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The Role of Facebook in Quota Reform Movement of Bangladesh

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The Role of Facebook in Quota Reform Movement of Bangladesh

Mahmudul Hasan [α], Arnab Biswas [σ] & Ali Ahsan [ρ]

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I. Introduction

In contemporary times, it has been observed that social media have played important roles in public protests in several countries around the world. It has also been noticed in Bangladesh. The recent Quota Reform Movement is said to be organized through social media, basically Facebook, throughout Bangladesh (Khan, 2018). This new dimension of organizing protest was first introduced after giving verdict by the International War Crimes Tribunal to a war criminal in Bangladesh; several online blogger activists started to protest against the nature of the verdict. They gathered in Shahbag Square in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, to protest against the verdict. However, the protest gained a new momentum because of social media, particularly Facebook. Being informed through social media, more and more people gathered in Shahbag Square and demanded trial of all the war criminals in Bangladesh. Though mainstream media frequently reported on this event, social media gave more information and united the public about the protest. The leaders of the protest were the extensive social media user. Though Bangladesh is a Third World country, it facilitates internet connection for the general people. 80% of the people of Bangladesh who use the internet have a Facebook account (The Daily Star, 2015). In Bangladesh, there are 96,199,000 users as of 2020, among them, 33,713,000 are Facebook users (Internet World Stats, 2020). As Facebook is a low-cost medium of communication, it is extensively used for connecting with people. Tufekci(2014) stated that recent uprisings and large protests around the world have provided indications that digital infrastructure empowers protests and movements in specific ways. If we see some movements like The "Tahrir Square" protest in Egypt, protests in Tunisia, The Occupy Movement in the USA, we can observe the extensive use of social media for the collective action of the general people. Social media have empowered protesters in three key areas: public attention, evading censorship, and coordination or logistics (Tufekci, 2014). With the help of social media, street protests can be coordinated easily than before. So, social media play roles in mobilizing public protests.

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II. Background of the Research

The roles of social media in public protests and collective action have been observed in several parts around the world, including Bangladesh.

In the middle of December, in 2010, a revolutionary wave of demonstration and protest began in Tunisia and spread throughout Arab countries and its surroundings. The protests shared some techniques in public resistance to persist movements involving strikes, demonstrations, marches, and rallies, as well as the extensive use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness for the protest. The youth members of the Arab population used social media the most against the state attempts of repression and Internet censorship.

In Turkey, government, along with submissive media conglomerates, has been increasingly controlling broadcast media through political and financial power. Mass media in Turkey has become quiet in areas that were not to the government's liking, such as reporting on corruption, violence, or extralegal influence on the government's economic policies. A salient example was the aerial bombing on smugglers from Roboski; a Kurdish village closed to Turkey's border with Iraq. This bombing killed thirty-four Kurdish smugglers. It was broadly known within Turkish newsrooms but was being censored. This story, however, broke by a journalist named Serdar Akinan. Mr. Akianan decided that he

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would no longer wait for the government approval. Using his own money to travel to Roboski, he soon found himself in a devastating scene-a grief-stricken funeral procession snaking around a hilltop with dozens of coffins being carried by wailing mourners (Tufekci, 2014). Though at the time, this event was well known among the Kurdish community who had alternative news sources like social media, coverage of this event was censored in the Turkish press. The journalist snapped a picture on his cell phone, uploaded it to Instagram, and tweet it out. Instantly, an absolute news blackout was broken as the heartbreaking images spread rapidly and broadly through social networks. This ultimately forced mass media to cover the story. Then extreme criticism against the Government widely spread in social media. (Tufekci, 2014)

At the beginning of February in 2013, some young blogger activists organized a protest at Shahbag Square in the capital city of Dhaka, Bangladesh. It aimed to protest the nature of the verdict given by the War Crimes Tribunal to a war criminal for his association with crimes against humanity in the 1971 war against Pakistan (BBC News, 2013). The protesters were demanding capital punishment of the war criminals. The following days had seen thousands of people joining and showing solidarity with this greater protest events. This protest was different from any social movement in the country. It was organized through social media especially using Facebook and Blogs.

Samiul Islam Rajon, a 13 years old boy, was brutally murdered by a group of people in the northeastern city of Sylhet in the second week of July in 2015. One of them took video footage of this incident and spread it to Facebook. Against this brutal murder, people upsurge and demanded their death penalty through social media. Being informed from the social media, different influential media like BBC, Al Jazeera covered the issue with importance. Rothwell (2015) reported, 'the 28-minute video of Samiul, which went viral after being posted on social media, has sparked an outpouring of anger, with petitions and demonstrations demanding the attackers face the death penalty'.

The quota reform movement first erupted on the campus of Dhaka University on April 8th, 2018, in Bangladesh (The Economist, 2018). Of all government jobs, only 44% was allocated for mass people where 56% percent was for different quota holders like son and grandsons of freedom fighters, physically disabled persons, indigenous people and, so on. For this imbalance in government job sector, students and the unemployed work force demanded logical quota reform. And they started showing their demand in the Shahbag and Dhaka university campus. The protest became strong on 8th April 2018 when thousands of students marched around Shahbag area in Dhaka City. And this situation became worsen when a clash took place between police and students after several provocations. And this mass movement took place in the only a couple of days across the country where different social media, especially Facebook, worked behind it. (Rahman, 2018)

The road-Safety protest was an another massive student upraising between 29th July to 8th August 2018 when two school students died in a road accident in Dhaka. This movement fueled up when a clash took place on August 2. This movement was also upraised within a very short time and, the role of Facebook and other social media was very crucial here and needs to be researched (Rahman, 2018).

These circumstances, particularly in Bangladesh have triggered the question of the involvement of Facebook in both organizing and fueling movements. This study has tried to dig out one of them, which is The Quota Reform Movement of Bangladesh.

III. Research Questions

This research has done based on one key question

How did Facebook play roles, if any, in the quota reform movement of Bangladesh?

For getting the answer to this question, we also used some sub-questions.

- Did quota reform movement get organized and mobilized through Facebook?
- Did any awareness about this movement have created through Facebook?
- Was Facebook being used for circulating any information about the protest?
- Did Facebook as a platform have played any role in ensuring justice?
- Are protest activities getting public attention through Facebook?

IV. Literature Review

Many literatures showed a relation between public protests and social media. Wolfsfeld et al. (2013) suggested two principles for understanding the role of social media by examining the several events of twenty Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority. On the first principle, they stated that one could not understand the role of social media in collective action without first taking into account the political environment in which they operate. On the second principle, they suggested that a significant increase in the use of social media is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it. They argued that social media are important because they can give information and images that can motivate people, they allow groups to organize and mobilize much more effectively than earlier, and they allow protesters to disseminate their messages around the world (Bennett 2003; Earl and Kimport 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). They argued that social media should be seen as facilitators of protest rather than causes. And the higher

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the level of political grievances, the higher the level of protest and, the more difficult the political environment is in a country, the higher the protest. In the second principle, they showed that during a protest, social media penetration is very high. In the present study, social media penetration during protest will be re-examined in the Bangladeshi context.

Hussain and Howard (2012) studied the protests of the Gulf States, which exhibited high levels of social media penetration low levels of protests. Anderson (2011) concluded that the key to the protests was not social media but how this technology resonated in the various local contexts. In the view of Bellin, noting four important explanatory factors in Egypt and Tunisia: long-standing grievances, an emotional trigger, a sense of impunity, and access to new social media fostered protests (Bellin, 2012).

> *'Social Software has the potential to foster grassroots activism, political inclusion, and community building that decrease oppressive or elitist forms of political decision making. At the same time, an exclusive character of Social Software can be observed, especially in developing countries where an enormous social gap is predominant'. (Neumayer and Raffl, 2008)*

By analyzing the role of social media for a political protest, they showed new possibilities but also limits this kind of grassroots activism. They argued blogs, wikis and, social networking sites provide a technological basis for grassroots action to coordinate and for activists to communicate. Still it also creates gap among the people who do not use social media. By using social media, protests are getting public attention, but some people remain ignorant about this.

Valenzuela (2013) showed how social media played roles in protests activity. To show this, he examined three explanations for this relationship in the context of citizens' protest behavior: information, opinion expression, and activism. His findings suggested that using social media for opinion expression and activism mediates the relationship between overall social media use and protest behavior. There are a plethora of evidence in both developed and developing countries suggesting that people engaging in public and political activities, including protest behavior, are frequent users of social media ((Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards, & Moody, 2011; Earl &Kimport, 2011; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012).

Harlow (2011) found that the social network site was used to organize an online movement of the justice for Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg that moved offline. Just before his murder, he posted video footage on Facebook and YouTube claiming that he was being assassinated by President Álvaro Colomo of Guatemala. Users' activities on Facebook helped to organize a massive protest. He argued that social media can immediately spread messages to the masses, unobstructed by time and space. The rise of an internet-based 'Activism 2.0' along with the Web 2.0 provides an opportunity to explain how online activism organized by social networking sites gave birth to offline activism that took to the streets.

Research on the effect of social media visuals on the visual communication of social movements found that 97% of the students depend on Facebook for any information (Photos, videos, opinions) during movements (Chowdhury et al., 2019).

Several literature showed this new technology appears to be able to provide a movement with powerful, speedy, and relatively low-cost tools for enrollment, fund-raising, the dissemination of information and images, group discussions, and mobilization for action. But the results were from western democracies and The Arab Spring perspective. In the Bangladeshi perspective, it is worth researching what the role of social media is in this region.

V. Theoretical Framework

a) Network Society

Today we live in an information age where information is called the Nucleus of this age. Every computer is linked with another through a network. Manuel Castells is one of the key thinkers of 'The Network Society' theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Castells (2005) described, 'The network society is a social structure based on networks operated by information and communication technologies based in microelectronics and digital computer networks that generate, process, and distribute information based on the knowledge accumulated in the nodes of the networks. He also stated the network society is based on networks, and communication networks transcend boundaries, the network society is global, it is based on global networks.

As the network society spreads and new communication technologies expand their networks, there is an explosion of horizontal networks of communication, quite independent from media business and governments that allow the emergence of what he calls self-directed mass communication (Castells, 2005). In the network society, anyone can disseminate information all over the world by using communication technologies. Thus a new form of state that Castells calls it 'The Network State'. It is also clear that new changes in technology and the social responses to them (such as social networking, cell phone use, Internet blogging, file sharing, and so on) ensure that as the network society spreads yet further(Littlejohn, & Foss, Ed. 2009). As of late, in social movements, networking sites have been used in Bangladesh. Movements such as the Quota reform movement are coordinated, maintained, and facilitated by social

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media, which Castells (2000) called a 'networked social movement' of the Information Age. This networked social movement was based on cultural values; it was a loose and semi-spontaneous alliance depending on internet technologies, and was a locally based movement aiming globally.

b) Technological Determinism

In this age of 4th industrial revolution in every aspect, technology has gained the power of controlling the life of most of the human beings of the planet. As a gift of technological advancement, Facebook has become one of the giant social media platforms having billions of active users. It has become one of the most used social media platforms to disseminate information in the world as well as in Bangladesh. From building campaigns for electing any political party to protest against them, Facebook as a platform is always there to help. This high level of technological dependency of today's society has coined a new theory called Technological Determinism. A website based on explaining communication theories introduced this particular theory as a reductionist theory that aims to provide a causative link between technology and a society's nature. Its main objective is explaining as to whom or what could have a controlling power in human affairs. The theory questions the degree to which human thought or action is influenced by technological factors. The term 'technological determinism' was coined by Thorstein Veblen and this theory revolves around the proposition that technology in any given society defines its nature. Technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society, and it determines its course of history ("Technological Determinism," 2018). This study is analyzed through this theory as this study's main goal is to dig out the interrelation between the quota reform movement of Bangladesh and Facebook.

VI. Sampling

As the main objective of this study is to know the role of Facebook in the Quota Reform Movement in Bangladesh, this study covers responses from all the eight divisions of Bangladesh. So, this study has used cluster sampling. To conduct the survey all over Bangladesh is time-consuming and very costly. To avoid this problem, this study selects the samples in categorizes. This procedure is known as cluster sampling. With cluster sampling, one can divide the State or country into districts, counties, or Zip code areas and select groups of people from these areas (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). Data has been collected randomly from 25 respondents to each divisional city. Total of 200 responses have been collected from all over Bangladesh.

VII. Methodology

a) Survey Method

A descriptive survey attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes-that is, to explain what exists at the moment (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010).This study gathered data form general people. As this research's aim is to find out the role of Facebook in the quota reform movement in Bangladesh, the survey is conducted in 8 divisional cities of Bangladesh.

b) In-Depth Interview

This study also conducts an In-depth interview with leading activists of the Quota reform movement. To explore the insides of the protests, Nurul Haque Nur, Faruk Hasan, both are the Joint Conveners of the Quota Reform Movement have been interviewed. And a social media manager is also interviewed for getting a broader insight into the movement.

VIII. Findings

a) Analysis of Survey Data

The study has conducted this survey on 200 students. These students represent every divisional city of Bangladesh. From each division, we've 25 responses. Among the participants, about 69% are undergraduate, 14% are graduate, and 17% are postgraduate students.

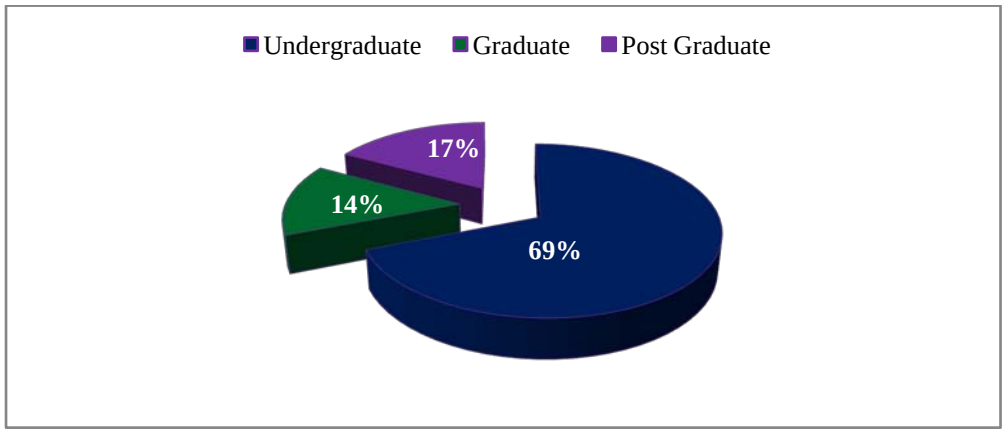


Figure 1: Educational Qualification

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From survey data, the study has got some crucial understanding about the impact of Facebook on the Quota reform movement of Bangladesh. Data shows that almost every respondent use Facebook. It indicates Facebook is a very popular social media in Bangladesh. The study found that Facebook is a top priority based on social media among the students.

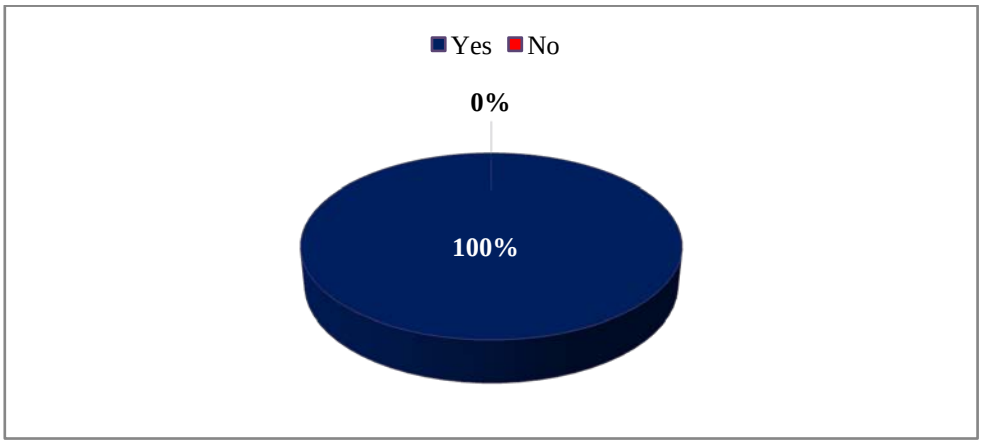


Figure 2: Facebook Users

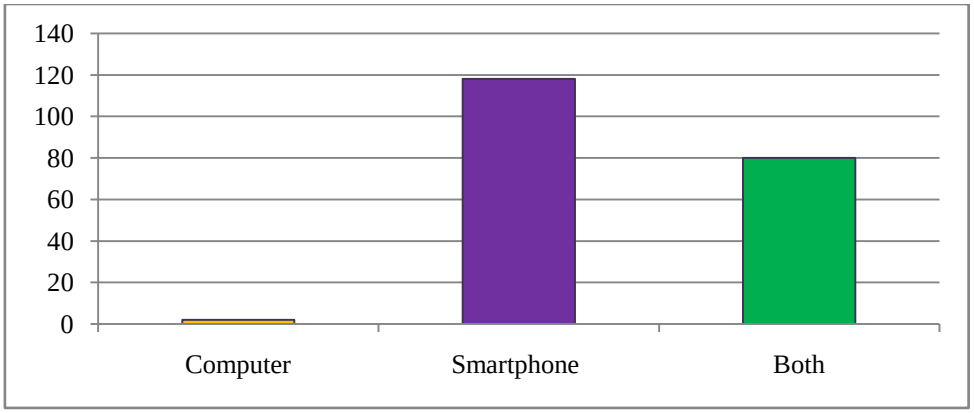


Figure 3: Facebook Using Device

The study has also found that 59% of students said that they use only smartphone for getting access to Facebook. 40% of the students said they use both a smartphone and computer to access Facebook. And the only 1% said that they use only computers to get access to Facebook. This research has found that most of the students use smartphones to get access to Facebook. Only a little use computer for this reason.

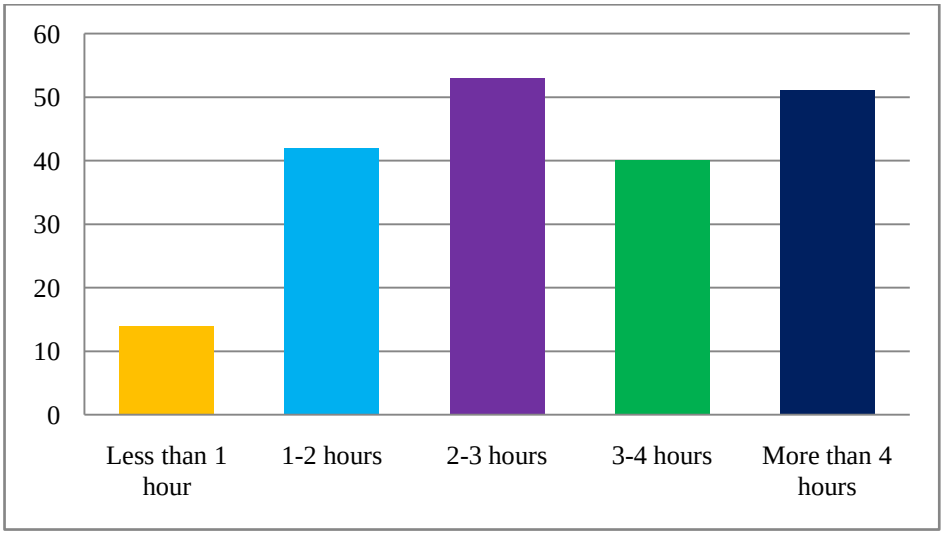


Figure 4: Facebook Using Time Length per Day

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Respondents were asked about how much time they spend using Facebook. This study observed that about 26.5% of students use Facebook for 2-3 hours per day. And 25.5% of students use Facebook for more than 4 hours. About 21% use it for 1-2 hours, and 20% of students use it for 3-4 hours. And about 7% of students use it for less than 1 hour. So, it's clear that most of the students spend a handsome amount of time using Facebook as the research discovered that 72% of the students spend more than 25% of their working time (excluding 8hrs sleeping time) using Facebook. So, we can say that Facebook has become an integral part of the life of most of the students of Bangladesh.

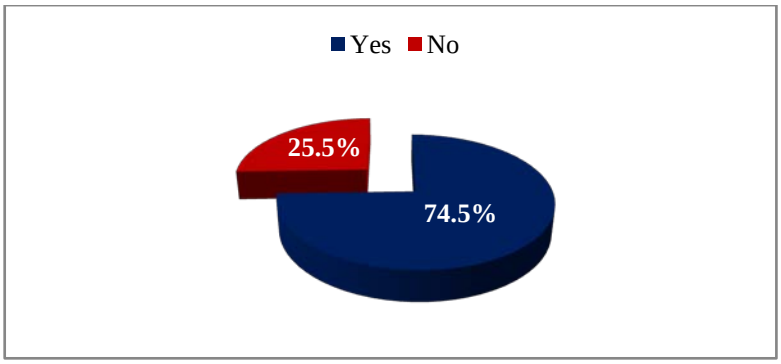


Figure 5: Follower of Quota Reform Movement on Facebook

It was noticed in this research, about 74.5% of the students followed this movement, and about 25.5% of students didn't follow. So it can be said that this movement had the strength of involving most of the students on Facebook.

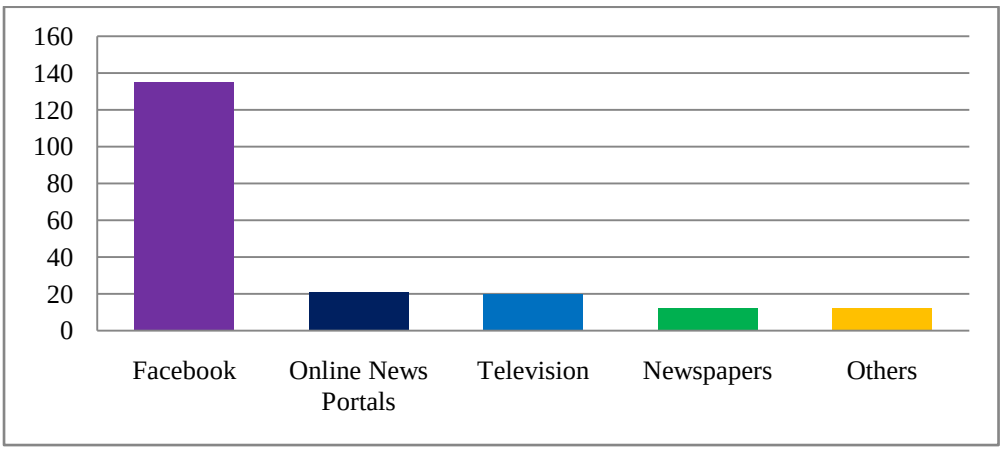


Figure 6: Sources from Where People Came to Know about the Movement First

The study has found that most of the students came to know about this protest through Facebook, which is about 67.5%. 10.5% came to know about it through online news portals. 10% of total students came to know from television, and 6% from newspapers. Students are highly dependent on Facebook and they got the very first boost to follow this movement through the info wave of Facebook. A little portion of the students is dependent on mainstream media like television and newspapers till now.

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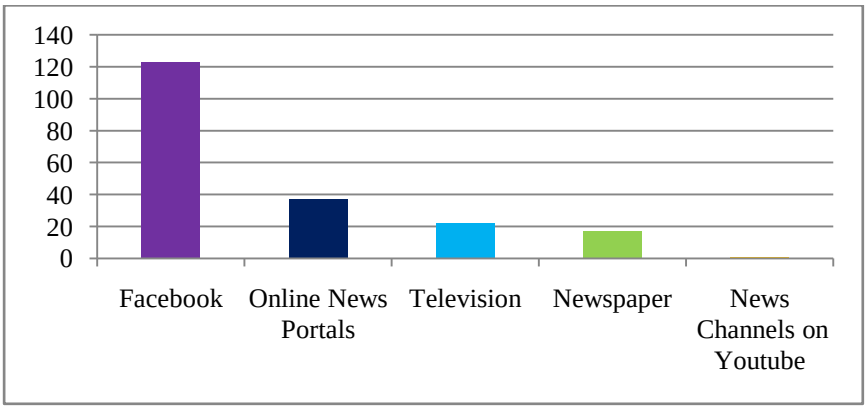


Figure 7: Media Mostly Used for Getting Information about This Movement

This study shows that about of61.5% students used Facebook to get information about this movement. 18.5% used online news portals, 11% used television, and 8.5% used newspapers. So it's clear that Facebook worked as the most essential platform for being updated about this movement.

In this study, most of the students agree that they use Facebook because it's very much handy though some students said that they use Facebook not for being handy. Almost all students think that Facebook is an affordable platform. And for that reason, they use Facebook. All kinds of media can be found on Facebook. This characteristic of Facebook is also very important to the students for using Facebook, despite some of them who don't agree with it, and others are neutral.

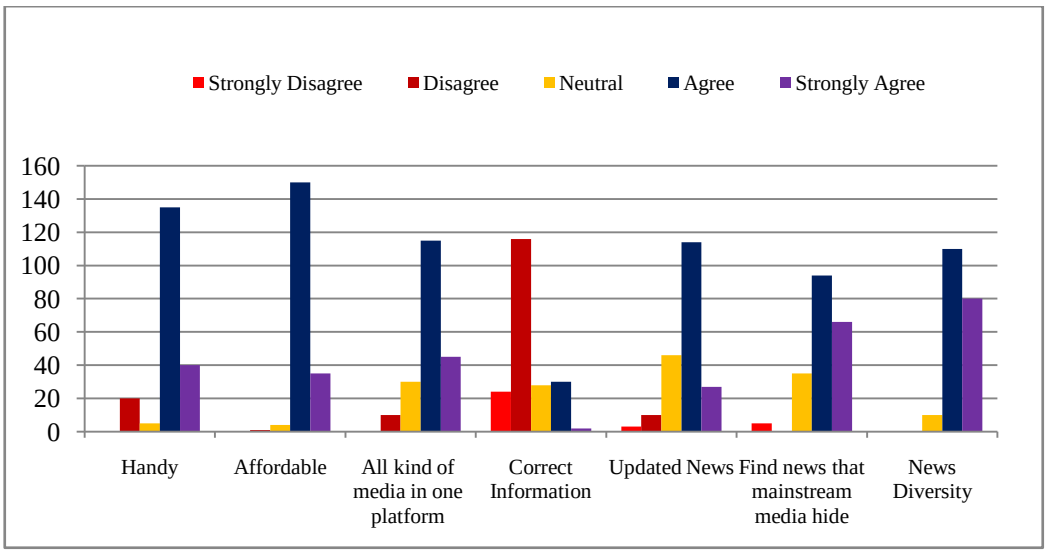


Figure 8: Causes Behind Using Facebook

This part is very important for our research because from this chart, we can see that though most of the students use Facebook for many reasons but not accurate information. So the credibility of Facebook in terms of accuracy of information is very poor till now. Most of the students are neutral or disagree that they use Facebook for correct information. The study also comes across that most of the students agree that they use Facebook for updated news. Some are neutral, and a little portion doesn't think so. Most of the students think that they use Facebook more than media because they want to find news that mainstream media don't flush. They agreed that on Facebook, they find news that mainstream hide. But some are neutral about this.

In this study, most of the students agree that they use Facebook for news diversity. Some strongly agree with it though some students are neutral.

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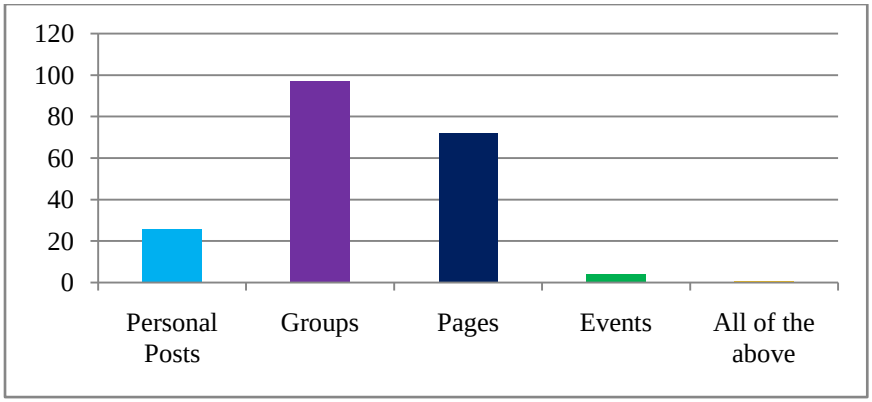


Figure 9: Mostly Used Feature of Facebook

The research shows that about 48.5% of students got information from the Group feature of Facebook to get updated about this movement. 36% of students said that some pages gave them the most benefit for being updated. 13% said it's the personal posts of a Facebook account that help them most for being updated.

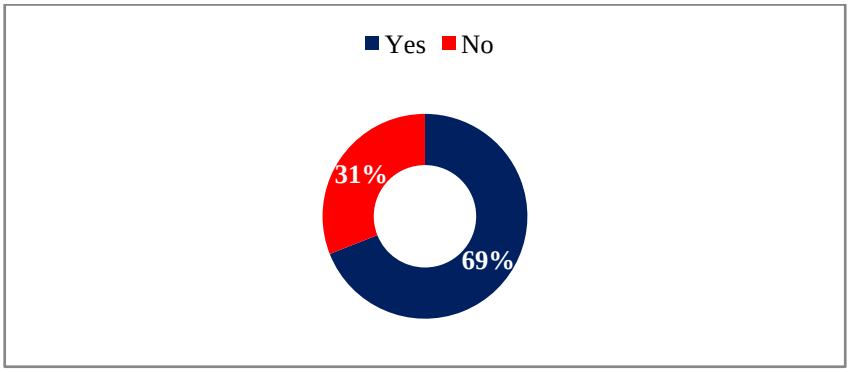


Figure 10: Percentage of Direct Participation after Getting Information from Facebook

The study clearly shows that on Facebook, how much motivated the students are for participating in this movement. About 69% think that 'yes' they were motivated to participate in this movement after getting information from Facebook Though 31% don't think so.

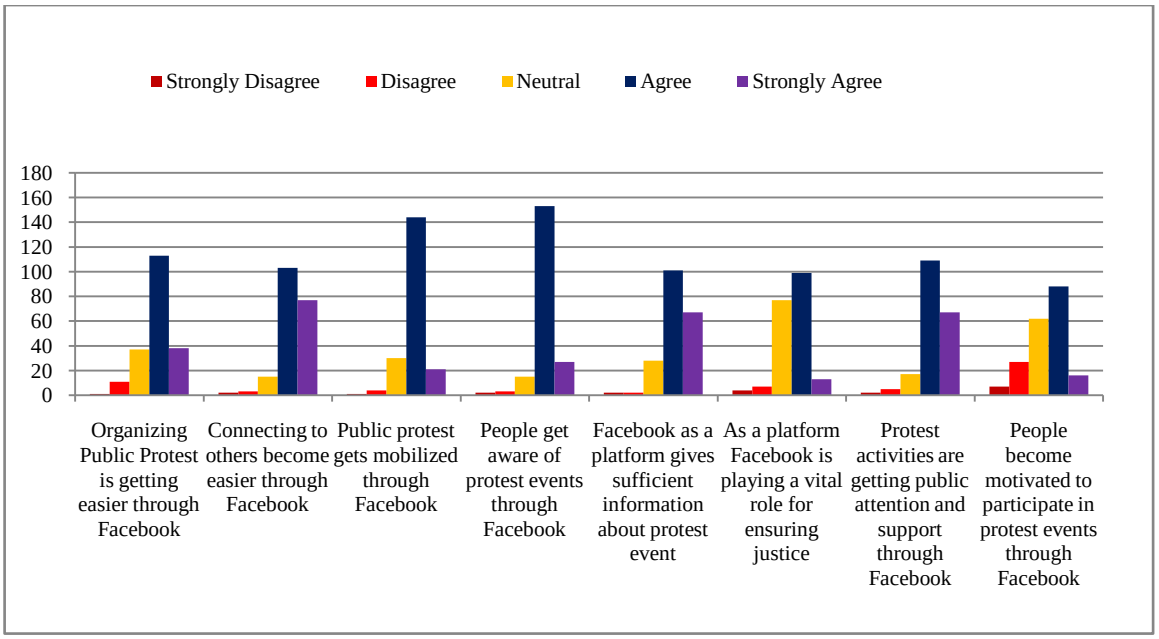


Figure 11: Role of Facebook in Quota Reform Movement

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According to the study, most of the students agreed organizing public protests is getting easier through Facebook. So, it can be said that Facebook is playing an important role to organize public protest. The Survey found that most of the students agree, and some strongly agree that connecting to others has become easier. In the quota reform movement, this easy access worked greatly in acquiring the public sentiment so quickly. In this study, almost all students agree that public protests mobilized through Facebook. Also, most of the students agreed that people get aware of public protest through Facebook though some are neutral on this question. 'Facebook as a platform, gives sufficient information about protest events' majority of the students agree with this statement also some others are neutral about it. Though most of the students agreed as a platform Facebook is playing a vital role in ensuring justice, but a handsome amount remained neutral. It is also found that most of the students agree that protest activities are getting public attention and support through Facebook. And finally, most of the students agree that people become motivated to participate in protest events through Facebook. But a large amount of students remained neutral about this.

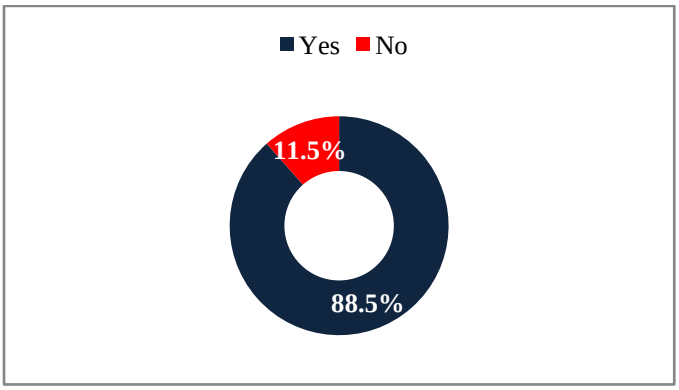


Figure 12: Percentage of People Who Think Facebook Added New Dimension in the Movement

This research indicates that Facebook added new dimensions to strengthen the quota reform movement, as 88.5% of students of Bangladesh think so. At the same time, 11.5% of students don't think that this platform added any dimension.

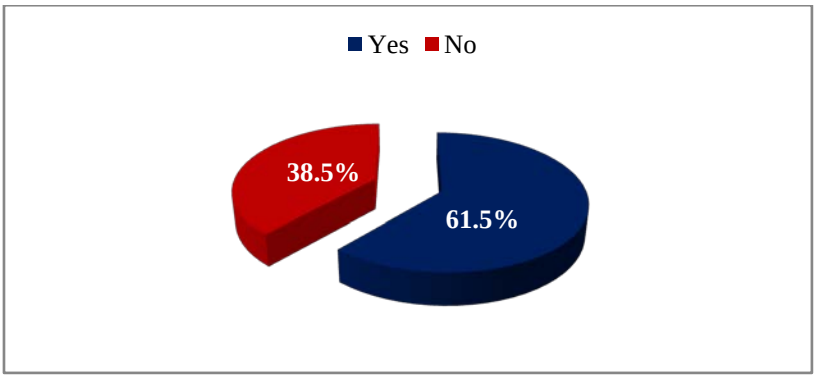


Figure 13: Percentage of People Who Think the Movement Was Largely Depended on Facebook

This research demonstrates that about 61.5% of students of Bangladesh think that the quota reform movement was largely dependent on Facebook, where 38.5% don't think so. In this age of the fourth industrial revolution, it can be said that the traditional movement procedure is changing for technological advancements.

b) In-Depth Interview Analysis

The study has conducted in-depth interview on three quota reform movement activists. The study has got crucial insights from them on the role of Facebook in the quota reform movement in Bangladesh.

It was in the year of 1996 when the first-ever movement on the quota issue took place, and after that, it was in 2012. But none of the movements could become successful. Again in 2018, some students of the public library near University of Dhaka called for a protest creating a Facebook group. And from then Facebook became part and parcel of this quota reform movement as per the statement given by a joint convener of this movement, Mr. Faruk Hasan.

He added that Facebook played a more important role than any other traditional media for organizing this movement. Print and electronic media

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were largely depended on their Facebook group for any kind of updated information. Mr. Nurul Haq Nur another joint convener of this movement gave us the same answer.

In the question about whether the public agenda became the media agenda in this particular movement, both of the joint conveners Mr. Faruk Hasan and Mr. Nurul Haq Nur fully agreed. Mr. Nur added that in the initial stage of this movement, most of the traditional media didn't pay any heed. Still, after some days, this issue becomes a viral topic on Facebook, and the traditional media couldn't help publishing news about this movement. He also added that now in Bangladesh, most of the people spend more time on Facebook than any other traditional media, and they also believe it. Though traditional media usually don't highlight any general event, but some issues sometimes become viral in Facebook, and traditional media had to publish that. Tanu, Rajon and Nusrat's murder cases can be examples of his concern.

The group named '*Quota Sangskar Chai*' or 'We Want Quota Reform' in English was a massive platform of 3.4 million people though it was hacked afterward. But there is a group in the same name which has about 1.1 million members still now. Mr. Faruk said that this Facebook group worked as the real 'spokesperson' of this movement. They also used the Facebook messenger group feature to contact with other fellow activists from different districts and convey a message about further plans.

Another activist worked as a social media manager of this movement said that they used Facebook in almost every way possible. His duty was to filtering Facebook posts given on their public group. He was assigned for checking comments and publishing their views and sharing news about the protest in that particular group.

They had back up groups for continuing the protest as their biggest two Facebook groups containing 3.4 million and 1.2 million members had become hacked. They also opened pages for passing information about this movement.

As a social media manager, they had to disapprove and delete any post against the movement. They also had to be aware of any sensitive post that may contain any insight against the sentiment of the liberation war of Bangladesh. He said that they had central and regional chat groups. They conducted Facebook live for reaching more people and to convey their message more clearly. He strongly agreed that it was social media that played the most significant role behind the success of this movement.

The respondents were also asked about the positive and negative side of Facebook in organizing this movement. Mr. Faruk uttered that the positive side was the easy of making connectivity. They could share their views more easily. And from the beginning to the success of the movement, Facebook was always with them.

There are some negative sides too as per their concern. Sometimes rumors spread through Facebook that caused damages of public properties, including the Vandalism that happened in the residence of the vice-chancellor of the University of Dhaka. But all three of them said that they always had to aware of this kind of propaganda. For that they always had filtered every post made in the group. They always had made clear statements about any kind of rumor that may criminalize the total movement. Mr. Faruk said that they made their position clear in television talk shows. They gave statement like if any person can prove any rumors, then they are ready to have any kind of punishment. For this, the public sentiment grew more on their side. The general activists across the country believed them.

Behind the success of the quota reform movement, Mr. Nurul Haq Nur and Mr. Faruk Hasan both remarked that first of all, they build up a strong organizational structure and this structure lead them to success. A contemporary movement called Road Safety Movement could not be able to achieve success for lacking of this organizational structure according to them. Social media played another salient role, mainly to connect to others at any moment. Mr. Faruk Hasan said that it's important to make media cell in every targeted area and publish movement-related updates in social media all the time. All the activists must be divided into spot activists and online activists. According to the social media manager of the quota reform movement, online activists must always be concerned about any rumor or propaganda as well as conveying any protest message.

IX. Discussion and Conclusion

The study has found some logical understanding of the movement in this technology-based society. In both survey results and in-depth interviews, this study thoroughly discovered the presence of technological determinism. And from the very beginning of the movement, the establishment of network society through Facebook groups and Messenger chat groups were the founding stones.

From the survey, It is found that most of the students use Facebook now and they spend 25% of their working time on Facebook. So, it's clear that we are living in a network society where everyone is connected through social media. Most of the students (74.5%) followed the quota reform movement and among the students, the biggest part (67.5%) came to know about this movement through Facebook first and used Facebook to get updated (61.5%).

This study tried to found out the root causes behind the popularity of Facebook among students, and from the survey, it is found that most of the students use

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Facebook for its being handy, affordability, presence of all kinds of media in one platform and to get updated news. Students also use Facebook to get the news or incidents that mainstream media hide and to get diversified news. But this study found noteworthy information from the survey that most of the students don't use the Facebook platform for correct information. So, it can be said that the credibility of the information that spread through Facebook is still not believed by most of the users.

Most of the students (48.5%) said that they followed some groups to get updated about the movement. And about 69% of the students got motivated to participate in the protest after getting information about the event. One of the activists of the movement, Mr. Faruk Hasan also claimed that their public group '*Quota Sangskar Chai*' or 'We Want Quota Reform' was the hub to get the movement updates. Quoting a post of their group, he said that a random person from Teknaf (An Upazila from the farthest south of Bangladesh) commented that he would come and join the movement. He added that this comment might have motivated other members of the group from near places from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and encouraged to participate. So, Facebook also motivated students across the country psychologically.

This research also found some correlation between Facebook and the organization of the movement. Most of the students agreed that organizing public protest is getting easier through Facebook because connecting to others has become easier through Facebook. Most of them think that Facebook gives sufficient information about any movement, and people get aware after having that information and for this reason public protest get mobilized. The students also agreed that protest events get more attention and support in the Facebook sphere. From the survey, it is also found that people get motivated to participate in protest events after getting sufficient information, and now, in Bangladesh as a platform, Facebook is working to ensure justice.

In the survey, most of the students (88.5%) said that Facebook added new dimensions for strengthening the quota reform movement, and most of the students(61.5%) also believe that the quota reform movement was largely dependent on Facebook.

As well as the students, both of the joint conveners and the social media manager of the quota reform movement think that technology shaped the nature and structure of the movement on a large scale, and they also stated that future movements would be technology-driven.

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