Digital Media in Electoral Participation: A Study of Bangladesh Election 2018

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Abstract

This is a qualitative research based on the recent 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election that investigates how the mushrooming digital media played role in political participation.

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Abstract

In modern representative democracy, election is considered as the most significant way of producing and promoting democracy. To successfully accomplish the electoral process, manifold groups, such as political parties, and citizens participate in political activities. However, this practice is evolving over times, and in modern world, digital media has emerged as a game changer in electoral participation. Bangladesh with a skyrocketing number of cyber-dwellers is not lagging in this race. In the last decade, an apparent paradigm shift has taken place, and prior public sphere has become digitalized. A huge portion of people are no longer interested to interact in physical context before online. Since the invading digital cyberspace overshadowed the existing political platforms, participants along with traditional media are also following the tide. In such circumstances, this research investigates and analyses how various political actors participated in the 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election of Bangladesh through digital media; and explores the dynamics of this communicative environment extrapolating a few unique propositions.

Keywords: Election, democracy, politics, participation, digital media, online, internet.

Introduction

In every democratic political process, media has profound impact. Contemporary scholarship is increasingly emphasizing that it shapes political behavior and awareness of the publics and other parties related to the electoral process (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). However, media in the meantime has evolved tremendously and turned into a key political participant in the political process of a given society. The miracle comes with the origin and advent of digital media. The role of traditional media in pre-digital Bangladesh was nominal, and the impression was most often unnoticeable. Political communication through placard, festoon, banner is almost being history, and some of them found a new nest in new media changing their earlier form from analogized to digitalized. When politics met digital media in Bangladesh, it was a wonderful beginning of a new era of political activities and participation. Although online platform could not and possible never would substitute the physical playground of politics in Bangladesh and elsewhere, but the involvement and influence of digital media is booming in political arena. Thus, electoral politics in Bangladesh following many other countries is also taking a new and more modernized shape. Instead of roaming around to persuade likely voters, public representatives as politicians are employing

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much of their efforts in digital media campaign. Thus, a new journey toward digitalization of political participation has begun.

The 11th Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad Election held in 2018 came with a ray of hope in Bangladesh traditional political atmosphere. Participants from various groups and categories got involved into political activities: supporting parties, preaching messages, favoring and resisting, debate and discourse, etc. In such circumstances, it is imperative to carefully examine the social media usage in elevating or evaporating and directing or diverging the public opinion as political leaders were passionate to harboring and reaping the benefit of online interaction and public were also partaking in the political gamble. Therefore, this study deals with the explicit and implicit characteristics of electoral participation through digital media, unravels the underlying mechanism of political game regarding online community, and the political correlation and reciprocity of interest groups that often foreshadows the election outcomes. As the utmost interactive section of internet, social media has gained more privilege in this research in terms of analysis and discussion.

Digital Media in Bangladesh

Comparison betwixt previous and contemporary communication culture might present an overall comprehension on how the acquisition, distribution, manipulation and storage of communication has been changing over the last few years, more precisely, a decade or more. A single invention revolutionized the entire ground of human interaction. Scholars address this extraordinary invention and outstanding phenomenon in variety of names, such as new media, cybermedia, internet-based media, although all of them, to some degree, denote "digital media", which converged computing with media for the first time in the six hundred years' history of mediated human communication (Manovich, 2006). Subtraction of contemporary media from the traditional forms of media present the new age digitalized media. To demonstrate the pivotal differences between traditional and new or analogue and digital media, Creeber and Martin states:

> First, digital media surpasses analogue technology in that it is easily transferable across distinctly different media platforms, it is easily manipulated and networked, it can be stored and remotely accessed or distributed and is more resilient to corruption during storage or transmission. Second, digital data is also easier to manipulate, and the end result can be reproduced indefinitely without any loss of quality. In short, digital material exceeds analogue systems in terms of speed, quality and performance. (Creeber and Martin, 2009:2)

Digital media as a global phenomenon penetrated Bangladesh traditional communicative atmosphere a long ago right after its inception, although the intensity was nominal and

unimportant. Only 0.00075104582943988 per cent people of the entire population was using internet in the first year of the arrival of this technology (World Bank, 2016). However, after the arrival of social media, the things have been changed dramatically. Online community has started getting bigger, even in the last decade a great explosion took place in Bangladesh internet sector that upsurge the total internet user from 1 per cent of the total population in 2006 to 18.25 per cent in 2016, almost eighteenfold (The Global Economy, 2016). Currently, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube are the three most surfed digital media platforms in Bangladesh.

Electoral Participation in Bangladesh

Electoral participation is the most significant and popular democratic mode of participation all over the world. Political participation is the kernel of this discussion. To define political participation, Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) refer to "those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take." In practice, political participation is the act of citizens who are willing to change policy or decisions taken by authority. The policymakers can be governmental personnel, and authority can be government body. Political participation, precisely after the Second World War, is considered as a legal right of any citizen in any democratic state. However, through the penetration of open access digital communication platforms, the traditional way of participation in election as well as other forms of politics has been changed a lot, and changing speedily. Bangladesh as a digitally thriving country is also experiencing such tendency.

Modes of political participation: Political theorists define the modes of political participation in different manners. In general, it is divided into two categories: active, and passive (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). According to participation theorists, it has two types: instrumental, and expressive (Mukhopadhyay, 1977). The most recognized classification of political participation, proposed by Smith, has also two categories: conventional, and unconventional (Smith et al., 1980). The conventional and approved political participation includes voting, public opinion, campaign, etc., and the unconventional and unconstitutional political participation includes demonstration and violence, procession and slogan, riot, etc. Nevertheless, theorizing procession, demonstration and slogan as unconventional is erroneous as in democratic process, these are highly usual, perceptible, and spontaneous. However, initiation of online has altered the effectiveness and characteristics of almost all modes of political participation drastically.

Table 01: Low and High-effort Online and Offline Participatory Activities

Status	Low-effort	High-effort
Offline	• Displaying campaign signs (stickers, posters) • Signing a petition on the street • Reminding someone to vote	• Attending political meetings • Attending political demonstrations • Contacting political candidates • Working for parties/candidates
Online	• Liking a political actor or cause • Sharing political information • Posting short political comments • Signing an online petition	• Sending Email to politicians • Writing political blog entry • Engaging in political discussion • Creating political group on social media

Source: Knoll, Johannes, Matthes, Jörg, & Heiss, Raffael. (2018). The social media political participation model: A goal systems theory perspective. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 1-22 doi: 10.1177/1354856517750366.

Although the fundamental modes of participation are almost unchanged, but the inner functions and practices are highly transformed even in contemporary Bangladesh. Political campaign, which has significant effect in electoral process, has found a new strategy called "social media campaign". The presidential election campaign of Barack Obama is often considered the first successful and most decisive instance of it. Like John F. Kennedy who mastered television to achieve political goal, Obama succeeded in identifying the potential of social media as a political tool (Bogost, 2017). However, theorists often exaggerate the fear of digital media effect:

> Many studies focus on the decline of many traditional forms of participation, in particular voting, joining political parties and campaign related activities, to suggest a decline of political engagement that will have a catastrophic impact upon democracy if not arrested. (Lilleker, 2004:151)

Based on this statement, it can strongly be argued that the modes of political participation in electoral process are not in decline but under a unique transformation, from real world to virtual. In public opinion formation, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have already proved their efficiency over traditional media in several key elections and referendums including 2008 and 2016 US elections, Brexit, etc. Consequently, in Bangladesh, politicians are moving towards social media to conduct their election campaigns. Therefore, to say euphemistically, digital media is only transforming the practice of political involvement often within the traditional mode of participation.

Medium of political participation: Accompanied by digital communication system, political communication between party and public has radically been altered. The former gaps between three compulsory components of political ground in Bangladesh—people, politician, and policy, are reduced noticeably. Nowadays, individuals as citizens are getting closer to the political figures as well as political decisions with the help of effective new

media communication. Free-access digital platform provide the opportunity to discuss political issues, share political information, and form political opinion within the active virtual community willing to participate in politics, directly or indirectly. The 2016 USA election, for an example, was determined by specifically two things: (a) online platform, a ground of political debate with a range of information as well as stimulants, such as fake news; and (b) online community an active participants body who were influenced in politics (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Specifically, from the last decade, thriving epoch of cyberspace, world elections are being dictated by the power of digital media. Emergence of "Big Data" and other data firms are contributing and facilitating this process. Algorithm makes the work easier analyzing the public opinion and helps to take necessary measures to guide the flow. Cambridge Analytica's breaching and hijacking the Facebook users' data, and mediating three vital voting incidents: Donald Trump and Ted Cruz's political campaign in USA, Brexit vote, Mexican general election, is considered few of the biggest political incidents in digital age (Davis, 2015; Cadwalladr & Townsend, 2018; Ahmed & Hakim, 2018).

The fundamental way of political communication is under ultimate reconstruction due to the penetration and growth of new media in the existing public sphere. Consequently, traditional form of interaction among participant groups in an electoral process is going highly virtual than the physical, and new age media as an intensive reciprocate channel has been acting as the determinants of political incidents. The following figure demonstrates how the scene has changed over the last decades not only in Bangladesh but also globally.

Figure: Contrast Between Former and Contemporary Political Participation
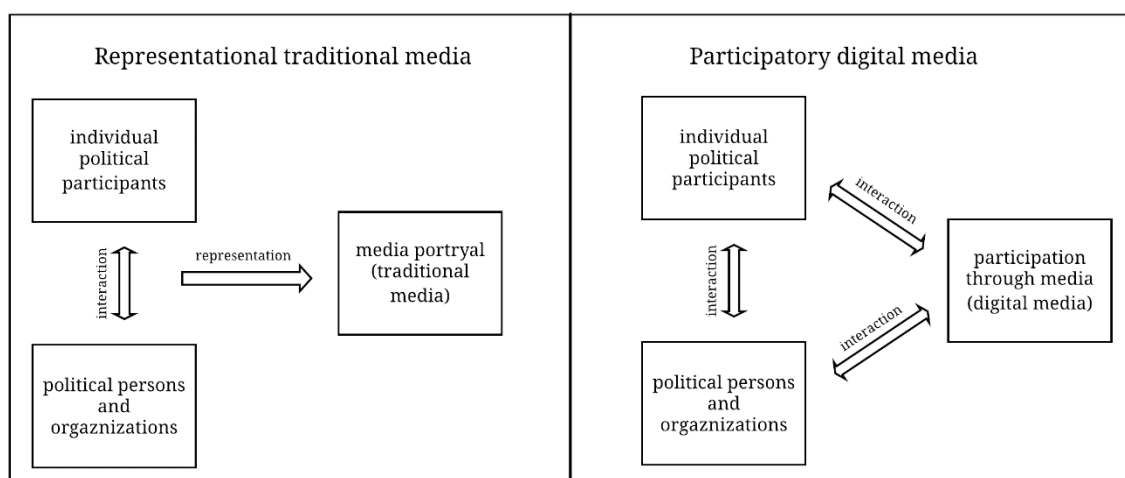
Source: Prepared by the Researcher

Figure shows the distinctiveness of political communication between the age of traditional media and digital age. In the past, individuals as active citizens took part in political activities and interacted with political organizations almost without any kind of intermediating agents (e.g. television and newspaper). What we still observe in present Bangladesh is the conventional media usually gather information, publish news and only represent instead of maintaining active mediation betwixt participants and political bodies despite a few current endeavors (e.g. Vox pop and quote of general people). On the other hand, only political elite could use traditional media as a political weapon in formulating public opinion. Therefore, the entire political process was, to some degree, deprived of a truly effective and interactive mediator. However, with the emergence of digital media, political communication became two-ways with prompt feedback and impact, and more accessible as well that filled up the gap of political communication. Thereafter, new media platforms have been working as an active and successful mediator between public and parties in Bangladesh.

Digital Media in Electoral Participation

During the previous century, three pivotal mainstream media, television, radio and press, were playing the directional role in elections and political participations. Although the scope and luxury to participate in politics through these media were limited, more specifically for the ordinary mass than the wealthy and political elite, so traditional media was, to some extent, failed to serve the proper interest to the public in terms of electoral participations. Designating "power" as the most crucial factor among the interplays of the aforementioned factors, Perloff (2014) states:

> Leaders invoke language, symbols, and the trappings of their offices to gain and maintain power. Media relay, interpret, challenge, or reinforce the use of power. Citizens, some more than others, the richer and better-connected more than the poorer and less-educated, become involved in the political process, wielding modern communications to advocate for causes and candidates, sometimes wisely, other times foolishly. (Perloff, 2014:35)

However, media in digital age is unique in nature and operation, and relatively better performer than its predecessor. Meanwhile, new age communication technology has been revolutionized by the invention of "cyberspace" as a breakthrough. British Prime Minister David Cameron in his 2009 speech, addressing internet as "amazing pollinator", said it "turns lonely fights into mass campaigns; transforms moans into movements; excites the attention of hundreds, thousands, millions of people and stirs them to action" (Polonski, 2016). However, in 2016 European Union (EU) referendum on Brexit, internet turned against him becoming

his worst nightmare, and through Russian alleged the social media mechanism, anti-EU sentiment soared up (Quinn, 2018).

Following many global events and phenomena, and the accommodation of huge number of Bangladesh citizens in social media hub also drives the political figures to go into virtual in order to influence their potential voters. First palpable evidence of social media campaign was seen in Dhaka City Corporation Election 2015 where the candidates used the most prominent social platform in Bangladesh, Facebook, to mobilize the potential voters. The compact scheme of virtual campaign is in the following:

Table 02: Dhaka City Corporation Election 2015 Campaigns in Facebook

Political figures	Facebook pages for campaign	Video response average			Photo response average		
		Like	Comment	Share	Like	Comment	Share
Anisul Haq	Amar Dhaka	2000	100	750	1000	50	150
Tabith Mohammed Awal	Camp. for Tabith Mohammed Awal	20	05	03	35	07	06
Zonayed Saki	Agamir Dhaka	1400	60	1400	200	50	70
Mirza Abbas	Mirza Abbas	1550	50	1420	1420	50	100
Sayeed Khokon	Vote for Sayeed Khokon	50	00	02	60	02	02

Source: Hossain, Dilshad, & Shifat, Sumaiya (2015). *Cyber Campaigning Via Facebook in Dhaka City Corporation Election 2015*. Retrieved from: *https://bit.ly/2P9oxjP*

Table 02 shows how the competitors were conscious about the strength of online community, and backup the conjecture of intense usage of social media in future election campaigns. However, not only pre-election time, stimulating public opinion is a continuous process during the reign of digital media as online dwellers are updated entities who regularly monitor the activities of the potential leaders, discuss political issues within their community, and therefore, try to form effective public opinion in favor or against specific political figures or parties. For that reason, enthusiastic politicians invest their concern on social sites with their compelling images and motivations for the pupils (Bdnews24.com, 2016). Based on several fundamental reasons, politicians are going for digital media campaign. Firstly, the new media platforms are getting extremely populated by individuals, and the nature of this online community is centralized and intensely interconnected although diverse and individualistic at the same time. This provide a unique scope for an information to spread and reach huge number of people with immense impact ultimately with no cost at all that is absent in traditional broadcast and print media. Digital media grandstand is perhaps going parallel to the mainstream media although having an alternative structure (BBC News, 2017). In some contemporary cases including 2018 Road-Safety Protest, Quota Reform Protest, etc., digital media surpassed the appeal and advantages of traditional mainstream media.

Secondly, the context and pattern of communication matters when it is all about impact. Direct and two-way communication work more than indirect, passive and linear one. Politicians have to endure explicit public trial and open criticism of virtual individuals as online platform enables the users to express their feelings of gratitude or disgust, and affection or criticisms against political organizations more independently and in non-filtered manner.

Thus, with almost no effort, the public representatives of the governmental authority can measure public temperament and opinion climate, and get a wonderful perception regarding public demand that makes the activities and policies of governing body and its implementation more accountable and fruitful (Bene, 2017). Being more credible to the citizens is the key game changing quality for a political party or person ever can have. Therefore, these are the raison d'état for the prompt new media involvement of the politicians in contemporary Bangladesh.

Digital Media and Political Participation in Jatiya Sangsad Election

Two major contesting parties: a Grand Alliance[i] (*Mohajot*) headed by AL, and Jatiya Oikya Front[ii] (National United Front) headed by BNP appeared in the 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election 2018 along with Left Democratic Alliance[iii] and independent contestants. However, AL as the foremost political party swept a landslide victory 259 of 300 seats whereas JP and BNP secured 20 and 5 seats respectively. Election of two constituencies (Brahmanbari-2 and Gaibandha-3) was postponed and not declared due to irregularities and death of a candidate respectively. Therefore, the results of 298 seats were declared out of total 300 seats. Total 39 political parties and 1846 candidates participated in this national competition. The total number of voters were 104.1 million and voter turnout was 80 per cent. Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina, for the third consecutive time, rewarded with the chance to form government (Chaity, 2018; BSS, 2018; Rediff News, 2018; The Daily Star, 2018). Most of the countries including India, China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arab, United States, United Kingdom, European Union, OIC, SAARC congratulated the victory despite certain allegations from the opposition (Dhaka Tribune, 2018; The Daily Star, 2018).

Unconventional political participation has been observed during the pre-election period amongst the participants. Public discourse regarding upcoming election issues was at a peak after the nominations of the contesting candidates. The 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election of Bangladesh was having a remarkable number of political importance due to two specific

reasons: (a) it is the first ever election in which digital media has widely been used for political campaigning and political discourse; and (b) legitimacy and credibility of the previous election was questioned from certain corners; therefore, this election was supposed to be the "key" to restore democracy. It is to mention that in 2014, the then ruling party AL snatched the victory through almost an uncontested election while the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the election (Bhattacharjee, 2014). The voter turnout was only 36 per cent according to the Bangladesh Election Commission (Mollah & Jahan, 2018). Such episodes left a room for doubts amid international as well as Bangladesh population. For those reasons, the recent election gained mass interest within and outside the country. Amid these, a newly emerged virtual populace, popularly known as online community, played an important role in mobilizing the electoral discourses and moving towards constructing successful opinion polls.

Online dwellers during the election: Unlike the previous elections, the 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election, to some degree, is different, and what separates the recent one from the preceding elections is the intense use of digital technology in electoral participation. Two distinctive features should be included here: (a) Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) is introduced for the first time in Bangladesh (Anik, 2018) along with online voter services sanctioned by the Election Commission (The Daily Star, 2018); and (b) active political participation of almost unmeasurable number of people. Most importantly, the educated youngsters have been observed as more willing to participate in electoral process and political discourses demanding necessary changes in conventional ill-practices within the existing political framework, possess more political knowledge, updated information, and come up with more solid and polished reasoning than their seniors.

The highest number of online dwellers in Bangladesh was sought in the eve of the national contestation (BTRC, 2018). Thus, the election experienced a new charm and received a new dimension. Centre for Research and Information (CRI) surmised that online content and campaigns are more effective than traditional method (Miazee & Raju, 2017). Table 03 is showing the growing number of internet users on the previous four election years.

Table 03: Changes in Population and Internet User in the Years of National Elections

Jatiya Sangsad elections	Total population (million)	Population growth rate	Internet users (million)	Users percentage of total population
2001	134.12	1.90	8.08	0.1
2008	148.81	1.13	22.95	2.5

| 2014 | 159.41 | 1.16 | 39.77 | 13.9 |
| 2018 | 167.10 | 1.03 | 92.47 | 55.34 |

Source: World Bank (2017). *Total population*. Retrieved from: *https://bit.ly/2F6ksNH*
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Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (October, 2018). *Internet Subscribers*. Retrieved from: *https://bit.ly/2rbNSjA*
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World Population Review (September 18, 2018). *Bangladesh Population*. Retrieved from: *www.bit.ly/2AJ2Ced*

Table 03 indicates how online population is mushrooming in Bangladesh on a swift fashion. The election in 2001 was the first one after the arrival of internet, and internet community was literally passing its infancy period then with only 0.1 per cent users of total country population. The number has raised slightly during the election of 2008 with 2.5 per cent. However, a remarkable inclination of internet users (13.9 per cent) was observed in 2014 during the 10th Jatiya Sangsad Election. Back then, digital contents and discussions regarding election flooded the digital public sphere. In 2018, a breakthrough in internet using population took place as 55.34 per cent of the entire population have become online dwellers. This is a significant hint of how they would put impact in the election through digital political participation.

Pattern of digital participation: Astonishingly, in October 2018 onward, the netizens crossed 92.47 million in numbers and constituted more than half (55.34 per cent) of the entire population. It is highly compelling that such a massive community would play an important role in electoral outcomes, with their active participation, political debates, and opinion polls. Influenced by the contemporary political trend across the globe, Bangladesh politicians and political parties stepped a little bit further in virtual world and convinced in social media campaign like their counterparts, the elected bodies from different countries who succeeded using this very platform. In India, Narendra Modi, for an instance, accomplished his goal becoming the Prime Minister using Twitter and organizing potential voters and thereafter was entitled as "India's first social media Prime Minister" (Pandey, 2015).

Meanwhile, although Bangladesh Election Commission was planning to propose a ban on digital campaign in elections (Irani, 2018), a remarkable number of key players of the election were found employing incredible efforts on online political campaigning by circulating their positive political activities. The prime purpose was to let the people as voters know how effective the representatives could be if they (people) elect them (representatives) through voting. These social advertisements and circulation were performed through both personal social media profiles and pages.

Digital contents, audience, and exceptionality: Almost all the politicians, including some popular faces, such as Obaidul Quader (Minister of Road Transport and Bridges, AL), Barrister Andaleeve Rahman Partha (Chairman, Bangladesh Jatiya Party - BJP), Zunaid Ahmed Palak (Minister of State for Information and Communication Technology, AL), Sajeeb Wazed Joy (Advisor to the Prime Minister on Information and Communication Technology, AL), Md. Shahriar Alam (State Minister for Foreign Affairs, AL), etc. were observed proactive during the pre-election time with their diverse social media activities. Besides, Facebook profiles and pages of political parties including AL and BNP were also filled up with written posts, photos and videos (Raju & Antara, 2018). Pondering official Facebook pages of AL and BNP, few incredible features have been sorted out.

At least 71 videos for upcoming election have been posted in BNP's Facebook page, titles of some are "*Rukhe Darabe Tarunno*" (Youths will revolt), "*Amrai Sobai*" (We are the everybody), "*Apnii Desher Shokti*" (You are the strength of the country). Of them, lion's share of the videos and writings target was youth voters. The spokesmen of most videos are Tarique Rahman (Acting Chairman of BNP) and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir (Secretary General of BNP). These videos are well-scripted and with rhetorical narrative. Several appealing songs, slogans, and rhymes are also generated for the election purpose, such as: *"Dhaner shish jitle jitbei Bangladesh/jonogoner dukkho hobei sesh"* (If "Sheaf of Paddy"[iv] wins, Bangladesh will win so/thus, the plight of mass would end). Criticisms of AL during its previous two terms have been tried to represent in these audio-visual productions. Few specific allegations by BNP against AL were postulated in BNP's digital contents to provoke and mobilize the potential voters to turn against their (BNP) opposition. Of these allegations, the disappearance and extrajudicial killings, academic dishonesty and educational failure, shrinking and mismanaged job sector, etc. during AL regime earned values.

On the other hand, AL pursue their support through intense digital campaign both in social networking sites: (a) creating and disseminating digital contents (e.g. videos, photos, illustrations and articles); (b) offline public sphere inducing digital media contents into discourse, such as title song for the election "*Jitbe Abar Nouka*" ("Boat"[v] will win again); (c) fueling digital political debates and discourse, such as "AL era of development is better than BNP's", "BNP is the espouser of *Razakars*[vi] and Islamic fanatics", and other worthwhile ways of digital media, such as mobile phone messaging, party's official website (www.albd.org). The primary motives of these initiatives are to capture public sentiment and

consents in favor of AL, and kicking the opposition out of the public mind by spreading propaganda. What exclusive AL public relation wing CRI generated was: (a) Let's Talk with Sheikh Hasina; and (b) Policy Café both targeting young generation (Youth Bangla, 2019).

Some extraordinary commonplace factors between digital campaigns of both AL and BNP are they emphasized youths to activate their sentiments to get favor in polls. This is because youths have been being considered the changemaker of Bangladesh politics from the past three elections. In 2008 election, AL secured a remarkable victory by including "Digital Bangladesh" in their manifesto which has been considered as the mandate for youth. In this very election of 2018, more than 23 million new voters have been registered. Therefore, it is easily comprehendible that both parties would propose their appeals to this enormous community (Rana, 2018). Like BNP, AL too came up with slogan specifically targeting youths: *"Tarunner shokti, Bangladesher shomriddhi"* (Youth's vigor is Bangladesh's progress). On the other hand, blame-gaming, adjoining political contempt and popular denomination, to each other has highly practiced by both parties and party-men in digital public sphere through digital contents. To produce impactful and burnished digital contents, political parties have been helped by professional advertisement firms (Alam, 2018).

Conclusion

Meddling elections, digital media has already earned the fame of effective mediator across the globe. Although in Bangladesh, this propensity is newfangled in politics, it is gaining popularity among both mass people and political authorities. This election of 2018 is the first ever almost-full-fledged digital national election of Bangladesh in terms of political participation. Online community is getting stronger and larger inside and outside the country, their cumulative strength is uplifting, and Bangladesh politicians, sensing this tendency, are becoming more tangled in digital communicative spheres to harvesting the fruits. Besides, why this election bears immense importance, apart from conventional political rhetoric, lies on some underlying features. BNP as one of the would-be major key players in the election has been passing serious political suppression before election. Even AL practically ensured BNP to be out of the scene of electoral campaign (Roy & Aman, 2018). This was all for heavy arrest and unleashed violence upon BNP candidates and political activists propagated by ruling party-men (The Daily Star, 2018). Therefore, they must go underground, and in this regard, digital media as a secret but decisive weapon let them to conduct their online campaign.

On the other hand, ahead of poll, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), instructed by ruling party, postponed the high speed 3G and 4G internet services of the country defining online might cause disinformation targeting election (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). To surmise, a covert motive behind this action is to make online community ineffective against electoral misconduct. On the other hand, increased power of digital discourse has massive impact on opinion formation, policy change, and policy implementation. Before the election, digital media nevertheless has been believed to overshadow mainstream media in sense of action, intensity and significance. The reality somewhat supports the idea as each of the three "political man": political leaders, political activists, and grassroot voters have welcomed and exploited digital platform as an instrument of electoral participation. On this context, to forecasting the future of digital media usage in Bangladesh political participation, two probable trends could be postulated: (a) optimistic view that political discourse and partaking in digital media would invigorate consensus, compromise, cooperation, unity, and nation-building; and (b) pessimistic view that political participation through digital media would lead toward conflict, disunity, discrimination, and catastrophe. It is hard to foretell accurately what is coming ahead as offline politics in Bangladesh still has massive impact on online political discourses, and often dictate the course of digital political participation. However, it is better to keep in mind that with the unimaginable growth rate of online community, digital media might lead the political environment of Bangladesh in near future.

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Notes

[i] Grand Alliance or *Mohajot* includes: Awami League, Jatiya Party (Ershad), Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Jatiya Party (Manju), Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, Bangladesh Nationalist front, and others.

[ii] Jatiya Oikya Front (National United Front) includes: Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Gano Forum, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-JSD, Nagorik Oikya, Krishak Sramik Janata League, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Bangladesh Muslim League, Jatiya Ganatantrik Party, Jatiya Oikya Prokriya, Kalyan Party, Liberal Democratic Party, and others.

[iii] Left Democratic Alliance includes: Communist Party of Bangladesh, Gonoshonghoti Andolon, United Communist League of Bangladesh, Basad (Marxist), Ganatantrik Biplobi Andolon, Samajtantrik Andolon.

[iv] The party symbol of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

[v] Boat is the symbol of Bangladesh Awami League (BAL).

[vi] An anti-Bangladesh paramilitary force constituted with local people and organized by Pakistan army during the Liberation War of 1971.