Framing the July 2024 Movement: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Activists' Strategic and Emotional Framing on Facebook During National Crisis

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Abstract: Texts and visuals on social media play a pivotal role in shaping movements by spreading messages, mobilizing support, and influencing outcomes. This study examines the July 2024 youth-led uprising in Bangladesh, which culminated in the Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation amid widespread violence, curfews, and internet shutdowns. Through qualitative content analysis, the study explores how movement is communicated strategically by leading activists utilizing Facebook and the study also elucidates the various strategic frames categorized by activists highlighting particular themes like unity and collective identity. And also application of emotional appeals (e.g., hope, justice, rage) to resonate across social, economic and political divides. Using purposive sampling, the study analyzes texts and visuals (images, slogans, illustrations) shared by 23 key activists between July 15 and August 5, 2024. Findings reveal how activists leveraged Facebook to engage audiences, shape discourse, and resonate across socio-political divides. Finally, the study discusses the implications of the findings to examine how texts and visuals shape narratives and influence public perception during periods of national unrest, especially in situations leading to a government's resignation.
Keywords — Movement, Visuals, Social Media, Student, Framing, Narratives

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a significant platform for people to raise their voices, mobilizing movements, shaping narratives, and influencing political outcomes globally. During social and political movements, activists integrate offline collective actions, such as street protests, with online participation through information dissemination, discussions, and opinion polls to connect the people [1]. In July 2024, Bangladesh witnessed a mass uprising, which marked a transformative chapter in the nation's history of Bangladesh. The movement is known as July 2024 uprising or July revolution, which was primarily led by the youth-activists, especially students. During the movements, social media, especially Facebook, has been used as a powerful platform to navigate the restrictive and politically repressive environment under the Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian regime, highlighting the critical role of digital activism in challenging systemic oppression. The movement initially aimed to properly reform the discriminatory quota system in government job recruitment in Bangladesh. By mid-July, the situation had escalated [2] after government suppression into a mass uprising involving students, professionals, and civil society [3]. Despite internet shutdowns and violent crackdowns, unprecedented since Bangladesh's Liberation War, activists used social media to sustain momentum through strategic visuals and messaging. The movement's success in forcing the Prime Minister's resignation after 16 years in power underscores digital activism's transformative potential in South Asia, particularly how platforms like Facebook can be utilize as an activism tool to mobilize collective action and reshape political narratives. This study is significant for understanding the interplay between social media and activism, especially in the South Asian context, exploring how digital platforms facilitated mobilization, narrative framing, and collective action during one of the most significant uprisings in the nation's history after its independence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FRAMING IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Benford and Snow's [4] study on framing has greatly enhanced the understanding of how discourse and meaning-making shape the success of social movements. Their concept of "collective action frames" highlights three key strategies: diagnostic framing, which defines issues and challenges; prognostic framing, which outlines collective solutions; and motivational framing, which mobilizes individuals to take action. Their study explains how activists construct narratives to mobilize support and provide a lens to analyze the July 2024 movement. For instance, diagnostic framing highlighted government corruption, while motivational framing unified protesters through slogans like "Ami ke, tumi ke? Rajakar!" (Who are we? Collaborators). Mendelsohn et al. [5] extended this framework to digital contexts, showing how social media enables real-time adaptation of frames during repression.

VISUALS AND EMOTIONAL APPEALS

In the July 2024 movement Movements activists strategically used visuals to frame their messages. Visuals are cultural and political tools that amplify movements by evoking emotions [6] for example anger against state violence, hope for change, were critical. Nabi et al. [7] found that hope, when paired with anger, motivates action more effectively than fear alone. During the July movement, patriotic songs and graffiti of martyrs fostered collective identity, aligning with Reed's [8] argument that moral outrage fuels revolutions. In the visuals, along with evoking various emotions, activists in the July movement used black-and-red profile pictures to symbolize mourning and resistance, mirroring tactics from the Arab Spring and Thailand's protests.

YOUTH ACTIVISM AND DIGITAL MOBILIZATION

Bangladesh's youth activists exemplify Cortese's [9] typologies: Emphatics (leaders), Demarcators (countering state narratives), and Reconcilers (balancing personal and movement goals). Facebook's reach allowed them to coordinate protests, despite internet shutdowns, and challenge mainstream media's pro-government narratives. The activists used the digital platforms to disrupt power structures by enabling rapid mobilization.

Given the strategic use of emotionally charged texts and visuals by activists during the July 2024 movement in Bangladesh, it is crucial to examine how these digital artifacts shaped collective political action. Visuals did not merely reflect the protest but actively constructed its emotional and ideological framework—mobilizing supporters, amplifying dissent, and resisting censorship. In light of these dynamics, this study poses the following research questions in the socio-political context of Bangladesh as it remains underexplored.

RQ1: How did activists use Facebook to frame messages during the July 2024 uprising?

RQ2: Which framing strategies (emotional appeals, collective action) were most effective?

RQ3: How were these strategies visually articulated to maximize engagement?

METHODS OR PROCEDURES

This study followed multimodal qualitative content analysis to examine 400 Facebook posts (N=400) from 23 student activists during Bangladesh's July 2024 uprising. Following Molder et al. [10], the study combined deductive coding of

collective action frames (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational) with inductive analysis of emotional appeals (hope, anger, frustration). Posts were collected from July 15-August 5, 2024, prioritizing visuals (images, slogans) over videos. Initial 768 posts were narrowed to 400 after removing duplicates and off-topic content. Three researchers achieved >80% inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff's α= .75–1.00) across 14 codes. Emotional appeals were categorized by dominant emotion per post.

RESULTS

This study reveals that student activists during the July 2024 movement in Bangladesh employed texts and visuals as emotionally and politically potent tools to mobilize public sentiment and drive collective action. Among the 400 analyzed posts, emotional appeals—particularly those evoking hope (n=140), anger (n=65), disapproval (n=35), and frustration (n=26), were central to activist messaging. Visuals celebrating victories (such as the expulsion of the ruling party's student wing from university dorms) and expressions of solidarity (e.g., support from the armed forces and private university students) were designed to generate optimism. Hopeful posts frequently used vibrant imagery and symbolic colors (yellow, red, pink) and referenced key milestones like the "32nd of July" and the "36th of July" to extend the chronological frame of the movement. Activists such as Asif Mahmud and Hamza Mahbub also used iconic images, including portraits of Che Guevara, to evoke revolutionary spirit and national pride. At the same time, visuals using red backgrounds and emotionally charged language captured anger and frustration, particularly in response to police brutality, internet shutdowns, and reports of torture and abductions. These were supplemented by posts using dark imagery, such as black images with red spots, to symbolize mourning and bloodshed. Though less frequent, humor and mockery also featured as strategic emotional tools to engage and critique through irony.

In terms of collective action framing, the most prominent was the call for action, which encouraged mass participation and emphasized patriotic unity through slogans, emotive language, and instructive visuals. These posts often specified dates, times, and actions, such as strikes and marches, using inclusive pronouns and red-colored backgrounds to galvanize supporters. Unified approach framing appeared in images of mass gatherings, faculty solidarity, and cultural events like patriotic song performances and candlelit protests, fostering a sense of togetherness. Diagnostic framing was used to identify political culpability, especially targeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her party. Visual analysis of 167 images revealed that the majority (73%) featured crowds, while 27% depicted activists alone. Most images were grouped (69%), emphasizing collective presence. Facial expressions, particularly shouting (51%), boldness (22%), and crying (14%), were significant to conveying emotion, while even the few smiling faces (13%) suggested hope amid crisis. Graffiti art, found in 43 visuals, emerged as a key medium for visual resistance, offering striking and durable messages against authoritarianism. Overall, activists used a careful blend of emotional and collective framing strategies in both text and visuals to sustain momentum and mobilize diverse publics during the movement.

DISCUSSION

Through the analysis of the posts of the young activists, it was evident that emotional appeals, particularly hope, played a dominant role in mobilizing the public, alongside anger, frustration, and disapproval which were also frequently employed to highlight state oppression and call for action. Activists not only shared content that reflected emotional intensity but also integrated collective action frames, such as calls to action and unified messaging, to inspire nationwide participation. Their innovative use of visual and textual elements, color-coded backgrounds, inclusive language, symbols, slogans, and emotive imagery, demonstrated how digital communication could transcend traditional barriers of protest and effectively coordinate large-scale civic engagement. These findings build on existing scholarship by showing how positive emotions, especially hope, can drive protest momentum in repressive political climates and provide practical insights into how social media can serve as a powerful tool for political expression and movement building in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

The July 2024 Movement in Bangladesh exemplifies how youth-led digital activism, through strategic framing of visual and textual content, can challenge entrenched authoritarian power and mobilize collective action. This study revealed that hope-driven emotional appeals, combined with action-oriented collective framing, were central to inspiring mass participation and sustaining momentum. Activists' ability to merge cultural symbols, patriotic messages, and inclusive language created a compelling narrative that united diverse groups under a common cause. The strategic use of Facebook as a mobilizing platform shows that even under censorship and repression, digital activism can offer an alternative public sphere for political discourse. This research will contribute to the growing body of literature on social media and protest movements and also offers practical implications for future activists aiming to frame their messages effectively to foster solidarity and drive social change. Despite limitations such as sampling only Facebook and exclusion of video content, the study provides critical insights into how framing strategies can influence the success of movements in authoritarian contexts.

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