobilization, amplify marginalized voices, and circumvent traditional media. While digital activism democratizes participation and fosters transnational solidarity, it also faces challenges, including misinformation, state surveillance, and platform commercialization. Despite concerns regarding coordination and the translation of online action into tangible change, digital activism has reshaped political engagement by empowering grassroots movements, redefining leadership structures, and facilitating real-time global communication. The study underscores the complex, evolving relationship between digital technologies and sociopolitical activism in the 21st century.]

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**Introduction:-**

In today’s digitally interconnected world, social media has become a pivotal force in reshaping the landscape of political and social engagement. Once confined to traditional modes of organization and communication, activism has now evolved into a dynamic, networked phenomenon that transcends geographical and institutional boundaries. From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter, and from the Shahbagh protests to the July Revolution in Bangladesh, digital platforms have redefined how movements emerge, mobilize, and sustain momentum. As state-controlled media and hierarchical structures give way to decentralized, user-driven networks, it is increasingly vital to examine the role of digital activism in contemporary society. This study endeavors to explore this transformative shift, shedding light on the power, potential, and perils of social media as a tool for civic expression and collective action.

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**Fig: Social Movements**

### **Literature Review:-**

Digital activism is a form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action. According to McCaughey & Ayers, digital activism is a broad term that refers to political activism on the internet or political movements relying on it (e.g., McCaughey & Ayers, 2003, p. 1; Vegh, 2003, p. 71). Karatzogianni's (2015, p. 1) definition of digital activism as political participation, activities and protests organized in digital networks beyond representational politics and by non-state actors. Digital activism has proved to be a powerful means of grassroots political mobilization and provides new ways to engage protesters. Digital activism has an enormous ability to amplify offline and online civic activism and political participation.

In Bangladesh, digital activism has successfully supported social and political change in recent years. A number of studies have argued that social media have played important roles in coordinating, mobilizing and organizing social and political movements. What is social media? Social media has been defined as websites that allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, provide people with a pervasive network connectivity (Asur & Huberman, 2010).

Social media utilizes mobile and web-based technology to build highly interactive platforms that enable communication, sharing, collaboration and modification of user-generated information which allows real-time virtual interactions (Bagley et al., 2014; King et al., 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Unlike face-to-face interactions, they have a global audience with almost immediate response times and are cheap and easy to use.

Social media can be defined as "any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback," according to Kent (2010). He pointed out that modern social media have "the potential for real-time interaction, less anonymity, a sense of proximity, short response times and the ability to 'time shift' or engage the social network whenever suits each member." (p. 645) Social Media makes it easier for people to build communication and interaction with each other. The development of digitalization, including in the form of social media, has behaviour-structuring effects that create a new mode of collective behavior. As a result, it promotes the digital-enabled social movements. (Agustin Rina Herawati et al., 2023)

Laaksonen and Laaksonen (2022) argue that social movements can be viewed as a form of collective action and informal networks based on solidarity and similar ideas among their participants. Social movements are key factors of social change in this modern world. Some of them represent joint efforts by activists or citizens to build a more just and equal world. The participants of social movements try to create positive change in society.

➤ **Social movements and social media:-**

A social movement is a social process through which collective actors articulate their interests, voice grievances and critiques, and proposed solutions to identified problems by engaging in a variety of collective actions. These movements have three characteristics: 1) they are conflictual and have clearly acknowledged (ideological) opponents; 2) they are structured through extensive informal networks; and 3) they are aimed towards establishing, sustaining, and sharing collective identities. (della Porta and Diani, 2006)

Social movements are collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites and authorities. (Tarrow, 1994, p. 4) According to Blau (Blau, 2004), (1) social movements are collective challenges (2) it concerns people with a common purpose and solidarity (3) Only by continuing collective activity does an actor transform a challenged situation into a social movement. Thus, it is important to describe the main distinctions between the Internet and cyberspace. The differences lie in spatiality as much as the Internet requires a physical space (Albrechtslunds, 2008). Albrechtslunds also states that cyberspace can be viewed as the place of online activities, including daily web surfing and interaction with others and this spatial metaphor so contrasts with the physical Internet which consists of servers. (Albrechtslunds, 2008: 1). Cyberspace is defined as a computer-generated landscape, specifically the virtual space of a global computer network that linking all people, computers and sources of various information in the world through which one could navigate.



**Fig: Social movements on Social Media**

The “public sphere” in cyberspace is an electronic environment where individuals can meet through the internet to engage in debate regarding general issues. Simply said, it is a network of communicative spaces that allows information, ideas, opinions, and arguments to circulate freely, thus shaping and forming public opinion. (Dahlgren, 2005).

Philip N. Howard and Malcolm R. Parks (2012) have stated that social media contains of (a)the information infrastructure and tools used to create and distribute content that has individual value while reflecting shared values; (b) the content that takes the digital form; and (c) the people, organizations and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content. In this regard, as Nick Anstead (2014) pointed out, social media might be seen as an infrastructure of public opinion that includes a means for assessing public opinion, an understanding of politics that shapes that public and how it is conceived and forums in which public opinion is discussed.

The activism or digital activism is a kind of protest based on the internet. Fuchs (2006) stated through his research that digital activism is an emerging field of social movements. His research reflects the role of alternative online media, online protests and online protest communication in society (Fuchs, 2006: 275). The online actions like setting up websites, surfing the web for information, posting materials on a website, transmitting electronic publications and letters through email and using the Internet to discuss issues, form coalitions, and coordinate

activities. According to (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), digital activism can create ‘crowd-enabled connection action’ by mobilizing the activists or movement’s participants through the internet or social media in particular. This is definitely different from the traditional old social movement because digital activism is organized by crowds largely without lead or central organizational actors. Ozgul mentioned that their primary organisation is carried out by sharing personal action frames on the Internet, which is an engagement created by a basic discourse shared with social networks. However, this doesn't mean that digital activism is a leaderless movement, but rather allows leaders to operate anonymously. (Billur Aslan Ozgul, 2019)

In a social movement, an essential way to gain power is to attract people to join the movement, so communication is very crucial (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012 & 5) However, digital technology has successfully reshaped the internal and external communication strategies within social movements, as well as created new communication patterns and alternative publics, making their potential reach broadened. (Agustin Rina Herawati et al., 2023a)

However, digitalization has accelerated the pace of social change in the twenty-first century. According to (Mwaura, 2017), activism refers to an action to effect social change. This action is usually using letters, petitions, protests, and hacktivism. Meanwhile, Joyce (2010) defines digital activism defines as the use of digital technologies—internet-enabled devices and mobile phones—in the campaign to bring about social and political change. According to Ozgul, new media is a tool for increasing freedom and promoting engagement. It stimulates collective action by reducing communication costs and removing two old obstacles—barriers to group reaction and locality of information. This is in line with the argument from Enjolras et al. that a digital network has the ability to bridge the local and the global, allowing local phenomena to spread across the whole network and produce global effects. (Enjolras et al., 2012)

➤ **History of Digital Activism:-**

Athina Karatzogianni (2015) explores four waves of digital activism, defining it as political participation and protest organised in digital networks. She identifies the first wave as starting in 1994 with the Zapatista movement and the anti-globalization movement, including alternative media such as Indymedia. The second wave of digital activism stretches from 2001 until 2007 and is mainly constituted by the rise of digital activism linked to anti-Iraq war mobilizations. During the third wave after 2007, digital activism spreads to the BRICS and other countries beyond Europe and the US, where it had initially originated. The fourth wave between 2010 to 2013 marks the mainstreaming of digital activism that is dominated by discussions of large-scale digital state surveillance unveiled by Wikileaks and Snowden (Karatzogianni, 2015). Similarly, Paolo Gerbaudo (2017) distinguishes two periods of digital activism. He identifies a first wave of digital activism in the mid-1990s characterized by cyber-autonomism within the anti-globalization movement and a second wave of the 2010s, which alludes to cyberpopulism as constituted within the mass mobilizations of Occupy, the movements of the squares, and the anti-austerity movements. In Gerbaudo’s periodization cyber-autonomism that is oriented towards autonomous communication is contrasted with cyber-populism with a techno-political orientation that is instituted by a web of commercial internet platforms such as orientatedk, Twitter and Google and is mainly geared towards mass outreach.

The use of new information and communication technologies has influenced recent political events, such as the Arab Spring or the Twitter Revolution in Moldova. The internet supported public sphere becomes both a hybrid space where the physical and virtual coexist, as well as a representational space accessible from anywhere connected to the internet. In the former we see how people in cities can augment their physical experience using internet connected devices, and in the latter, we can see the experience of presence at a distance.

In 2009 Moldova, one of the poorest countries of the Ex-Soviet Block, was the scene of one of the most effective political protests organized using the Internet. After nine years of economic crisis, the Communist Party was enjoying majority in the Parliament. In April 2009, the journalist Natalia Morar and other members of an NGO tried to organize a flash mob using Tweeter and other Internet-related communication tools.

Starting with the Arab Spring in 2011 and the “indignant” movements it led to, mobilization is globalized from the local level and participation takes place simultaneously in the streets and on the Internet, leaving behind the concept of “activist networks”, widely used until then, to now speak of “connected crowds” (Rovira, 2017).

Across the region, the use of social media in processes of change has produced new descriptive coinages, usually by external observers. Thus “Facebook Revolution” and “Twitter Revolution,” synecdoches for complex political and social dynamics, found a home in global public discourse even as they have been criticized for both overstating and

obfuscating the role of social media in change. Such hyped constructions function as zombie categories, explaining little about either new media or political process. Ofcourse social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used within the Arab Spring movements of 2010–11. Twitter’s use in particular has risen considerably in Saudi Arabia where, as elsewhere in the region, a sizeable proportion of the population is under thirty-five and accesses the internet via mobile phone, making it one of the world’s top Internet markets.

Tunisia was the first Arab country where the Arab Spring began, on Dec. 17, 2010, when Mohammed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor in Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire in front of a public building. Some academics believed that the role of social media was very important to spread the protests over the region (Howard & Hussain, 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; Stepanova, 2011; Cassara& Lengel, 2013). Others argue that social media played an incidental role in the revolt (Ehrenberg, 2012; Morozov, 2011; Shirky, 2011), insisting in the term “people revolution” (York, 2011), not “Facebook revolution” or “Twitter revolution,” as others say (Zuckerman, 2011).

This shift in social activism to online spaces is one example of digital activism, or socially relevant activism that takes place significantly online, through websites, social media, or even hackers shutting down websites (George & Leidner, 2019). A relevant example of this shift is the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the summer of 2020 (Ruffin, 2021). BLM can be described as a collective resistance movement centered around rectifying the dehumanizing aspects of the Black experience. The mission of BLM involves challenging institutional forms of racism and state-sanctioned violence (Clayton, 2018). In practice, the ubiquitous presence of BLM on social media has been highly instrumental in its impact (Clayton, 2018). Between the first mention of #BlackLivesMatter in July of 2013 to 5 years later in July of 2018, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was used approximately 30 million times on Twitter (Anderson et al., 2018)

Globally, 4.9 billion people are active on social media, and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are increasingly leveraged to organize protests, share information, and coordinate efforts in real-time.<sup>3</sup> Though Bangladesh is a Third World country, it facilitates internet connection for the general people. It is estimated that 55.1 million people in Bangladesh will be using Facebook in 2024, making it the eighth most popular country worldwide and the second most popular in South Asia after India.

In the past few years, social media has been used to change social phenomena or bring a more significant change in the society of Bangladesh. Digital activism in Bangladesh has evolved significantly, shaped by the country’s socio-political landscape and advancements in digital technology. It was only since the post-2005 period when the actions and practices of blog writers have been acknowledged as ‘activism’ in Bangladesh.

Though, in the past few years, social media helped to create a new public sphere and space for activism in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2012; Haq, 2011). Shahbag movement helped to expand that practice of ‘online activism’ both in scale and magnitude in social media and social life. In the context of Bangladesh, it solicits further explorations as to how online activism stimulates the reformation of social movements and transformation of political culture.

Thousands of people gathered at ShahbagMor in Dhaka on 5 February 2013 to protest against the verdict given to Bangladesh war criminals of the Bangladesh Liberation movement of 1971. This movement known as Shahbag Maovement, was raised by using Blogs and other social networking sites. Social media took a major role in the movement. People used it both in the country and outside to mobilise people to join the protest and to disseminate news about the movement to gain public opinion in favour of it. They used Twitter broadly besides networking sites like Blogs and Facebook. Social media played a vital role to unite people in this movement. The protesters used social media to raise awareness and to increase numbers of people at the rally. Any type of movement may be social or political are always generally pre planned and organised in manner where different social and political bodies used to take active part but in case of Shahbag movement the people mainly from younger generation joined the movement.

In Bangladesh, social media has played a significant role in youth-led movements, particularly in response to political and social issues. The 2018 “Road Safety Movement,” led predominantly by students, is a prominent example. Following the death of two students in a traffic accident, young people took to the streets, demanding safer roads and greater accountability from the government. Through social media, they organized large-scale protests, shared real-time updates, and raised awareness about the need for road safety reforms. Platforms like Facebook and

Twitter were instrumental in disseminating information, allowing the movement to gain widespread support both domestically and internationally (Rahman, 2020).

In August 2024, Bangladesh witnessed a significant shift in its political landscape with the overthrow of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, following a student-led movement primarily sparked by the reinstatement of a controversial quota system for public sector jobs. The movement, which began in July, was characterized by widespread protests fueled by social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, which played a crucial role in mobilizing and disseminating information among protesters.

This revolution underscored the transformative power of social media as a tool for activism in Bangladesh. Activists utilized social media to communicate rapidly and organize events. Facebook and Telegram were particularly effective for sharing information about protest locations and timings. Students created groups to coordinate their actions, allowing them to respond quickly to developments on the ground. Even when the government attempted to shut down internet services, many continued to use alternate platforms to share updates and organize protests. Young people were at the forefront of the protests, leveraging social media to communicate quickly and effectively. They created online communities, pages, and groups where they shared information about protest locations, timings, and strategies. Students established dedicated groups on platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, which served as hubs for coordination. In this age of social media, it sometimes evades traditional media. Nowadays social movement starts and is triggered by the social media posts shared by enraged citizens of countries (Mansour, 2012; Van Dijk, 2021).

Lack of trust in mainstream media and limited access to those could be a reason for using social media to enhance social movements (Earl et al., 2022 & Andersen et al., 2021). Nowadays, movements throughout the world are using alternative media based on the Internet to bypass the mainstream media to communicate with the broader public against the repressive governments and the social elites (Stein, 2009).

In this research, we will conduct case studies on the NirapadSarak Chai (Road Safety Movement 2018) and the July Revolution (2024), two significant social movements. Through these case studies, we aim to analyze the mechanisms and effectiveness of digital activism in driving social change.

### **Importance of the Research:-**

In today's interconnected world, the internet—particularly the sphere of social media—has emerged as an indispensable instrument in the arsenal of activists and social movements. Digital activism, a term that encapsulates the strategic use of digital technologies to drive political and social transformation, has become a defining hallmark of 21st-century civic engagement. This evolution signifies not merely a shift in medium, but a profound reconfiguration of how movements are conceived, mobilized, and sustained over time.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok have radically reshaped the communicative landscape, enabling individuals to transcend geographic, cultural, and political boundaries. These platforms empower activists to circumvent traditional gatekeepers—such as mainstream media outlets—and engage directly with their audiences in real time. In contexts like Bangladesh, where conventional media may be compromised by political influence or censorship, social media serves as a vital arena for free expression, protest coordination, and the amplification of marginalized voices.

On a global scale, digital activism has played instrumental roles in shaping the trajectory of numerous landmark uprisings over the past two decades—from the Arab Spring to the Black Lives Matter movement. In Bangladesh, youth-led mobilizations such as the Shahbagh protests (2013), the Road Safety Movement (2018), and the July Revolution (2024) exemplify how digitally orchestrated campaigns can significantly influence public discourse, challenge power structures, and shape national policy. As such, understanding the dynamics of digital activism is essential for scholars, policymakers, and citizens alike who are invested in the study of modern politics, media and communication, youth engagement, or transformative social change.

### **Objective of the Research:-**

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the evolving role of digital activism—particularly as it manifests through social media—in shaping contemporary social and political movements. In an era where online platforms have become central to public discourse and collective mobilization, understanding their impact is crucial.

**By closely examining a series of key case studies from both Bangladesh and the broader global landscape, this research aims to:-**

- **Analyze** the ways in which digital platforms facilitate, amplify, or potentially hinder collective action and grassroots organizing.
- **Understand** how social media influences the organizational structure, communication strategies, and ultimate outcomes of modern activist movements.
- **Evaluate** the transformative effects of online engagement on traditional movement dynamics, including leadership models, modes of participation, and tactical innovations.
- **Examine** both the strengths and vulnerabilities inherent in decentralized, digitally-driven mobilization, particularly in varying political, social, and technological environments.

Ultimately, this study seeks not only to document the operational mechanisms of digital activism but also to offer a critical assessment of its effectiveness, sustainability, and long-term implications. Special attention is given to how these digital strategies play out across different political regimes and cultural contexts, contributing to a nuanced understanding of activism in the digital age.

### **Research Questions:-**

**To achieve its objectives, this study is guided by the following central research questions:-**

1. How has digital activism influenced social and political movements in Bangladesh and globally?
2. What role do social media platforms play in organizing, mobilizing, and disseminating information for activism?
3. How do decentralized digital movements compare to traditional hierarchical activism in terms of impact and sustainability?
4. What are the major challenges—such as misinformation, surveillance, and platform bias—facing digital activists today?

These questions aim to capture both the potential and the pitfalls of using digital platforms as a medium for civic engagement and social change.

### **Limitations of the Research:-**

While this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of digital activism, it is important to acknowledge several inherent limitations that may affect the scope and applicability of the findings:

- **Scope of Case Studies:** The case studies selected for analysis, although relevant and impactful, represent only a subset of the diverse forms of digital activism occurring worldwide. Movements with limited or no digital footprint, especially in regions with low internet penetration or restricted online access, may be underrepresented or entirely absent from this research.
- **Language and Access Constraints:** This study primarily analyzes content in English and Bengali, which may result in the exclusion of valuable perspectives and examples from other linguistic and cultural contexts. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect the global diversity of digital activism.
- **Rapid Technological Change:** Social media platforms and digital tools evolve at a fast pace. New features, algorithm changes, and the emergence or decline of platforms can significantly alter how activism is conducted and perceived. As a result, some aspects of this research may become outdated relatively quickly.
- **Data Reliability and Authenticity:** The digital environment is inherently volatile. Online content can be deleted, altered, or manipulated, raising questions about the accuracy and longevity of available data. Distinguishing between genuine grassroots activism and coordinated misinformation or astroturfing efforts remains a challenge.
- **Security and Ethical Considerations:** Researching digital activism, particularly in politically sensitive or authoritarian contexts, carries ethical implications. Ensuring the privacy, security, and consent of individuals involved in activist movements has been a key priority. Careful measures have been taken to avoid any potential harm or exposure of vulnerable participants.

### **Methodology:-**

#### **Research Design:-**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a case study methodology, to investigate the dynamics of digital activism. By concentrating on a carefully selected group of digitally driven social movements, the research seeks to delve deeply into the mechanisms, strategic approaches, and broader consequences that define contemporary forms of activism facilitated by digital technologies. The case study approach is particularly well-

suited for this inquiry, as it enables a comprehensive and context-sensitive examination of each movement within its unique socio-political environment.

Through detailed analysis of each case, the study aims to uncover how activists harness digital platforms—such as social media, messaging applications, and online forums—to mobilize support, disseminate information, and influence public discourse. Furthermore, the research pays close attention to the interplay between online and offline activism, exploring how digital tactics translate into tangible actions and outcomes on the ground. By examining both local and global contexts, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital activism's transformative potential, as well as the limitations and challenges it faces in different political, cultural, and technological landscapes.

#### **Research Approach and Rationale:-**

Given the inherently dynamic, evolving, and interpretive nature of digital activism, a qualitative research approach is most appropriate for capturing the richness and complexity of this phenomenon. This methodological orientation is particularly well-suited to understanding the lived experiences, personal narratives, and media practices of both activists and observers operating within digital spaces. Unlike quantitative approaches that seek to generalize findings through statistical analysis, qualitative methods allow for a deeper exploration of how individuals and communities make sense of their actions, environments, and engagements within the realm of online activism.

This study emphasizes interpretive analysis, privileging the ways in which meaning is constructed, contested, and communicated in digital environments. Through methods such as interviews, content analysis, and digital ethnography, the research investigates how activists frame their causes, engage with audiences, and respond to both support and opposition. Special attention is given to the discursive dimensions of digital activism—how language, imagery, and symbols are used to mobilize, resist, and negotiate power in networked spaces.

Moreover, the research foregrounds the socio-political and cultural contexts in which digital activism unfolds, examining how power relations are enacted and challenged through digital practices. By focusing on the subjective and situated experiences of those involved, this approach reveals the underlying logics, emotions, and motivations that drive digital mobilizations. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced and critical understanding of the role that digital technologies play in shaping contemporary forms of collective action and resistance.

#### **Data Collection Methods:-**

##### **Content Analysis:-**

The primary method of data collection is qualitative content analysis of digital media artifacts.

##### **These include:-**

- Social media posts (X/Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
- Hashtags(#ShahbaghMovement,#RoadSafetyMovement, #BlackLivesMatter, #Bangladesh revolution)
- News articles and digital commentaries
- YouTube videos and TikTok content (where applicable)

Content was selected based on relevance, engagement level, and representativeness of broader activist discourse.

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews (Optional but Recommended):-**

##### **If feasible, a small number of semi-structured interviews will be conducted with:-**

- Digital activists and organizers
- Journalists covering the movements
- Academics or experts on digital activism

Interviews will explore themes such as digital strategy, censorship, mobilization challenges, and perceptions of effectiveness.

#### **Case Selection:-**

##### **The study includes four key cases, chosen through purposive sampling:-**

1. **Shahbagh Movement (2013, Bangladesh)** – one of the first mass mobilizations in Bangladesh significantly amplified by social media.
2. **Road Safety Movement (2018, Bangladesh)** – student-led, decentralized activism that saw high engagement on Facebook.

3. **Black Lives Matter (2013–present, USA & global)** – a globally recognized model of hashtag-driven mobilization.
4. **Bangladesh Revolution (2024)** – an emerging and ongoing case, offering a chance to explore real-time digital activism.

These cases provide a mix of geographies (Global North and South), movement types (issue-specific vs. systemic), and outcomes (short-term vs. long-term impacts).

#### **Data Analysis Method:-**

**Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis guided by the frameworks of:-**

- **Framing Theory**(how issues are presented digitally)
- **Connective Action Framework**(Bennett & Segerberg, 2012)
- **New Social Movement Theory**.Steps include:
  - ❖ **Familiarization** with digital artifacts.
  - ❖ **Coding** for recurring themes (e.g., calls to action, emotional appeal, identity framing).
  - ❖ **Category development** based on the research questions.
  - ❖ **Cross-case comparison** to identify similarities and differences between movements.

#### **Ethical Considerations:-**

- Publicly available content will be used, and users' identities will be anonymized unless they are public figures.
- Interviewees (if included) will be given informed consent forms, and their data will be stored securely.
- The study avoids intrusive data scraping or private data collection.

#### **Limitations of the Methodology:-**

- **Platform Bias:**Facebook-dominated activism in Bangladesh might underrepresent movements active on other platforms.
- **Selection Bias:** High-engagement posts may skew results toward more sensational content.
- **Translation & interpretation:** Some content in Bangla may lose nuances when translated.
- **Temporal limitation:** The ongoing nature of the 2024 Revolution means conclusions are tentative.

#### **Findings:-**

##### **Case Studies of Bangladesh:-**

##### **Shahbagh Movement (2013):-**

The Shahbagh movement was sparked by demands for capital punishment for war criminals. Social media, especially Facebook, played a crucial role in organizing protests, sharing slogans, and spreading nationalist sentiment. Citizen journalism emerged as a powerful force, bypassing traditional media. However, over time, internal fragmentation and political co-option weakened momentum.



**Fig: Shahbagh Movement 2013**

**Road Safety Movement (2018):-**

What began as outrage over student deaths turned into one of the largest youth-led mobilizations in Bangladesh. Facebook Live, memes, and hashtags were heavily used. Students leveraged their digital literacy to share videos of police brutality, organize protests, and bypass state-controlled narratives. Government crackdowns on internet access and arrests of student leaders revealed the vulnerability of digital activism in authoritarian contexts.



**Fig: Shahbagh Movement 2018**

**Bangladesh Revolution (2024):-**

Still unfolding, this recent wave of protests—largely coordinated via TikTok, Telegram, and Facebook—centers around economic hardship and political reform. Its decentralized, meme-heavy, and often anonymous nature shows an evolution in activist strategies. The movement uses irony, symbolism, and coded language to evade censorship, illustrating maturing digital resistance culture.



**Fig: Bangladesh Revolution 2024**

**Global Perspectives on Digital Activism:-**

➤ **Black Lives Matter (BLM):-**

Originating in the U.S., BLM became a global phenomenon through the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. It demonstrates how digital activism can foster transnational solidarity. Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok were used for real-time updates, resource sharing, and cultural expression. Unlike earlier movements, BLM incorporated art, performance, and influencer activism to sustain visibility.



**Fig: Black Lives Matter**

➤ **Comparative Insights:-**

Decentralization is a shared feature across movements. Hashtag activism plays a central role in agenda-setting. Visual media (memes, videos, livestreams) are key to narrative control. Digital divides affect reach-rural and marginalized voices are often underrepresented.

**Impacts of Social Media on Social Movements:-**

Social media has significantly transformed the landscape of contemporary social movements, altering how they are initiated, organized, and sustained. The following subsections explore key areas in which digital platforms have impacted the structure, strategy, and reach of social activism.

➤ **Mobilization Speed:-**

One of the most profound impacts of social media is its ability to accelerate the mobilization of people, particularly among younger demographics who are digitally native and highly connected. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook facilitate real-time communication, enabling activists to disseminate information about events, protests, and calls to action with unprecedented speed. This immediacy allows movements to gain momentum quickly, often within hours or days, bypassing traditional media gatekeeping. The rapid mobilization enabled by social media was evident in events such as the Arab Spring and the global climate strikes, where youth-led movements emerged almost overnight through coordinated digital efforts.

➤ **Narrative Framing:-**

Social media gives activists direct access to audiences, allowing them to frame their own narratives and influence public discourse before traditional media outlets can shape or mediate the story. Through curated posts, hashtags, memes, videos, and livestreams, movements can present their messages in emotionally resonant and visually compelling ways. This narrative control enables activists to highlight injustices, promote counter-hegemonic perspectives, and challenge dominant societal narratives. The ability to set the tone and terms of the conversation helps movements build legitimacy, attract allies, and resist misrepresentation by mainstream sources.

➤ **Global Solidarity:-**

Digital platforms facilitate transnational connections, allowing local movements to resonate on a global scale. Hashtags, viral content, and online campaigns can quickly cross borders, enabling international audiences to show solidarity, share resources, and apply pressure on governments and institutions. Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #EndSARS illustrate how digital activism transcends geographic boundaries, creating a sense of global community and shared struggle. The international visibility provided by social media often amplifies the voices of marginalized groups and exerts additional accountability on state and corporate actors.

➤ **Leaderless Organization:-**

Social media has encouraged the rise of decentralized, horizontal organizational structures in activist movements. These structures allow for more inclusive participation, as anyone with internet access can contribute, coordinate, or initiate actions without waiting for top-down approval. While this can foster grassroots innovation and autonomy, it can also pose challenges in terms of strategic coherence, message consistency, and long-term sustainability. The absence of formal leadership can lead to fragmentation or internal conflict, particularly when movements face external pressure or reach critical decision-making junctures.

**Challenges and Limitations:-**

- State Surveillance and Censorship: Internet shutdowns, arrests, and propaganda threaten online activists.
- Disinformation: Movements often struggle with fake news, bot attacks, and algorithmic suppression.
- Burnout and Fragmentation: Sustaining momentum digitally is difficult without long-term strategy.
- Platform Dependency: Activists rely on platforms (e.g., Facebook, X) that can moderate or remove content arbitrarily.

**Discussion:-**

**Evolution of Digital Activism:-**

Digital activism has evolved from simple online petitions and hashtag use to sophisticated strategies involving memes, encrypted communication, and decentralized coordination. The case of Bangladesh shows a gradual progression—from Facebook-organized sit-ins (Shahbagh) to TikTok-driven resistance (2024 Revolution).

**Local vs. Global Dynamics:-**

While BLM leveraged global digital networks and media visibility, Bangladeshi movements are more susceptible to state repression and infrastructure limitations. However, both contexts show how young people repurpose digital tools to create new political spaces.

**Reimagining Protest in the Digital Age:-**

Protests are no longer confined to streets—they now occur in timelines, comment sections, and livestreams. Digital activism isn't just a tool; it reshapes what activism means. For many, especially under authoritarian regimes, the internet becomes the first and sometimes only space for dissent.

**Agency and Power:-**

Digital activism decentralizes power but also introduces new gatekeepers—algorithms, platforms, influencers. Activists navigate between empowerment and control, constantly adapting strategies to evade suppression and amplify reach.

**Future Directions:-**

- Need for digital resilience training among activists.
- Greater focus on data sovereignty and platform accountability.
- Hybrid models of protest (online + offline) may prove most sustainable.

**Conclusion:-**

This research delves into the evolving and dynamic terrain of digital activism, with a particular focus on its expressions within Bangladesh and a comparative lens on global movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). The study underscores that social media platforms have emerged as indispensable instruments for political mobilization, strategic communication, and resistance—especially among youth and marginalized groups who are often excluded from traditional forms of political participation.

In the Bangladeshi context, digital activism has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade. Initially centered around structured, urban-led protests, it has since evolved into more decentralized, internet-driven movements characterized by the use of memes, viral content, and online campaigns. Despite facing considerable obstacles—including government surveillance, digital censorship, and intermittent internet shutdowns—Bangladeshi activists have continuously devised innovative strategies to circumvent restrictions, articulate dissent, organize resistance, and raise awareness on pressing social issues.

On a global scale, movements like Black Lives Matter exemplify the transnational capabilities of digital activism, demonstrating how shared narratives of injustice can transcend geographic boundaries and unite individuals in

collective action. These movements leverage the connective power of digital platforms to build solidarity, amplify local struggles on a global stage, and foster a sense of global civic engagement.

Nevertheless, the promise of digital activism is not without its challenges. The prevalence of censorship, the spread of misinformation, heavy reliance on corporate-owned platforms, and the psychological toll of constant engagement present critical limitations. The long-term effectiveness of digital resistance will hinge on activists' ability to adapt to rapidly evolving technological environments while preserving strong grassroots connections and offline organizing strategies.

In conclusion, digital activism should not be viewed as a replacement for traditional forms of activism but rather as a powerful and complementary force. When employed strategically, digital tools possess the capacity to amplify marginalized voices, expose systemic injustices, and cultivate cross-border solidarity. For countries like Bangladesh, where physical protest often involves significant personal risk, digital spaces offer a crucial platform for envisioning, articulating, and enacting transformative social change.

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