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Impact of Social Media Visuals on People's Visual Communication during Social Movements in Bangladesh

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Abstract- The past decade has seen an armorial growth of the influence of social media on many aspects of people's lives. Social networking sites, especially Facebook, play a substantial role in framing popular view through its contents. This article explores the impact of visuals, especially photos and videos, published in social media during social movements. Importantly that some visuals received attention in social media during agitations which later got featured or become news in print, electronic and online news portal media as well. Some of the visuals later proved to be edited or fabricated contents which created confusion among participants in this research and beyond. The confusion has contributed to the acceleration or shrinkage of the movement in question in many cases. The center of this article is to examine how social media visuals influence people's visual communication during social movements. Additionally, it digs out the user's activity on social media during movements.

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I. Introduction

In the recent decade, social media have played the role of a powerful catalyst in the inception and development of contemporary social and political movements in Bangladesh. Thus, social networking sites are taking the place of 'public sphere' (Habermas & Habermas, 1991), which was traditionally used by people to congregate and discuss the ongoing issues. Shirnky (2011) asserted that the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (Shirky, 2011, p. 29). Participants of this research engage themselves in recent movements occurred in Bangladesh by expressing their opinion through literary and visual contents in social media. Photos and videos are the components of visual communication. The impact of visuals in people's visual communication through social media is vital and encompassing in nature. However, visuals published on social media during the movements may prove to be ambiguous in some instances. A common phenomenon has been observed that is the tendency of inciting participants by distorted or edited photo or video. In this connection, this study explores the impact of social media visuals in the visual communication of people during social movements.

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a) Social Media

Social media is like an umbrella which consists of different types of social media. It is a significant part of contemporary communication. As an interactive platform, it is difficult to determine whether a specific website, application, or any platform fit for the definition of social media. (Kane, Alavi, Labianca, & Borgatti (2014) referred the social media as one of the recent most impactful IT phenomena that is the emergence and spread of a sub-set of IT technologies. It is qualitatively different from traditional media and online communication systems. Social media are the second generation internet-based applications of websites (Obar & Wildman, 2015, p. 748). And also it is defined as a group of Internet-based applications which build an ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In this definition, media is referred to as a generation of content; an internet-based set of technologies whether social part attributes to Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. Some Scholars referred Social media as "social media sites" or a set of information technologies which facilitate interactions and networking (Diga & Kelleher, 2009, p. 442). There also other scholars who discuss social media more externally. Boyd and Ellison (2007) addressed that "social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Social media split the field into six distinctive categories Blogs, Social Networking Sites, Collaboration Projects, Content Communities, Virtual Social Worlds, and Virtual Game Worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Popular social media

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websites are Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumbler, Viber, VK, WeChat, Weibo, Baidu Tieba, and Wikia. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are used frequently in Bangladesh; they were given special emphasis in this study.

b) Visual Communication

Sharing of visuals on social media is becoming an integral part of social life experiences. Visual images suggest reality, create causal relationships, and foster interaction (Fahmy, Bock, & Wayne, 2014). People are trying to relate to each other, trying to perceive and create a sense of any issues or content given in social media day by day. Content may be any photos, videos, hash tags, emoticons, and written text of any opinions with photo or videos on social media which are commonly posted or shared by users. Thus they float on the wave of visual communication impulsively. G Rose (2016) has framed visual communication and other scholars worked on its functions and structure. Rose (2016) differentiates the sites "at which the meanings of an image are made"; the site(s) of production (referring to where an image is made); the site(s) of the image itself (referring to its visual content); the site(s) of its circulation (referring to where an image travels) as well as site(s) where the image encounters its spectators or users, something Rose labels audience (Rose, 2016, p. 24). At each of these sites, there are three modalities (aspects): the technological, the compositional, and the social. The site of the (material) production (process) examines the conditions of origin and the production structures of visual communication (Müller & Geise, 2015). Creating virtual and visual sphere people share and discuss on visual issues. Thus they get and show their social and cultural identity through visual communication.

c) Recent movements in Bangladesh

Recently, some noteworthy social movements occurred in Bangladesh. Social movements which got more attention in social media and thus significant for this study:

1. Movement for formulating and implementing proper road safety laws, and ensuring punishment for drivers who violate traffic rules (2018)
2. Quota reform movement demanding policy reform in government services recruitment (2018)
3. Protest against VAT on private university education (2015)
4. Shahbag movement demanding capital punishment for those convicted of war crimes during the Bangladesh Liberation War (2013)

Road Safety Movement (2018): The movement which spanned from 29 July to 8 August 2018 was started by the death of two high school students in a bus accident. The protesters, most of whom were teenage school students, took a position in a central place of the city and checked the legal documents and fitness certificate of every vehicle. Buses were torched; hundreds of vehicles were vandalized as alleged pro-government mobs attacked demonstrators, journalists, and photographers.

Some photos, such as, checking license and certificate of vehicle by student, giving slogans in front of students surrounded by police (recreation of a photo of quota movement), a student is walking with blood on his right shoulder, photos of parents in road safety movement that they help their sons giving water, foods, etc. get noticed in social media. Some photos of the slogan also got attention in social media. These are, '*we want justice*'; '*if you fear, you are dead, if you stand, you are the Bangladesh*'; '*you see the only 18 age, you did not see the power of age 18*'. Importantly, the smiling photos of Minister Shajahan Khan's in response to the news of road accident put a strong impact among protesters and beyond. There were also fabricated and rumored videos and pictures of actress Nawshaba, which got viral, created a negative effect on protesters.

Responding to the protest, Government of Bangladesh approved a draft Traffic Act including capital punishment for intentional killing and a maximum of a five-year prison sentence for accidental murder with a motor vehicle. The announcement of punishment came on 8 August and set to be enforced from 1 September 2018.

Quota Reform Movement (2018): After previous failed attempts of realizing their demand, hundreds of students began vigorous protests in Shahbag on 8 April 2018. Among the five demands of the protesters, the reduction of quota reservation from 56% to 10% in public employments was most prominent. Pictures and videos of the clashes that took place at the University of Dhaka that day went viral on social media. During movement, Minister of Agriculture Matia Chowdhury made a controversial remark in Parliament by calling the quota reform protestors 'children of razakars'. In response, leaders of 'Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad' called for a nationwide road blockade and strike at universities and colleges from 11 April 2018. Another incident made protesters more agitated when Iffat Jahan Esha, the president of Sufia Kamal Hall unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League was seen to have tortured and wounded a female student at midnight, named Morsheda in Sufia Kamal Hall of DU for participating in quota reform protests. Photos and videos of the incident quickly went viral on different social networking sites which drew attention to other general students. Around 5,000 students of the university gathered in front of the Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall at 1 am and took a position in front of the gate in protest of the incident.

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Finally, the government announced the abolition of the quota system. It made the protesters surprised or shocked as they earlier demanded the provision of the quota system for the indigenous people, women and some underprivileged freedom fighters (The Daily Star, 2018). However, the announcement was later confirmed by a gazette notification.

No VAT on Education Movement (2015): This is a remarkable protest by private university students demanding the elimination of VAT imposed on their education. In the budget of 2015-16, 10% VAT was introduced in the higher education of private universities (Anik, 2015). Following the protest and strong opposition by students, the Government was forced to reduce the amount to 7.5%. On 14 September 2015, the finance division decided to withdraw the imposed VAT after a cabinet meeting (Mamun, 2015).

Shahbag Movement (2013): On 5 February 2013, the International Crimes Tribunal found Abdul Quader Mollah guilty of crimes against humanity after prosecution started in 2011. Among his various convictions and punishments, his severest punishment was life imprisonment. The day before the verdict was announced, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, announced a nationwide dawn-to-dusk general strike for 5 February in protest of their leader's conviction (Habib, 2013). Responding to the punishment, thousands of pro-liberation people assembled at Shahbag demanding, *among other things*, the death sentence for war criminals, including Quader Mollah (Rahman, 2013). Social media played a considerable role in spreading news, photos, and videos worldwide about events at Shahbag. Especially a Facebook event was created calling for a protest at Shahbag. The human chain was made at Shahbag which went viral on 5 February 2013. Bangladeshis used the Twitter hashtag "#Shahbag" to provide live updates of the movement. On 15 February, protester and blogger Ahmed Rajib Haidar was killed. Protesters got agitated, wore black badges to show their respect on the death of Ahmed Rajib Haider and they swear not to return home leaving their demands unfulfilled. Five students were arrested after as they confessed their involvement in the killing. The Shahbag protest has attracted people for its strength for all classes of people. The protest center was named as a 'generation circle' during movements. Many International and Bangladeshis abroad people and students showed their unity supporting the protest through social media, Facebook, and twitter (Cohen, 2013). After a prolonged prosecution, Abdul Kader Mullah was sentenced to death on 12 December 2013.

II. Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the impact of visuals in the formation of public opinion and public discourse on social media during movements.
- To find out if there's any manipulation of visuals that tends to accelerate or shrink the movement.
- To see visual communication through visuals during social-movements among people.

III. Literature Review

Social media has become a more forceful social platform nowadays. Tremendous circulation of visuals on social media has increased results of innovation and expansion of ICT. People share their visuals on social media that can bring social impacts. Social media platforms also allow visual images to be framed, filtered, and edited before being distributed (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). That is shown in this research with the help of comments of participants how visuals are presented and how this modifies people's visual communication during some recent social movements.

Russmann and Svensson (2017) focused on their study mainly on the site of the production and the site of the image itself. They also tried to find why and how visual images are shared and distributed across a platform or platforms. Besides, there's the content analysis of postings, including the visual image, its captions, and comments, on the Instagram accounts of Swedish political parties on their study (Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson, 2016). An important side in visual communication is an audience, Müller and Geise (2015) deal with examining forms, structures, and processes of the perception and reception of visual images as well as its effects on the audience.

A significant research article by Wetzstein (2017) is about a social movement, called the umbrella movement. This research focuses on Twitter and the visual discourse of the 2014 Hong Kong protests. That time people widely used hashtag #honkongprotest. With the use of documentary image interpretation, the article explores visual thematic patterns, depicted actors and relations among actors, the visual perspectives used as well as visual image sources and narrative strategies. The study goes through analyzing the way discourses are formed and structured through visual images and how the visual documentation of a protest movement is shared through Twitter (Wetzstein, 2017).

Alper (2014) showed a controversial use of photo application Hipstamatic and Instagram. He documented the experience of US soldiers using mobile photo application Hipstamatic and Instagram. And also, he showed their de-professionalism of photojournalism and the debate about in war photography that raised questions about distinctions between photography and illustration, photography and photojournalism,

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professional and amateur, and reporting and editorializing (Alper, 2014). Schill (2012) explained his research that photography plays a vital role in formatting political images and television as visual media has an impact on giving political information. This study focused on the effectiveness of visual symbols in public affairs (Schill, 2012). In the study of reader's perception of digital alteration in photojournalism, Huang (2001) tried to find how much readers trust digital images used in documentary contexts and to provide an empirical base for newsroom guidelines and principles regarding the uses of digitally altered photographs.

Fahmy and Wanta (2007) studied visual journalist what they think and what the others think and the impact of news photographs on public opinion formation. They found the result that visual journalists believe their work can have powerful effects on the public under certain circumstances and their findings indicate homogeneous attitudes towards the impact of visual messages on the public (Fahmy & Wanta, 2007, p. 16).

Griffin (2001) worked with the camera, sign, and visual communication. In his research, he summarized the study of visual communication in communication research. He showed in his study the major themes and theories characterizing the study of visual communication and concludes by isolating key issues and current trends in the field. He also showed the use of the picture on the war in another research. He discussed the nature of US news-magazine photo coverage of the 'War on Terrorism' in Afghanistan and the military invasion of Iraq. He found that news-magazine photographs primarily serve established narrative themes within official discourse: that published photographs most often offer for prevailing government versions of events and rarely contribute independent, new, or unique visual information. (Griffin, 2001, pp. 382-400)

Adami and Jewitt (2016) traced four themes across their study on visual communication and social media. Transmedia circulation, appropriation, and control are the last theme of their study. Last theme means Digital technologies afford text creation through 'copy-and-paste' across media. As results visuals are easily assembled, bricolage, edited, manipulated, and reused, from one media to another (Adami & Jewitt, 2016, p. 3-5).

IV. Theoretical Framework

a) Social network theory

In the early stage, social network theory studied by some researchers. John Bernes, J Clyde Mitchell firstly studied social network in the field. From the overview of literature review of Jason Tyson's article, John Barnes is considered as coining the notion of social networks, an outflow of his study of class and committees in a Norwegian Island Parish in 1954 (Barnes, 1954). He viewed social interactions as a set of points, some of which are joined by lines and that the informal set of interpersonal relations composed a partial network within this structure. Stanley Milgram, who coined a fascinating aspect of Social Network Theory; is 'six degrees separations concepts'. It was the outcome of his late social experiment in 1960, named 'The small world problem' (Milgram, 1967). Another researcher John S Gravovetter conducted a study on the strength of weak ties as well as (Granovetter, 1973, pp. 1360-1378).

A social network is how people stay connected with online, like a platform, and accessible to anyone for communication. Social Networks refers to ties and nodes. Nodes are the individual actors within network, and ties are the social relationships between the actors. Social network analysis strives to derive social structure empirically, based on observed exchanges among actors (Haythornth waite, 2002, p. 125). However, people can influence their nodes and ties within the network. Such as facebook, they spend more effort and time to form and manage their impressions, especially when or engaging in the initial stage of interactions (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Gradually people get less control when they are in the online chat room or sphere, which is not possible in the real world because people get controlled or have limitations.

Social network existed from the very early time of the 1990s. As a social network site, classmates.com started its journey in 1995, which became the most visited site until 2008. Friendster.com and Myspace.com are other sites which get popularity remarkably. In 2006, Twitter.com emerged apart from Youtube, Pandora, Flicker started to get their popularity day by day. The most popular site, facebook, created and founded by Mark Zuckerberg, now secured the third position among all sites by Alexa rank till February 2019. It was estimated in 2018 December that monthly 2.3 billion users actively would get access in facebook. Within this network, people are getting involved more and more with social network sites. They share their opinion, post their photos and videos influencing their ties and nodes continuously. And this process is continuing in this network.

In the light of Social network theory, Social network sites play a very vital role in shaping people's activity in social media during social movements. Thus, holding a strong social relationship, social media bring people together through engaging posting opinions, photos and videos and set them what would they think what they would do influencing nodes and ties within the network during social movements. These kinds of process and relationship within a social network influence people visual communication.

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V. Method of the Study

This study bridges with a quantitative and qualitative approach to meet its objective. A survey was conducted with a questionnaire among people of students and professionals to know how they did their visual communication through social media during road safety movement, and how they interpreted those visuals using in this movement. Later, the survey result was analyzed from multifaceted perspectives.

VI. Analysis of the Survey

A survey was conducted on people's activities in social media and their influence on people's visual communication during movements in Bangladesh. While most of the participants of the survey are from Dhaka city, the rest of them are from other cities. Sampling has been done successfully for selecting participants where 150 numbers of participants answered 12 questions. Where 80% of participants were students, 20% were professionals. Most of the participants are male (65%), and other participants are female (35%). These participants are from different ages (18-40). Most of them are 17-25 ages (86%), 26-32 ages (11%) and other 34-40 ages (3%) ages.

Questionnaires for the study have been prepared based on some selected social movements that occurred recently in Bangladesh. These are 'Shahbag Movement', 'Quota Reform Movement', and 'Movement for Road Safety' 'Movements against VAT'.

Age of the participants is very considerable in this study because the youth always stay forward in every movement. In this study, it was found those maximum ages between 17-25 who are university students and the other 26-40 ages are both students and jobholders. Every participant, directly or indirectly, was engaged with those social movements.

Research questionnaires analysis: Among 150 participants, 68% said that they participated in any of the social movements directly. Besides, they were active users of social media during movements. 32% of the participants had no direct participation, but they participated through social media by sharing their opinion, picture, videos, or related things (Figure 1). In choosing the social media, most of them showed their preference in Facebook (97%), Twitter (3%), Instagram (14%), YouTube (2%), Reddit, LinkedIn, Pinterest (1.5%), etc. (Figure 2)

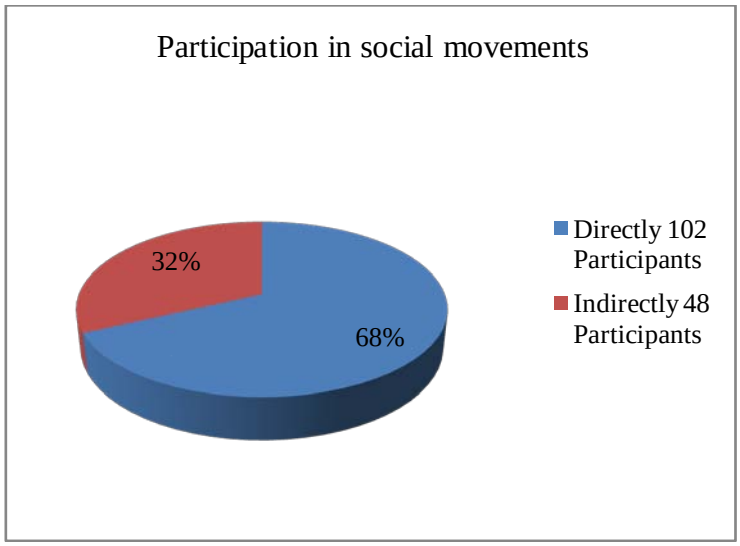


Figure 1: Participation in Social Movements

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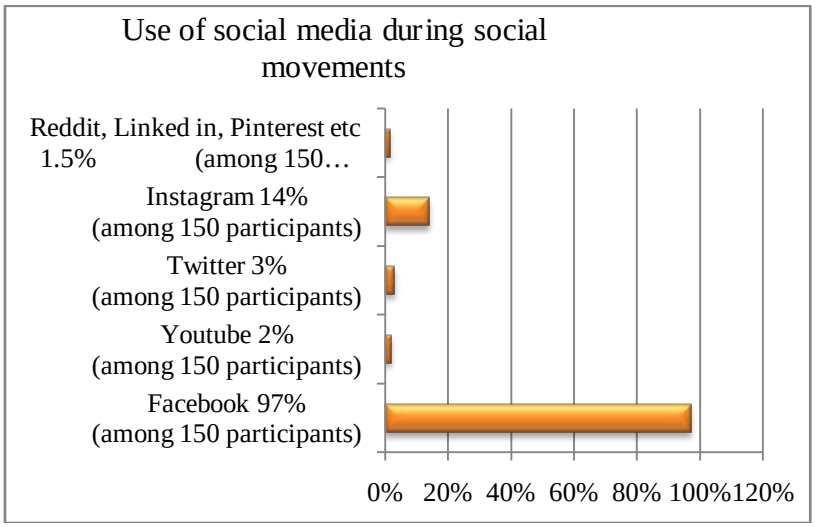


Figure 2: Use of media during social movements

During social movements, participants usually prefer to use social media above to get updated. Most of the participants were asked why they give more attention to Facebook than other social media. As Facebook has become more popular than other media, participants want to stay connected easily. They would get pictures or videos immediately if any incident occurred instantly in any place at any time. Besides, Facebook user, Instagram, Twitter users are now increasing as can be deciphered from their response. Social media accelerated and deepened participants' involvement during social media.

As mentioned by participants, some slogans, and presentation of pictures and videos through social media influenced those movements to be more vibrant and aggressive during that time. Some of these are, '*We want justice*'; '*If you fear you are dead, If you stand you are the Bangladesh*'; '*You see the only 18 age, You have not seen the power of age 18*'; '*No License*', '*Sate is being repaired, Road is blocked, Walk please*'. These were the strong impetus of young people. These kinds of picture and videos got coverage in print, electronic, online, and social media that inspired young and accumulated themselves for protest.

Participants were asked to know if any kind of photo has created any confusion or if they have perceived any picture or video as a 'fabricated', 'made' or 'rumored' during these time. About 90% of the participants showed their reasons for creating fabricated and confusing photos. Participants responded that there were some fabricated pictures and videos on fighting and raping cases. There were news and images of 'four Students were raped in Jigatola, Dhaka' during road safety movement, photographs of injured or murder, pictures and videos of past political clashes, photos of political clashes, images of missing people during this time. They were later found to be fabricated, made, or rumored. They also stated that when actress Nawshaba came on Facebook live and gave rumored information that was scripted and created confusion in general protesters. 10% of the participants thought that there are no confused, or made photos, or videos during social movements (Figure 3).

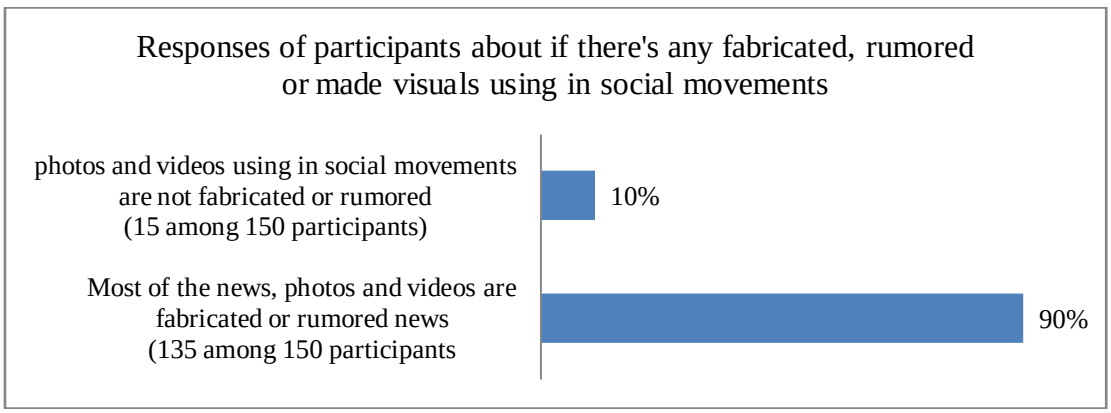


Figure 3: Responses of participants about if there's any fabricated, rumored, or made visuals using in social movements

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Most of the participants were active in social media during social movements. They shared their views, comments through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and news media (Figure 4).

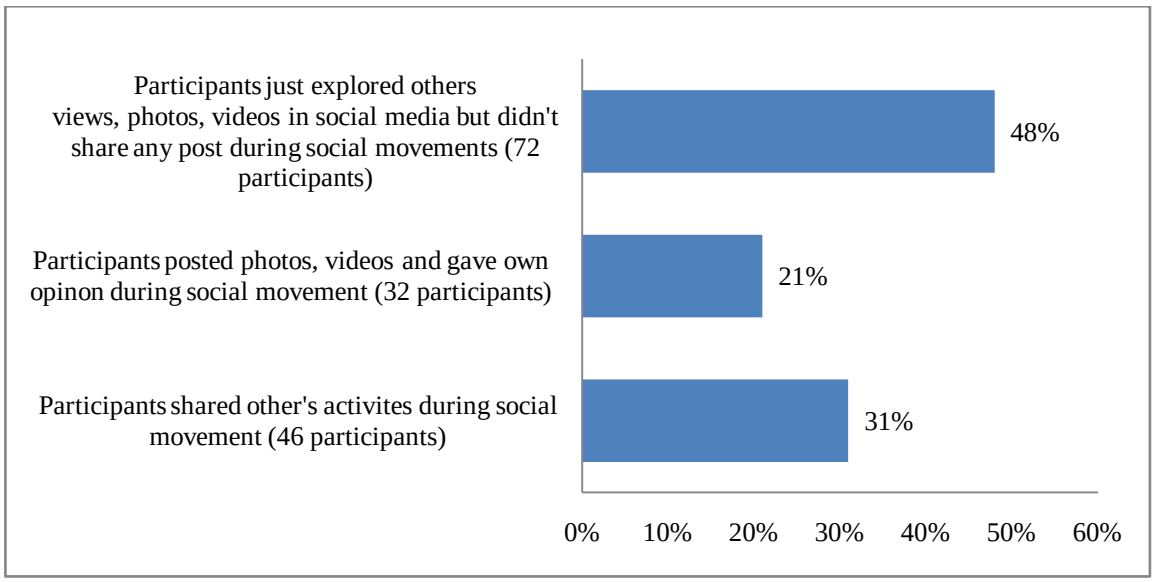


Figure 4: Activities of participants through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other media during social movements

Seventy-two participants said that they just explored others activities and views on social media-related social movements, 46 responded that they just shared others views and post on social media, 32 responded that they expressed their own opinion. Interestingly, about 70% of the participants said that they did not verify the information found in social media before sharing or expressing an opinion. Conversely, 30% of the participants went for crosschecking every news, photos, or videos (Figure 5).

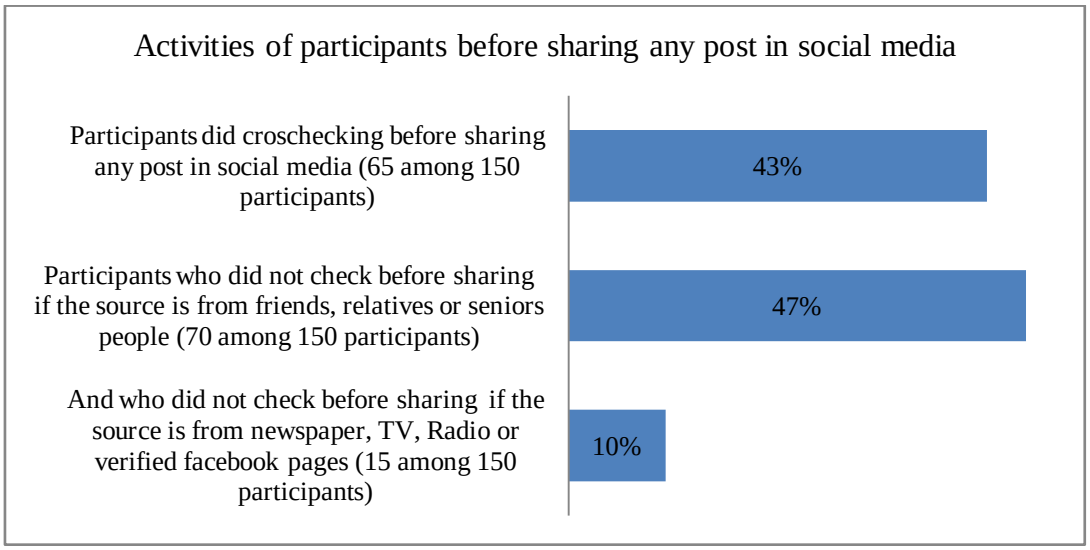


Figure 5: Activities of participants before sharing the post in social media

Where about 45% of participants showed their reaction by posting or giving a report for any kind of fabricated photos or videos in their news feed, 55% did not do anything. Participants were asked if they could understand if any pictures, videos or audio are edited for making people perplexed during movement's time. (Figure 6)

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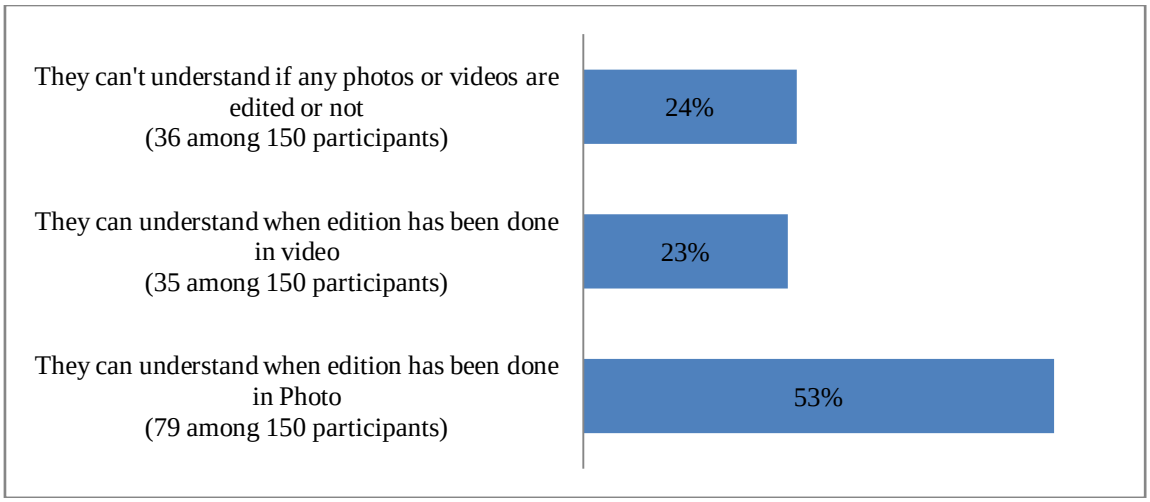


Figure 6: Activities of participants of the understanding edition of visuals

53% of participants said that they can understand if any photo shop has been done on any photo. 23% of participants answered affirmatively for the video edition. 36 participants can't understand the edition on any photo or videos which covers 24% of total percentages. Participants added some important issues in their responses. They said that most of the time, these movements lost their attention because of the downfall of protesters unity. They separated themselves into many groups for some confusing information or decision bestowed from some political authority. And lots of rumor has been created during movements that hamper government decision and their activities. People feel more interest in these topics during movements. About 90% of participants think that there are lots of social media visuals noticed in social media that influences people's visual communication spontaneously (Figure 7). They prefer to talk on social movements, and they think this kind's communication tends people to be more conscious about the rights.

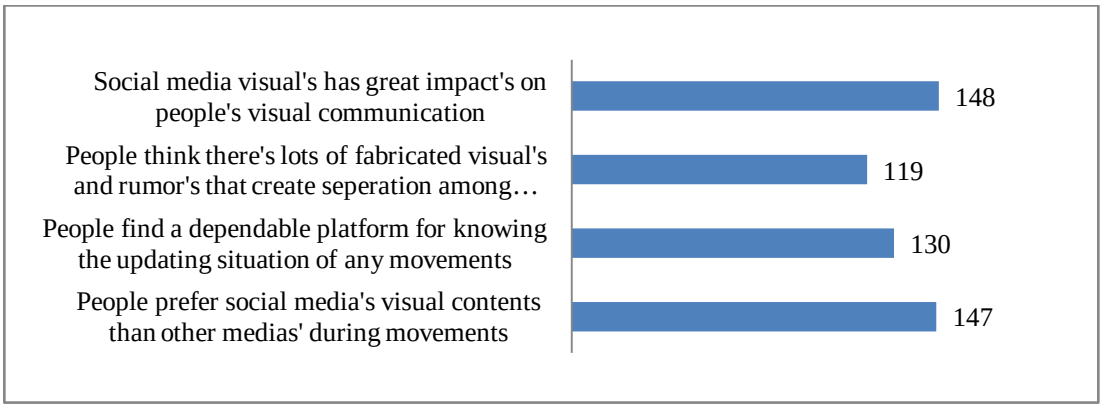


Figure 7: Impacts of social media visuals on people's visual communication

VII. Result of the Survey

It was found that about 68% of people participated in movements directly, which recently occurred in Bangladesh. Of them, about 86% are young from 17-25 ages, and 14% are adults from 26-40. Among 150 participants, 97% said that they depend on Facebook for any information (Photos, videos, opinions) during movements. There are also a growing number of Instagram users which was used by 14% participants. 90% of participants showed some rumored and fabricated photos that created confusion and clash among protesters and created separation among protesters. 10% did not give their opinion supporting the rumored photos. 53% of the participants said that they could understand the edited photo. 23% of participants answered that they could understand the video edition. Again, 24% of participants can't understand if there's any edit on any photo or videos. 90% of the participants did not check any post before sharing in social media if the sources are friends, relatives or senior people and also if the source is mainstream media, such as TV, radio, and newspaper and verified Facebook pages. Only 10 % of participants checked photos or anything before sharing.

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VIII. Conclusion

Social media plays a very significant role in any movements recently in the world. Bangladesh witnessed this trend in recent decade frequently. So, this research is more relevant and seasonable work. It will also add new knowledge and new thing in journalism and communication field. This research also demands further research in this field.

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