



Role of Social-Media in Shaping Local Government Politics in Bangladesh: A Secondary Data Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Role of Social-Media in Shaping Local Government Politics in Bangladesh: A Secondary Data Analysis, the study examines the state of affairs about social media and local government politics, with a focus on Union Parishads political sphere in Bangladesh, from the viewpoint of Public Sphere Theory and Participatory Democracy Theory. The research, based on a secondary data analysis of articles, reports and media sources from 2016 through 2025 explores the ways in which social media influence citizen awareness, participation and governance outputs. Results indicate that social media represents a space where citizens can interact with local leaders, inquiry about development projects, and monitor the performance of public officials, a form of digital public sphere in which information and discussion is readily available to the community. It also promotes participatory democracy by enabling citizens to participate in decision making and oversee the work of local government. But it is limited by local political hierarchies and patronage networks and by limited access to digital tools. Overall social-media enhances grassroots engagement but does not fully overcome structural inequalities in Union Parishads politics.

Keyword: Social media, Union Parishad, Local government politics, Citizen Participation, Political awareness, Governance

Introduction

Bangladesh has experienced a dramatic shift in the way its people connect, talk and decide over the past decade. The change that is happening is being driven by social media and now it has affected everything; from social-movements to politics. Bangladesh is well on its way to a digital revolution, with over 100 million internet users and almost 200 million mobile phone subscribers. (Hoque, 2025). As the world has become more interconnected, social media has gained in importance, affecting politics, public opinion and social change. Websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok have seen massive growth in the last few years. Yet digitalisation of Bangladesh has also proceeded at a fast pace, with online social media including primarily facebook becoming omnipresent and being utilized for new forms of political communication, civic activism and grassroots accountability (Al-Zaman, 2020). Simultaneously, through social media local politicians have been mobilizing for election and agenda promotion particularly during Union Parishad election. However, deploying social media can bring profound challenges too-disinformation spread, algorithmic exaggeration of discriminatory content, or uneven access to digital platforms, which may complicate governance outcomes and citizen trust.

Even though there is a growing interest in digital media and politics in Bangladesh, the majority of current research focusses more on youth engagement or national election dynamics than on social media's impact in local governance. Furthermore, insufficient has been discovered about the relationships between citizen knowledge, involvement, and governance outcomes mediated by social media in the context of local governance in Bangladesh. Since local government is connected with the grassroots level and represents the lowest tier of administration, it holds significant importance in the political landscape of Bangladesh. In this context, social media is currently playing a crucial role. Therefore, this study has been undertaken to explore the influence of social media on the local government politics of Bangladesh.

Research Question

This study presents the following question to explore the role of social-media in local government:

1. How does social media influence local government politics in Bangladesh in relation to people awareness, participation, and governance outcomes?

Objective of the Study

To address the research question, the objectives of the study are-

1. To examine how citizens use social media to access information and engage with local government representatives.
2. To analyse how local politicians and candidates leverage social media for campaigning and mobilization.
3. To assess the effects of social media dynamics, including misinformation, on accountability and governance outcomes.

Rationale of the Study

Particularly in emerging democracies, social media has become an influential force in civic engagement, political communication, and governance. Social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp have quickly become important avenues for public service engagement, voter mobilisation, and political discourse in Bangladesh. Although social media and national politics in Bangladesh have been the subject of much research, little is known about how social media affects the dynamics of local government, particularly Union Parishads.

In order to ensure accountability, promote democratic participation, and provide basic services at the local level, local government institutions are essential. However, bureaucratic obstacles, political patronage networks, and restricted access have historically limited traditional forms of communication in rural and semi-urban areas. Along with new opportunities for openness, public discourse, and inclusive participation, the growing use of social media in local political communication also brings with it risks like political polarisation, misinformation, the digital divide, and manipulation by local elites.

Despite this notable change, youth activism and national-level electoral politics have dominated academic studies and policy discussions in Bangladesh. Examining the ways in which social media affects citizen awareness, participation, and governance outcomes in local political contexts is therefore imperative. By examining secondary data, this study fills this knowledge gap by investigating how local representatives use digital platforms for communication and campaigning, how citizens interact with them online, and how online political behaviour impacts accountability and service delivery.

By examining these aspects, the study adds to the present discussion on digital democracy and provides useful information for scholars, policymakers, and development professionals

who want to improve digital governance, decentralised governance, and civic empowerment in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the results could direct future efforts to encourage inclusive and responsible digital engagement at the local level.

Literature Review

Global Studies on Social- Media and Local Politics

Social media has emerged as a vital tool for citizen engagement and local political communication on a global scale. According to studies, local governments can share information, include citizens in decision-making, and establish local policy agendas through social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Sobaci, 2016; Steinveg et al., 2023). The risks are also highlighted by research: online polarisation, digital inequality, and elite capture may restrict social media's ability to democratise (Fatema et al., 2022). Global data indicates that social media can both strengthen local power structures and empower citizens.

Bangladesh-Specific Studies: Youth Engagement, Union Parishad Politics, Digital Governance

In Bangladesh, social media usage for political purposes is rapidly expanding, especially among youth. University students use social media to access political information, discuss issues, and mobilize support (Razib & Pinky, 2023). Political parties utilize platforms like Facebook to engage with constituents and mobilize voters, although such communication often remains one-directional (Asaduzzaman, 2023). At the grassroots level, Union Parishads face challenges in citizen engagement and accountability; studies suggest that social media and digital governance tools, such as Union Digital Centers (UDCs), have the potential to enhance transparency and participation, but practical use is limited (Jahan, 2023; Rihan& Islam, 2023).

Although global studies provide theoretical insights into social media's influence on local governance, and Bangladesh-specific research works mostly highlight youth engagement and digital governance, there is limited research work on how social media specifically shapes citizen awareness, participation, and governance outcomes at the Union Parishad in Bangladesh. This gap highlights the importance of the present research.

Methodology

This study examines the role of social media in shaping local government politics in Bangladesh through a secondary data analysis approach. The focus is on understanding how social media influences citizen awareness, participation, and governance outcomes at the Union Parishad level. Data were collected from various sources, including articles, policy reports, official documents, media archives, and global literature on social media, newspaper and local governance. Only studies and reports published between 2016 and 2025 that addressed social media use, local political engagement, or digital governance were considered. Particular attention was given to Bangladesh-specific studies on Union Parishads, youth political engagement, and digital governance initiatives. Data collection involved systematic searches using keywords such as "social media AND local government AND Bangladesh," "Union Parishad AND social media," and "digital governance AND citizen participation" in databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Banglajol, and ResearchGate.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic content analysis approach. Patterns were identified in three key areas: (1) citizen awareness and local government politics (2) citizen engagement and political contestation (3) governance outcomes, including transparency and local political power. Findings were synthesized across Bangladesh-specific and global stud-

ies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on local politics. As the study relied exclusively on publicly available secondary data, no ethical approval was required.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Public Sphere Theory and Participatory Democracy Theory to explain how social media shapes local government politics in Bangladesh. Habermas’ Public Sphere Theory defines a space in which individuals rationalize through speech, debate public issues and affect political decisions (Habermas, 1989). Anticipating Jürgen Habermas, they make the point that with appropriate requirements in place the media work to "structure" public discourse. In the digital age of today, social media is a giant public sphere where one can obtain political information and can also voice his or her opinion to hold leaders accountable. At the local level in Bangladesh, platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp allow rural citizens to articulate development priorities, monitor public officials and expose corruption and issues in service delivery. In the process, these online tools promote political consciousness and accountability among rural citizens.

Participatory Democracy Theory highlights that; citizens should participate more directly in the conduct of their government than merely casting votes periodically (Pateman, 1970). Social media reduces participation barriers in enabling citizens to engage local leaders, demand their rights, mobilise for services and follow service provision. This is especially true in the case of Bangladesh for involving young people, rural communities and marginalized actors that often have restricted access to formal political arenas. This theory underpins also an analysis of the role of digital platforms in strengthening political participation, local accountability and civic empowerment.

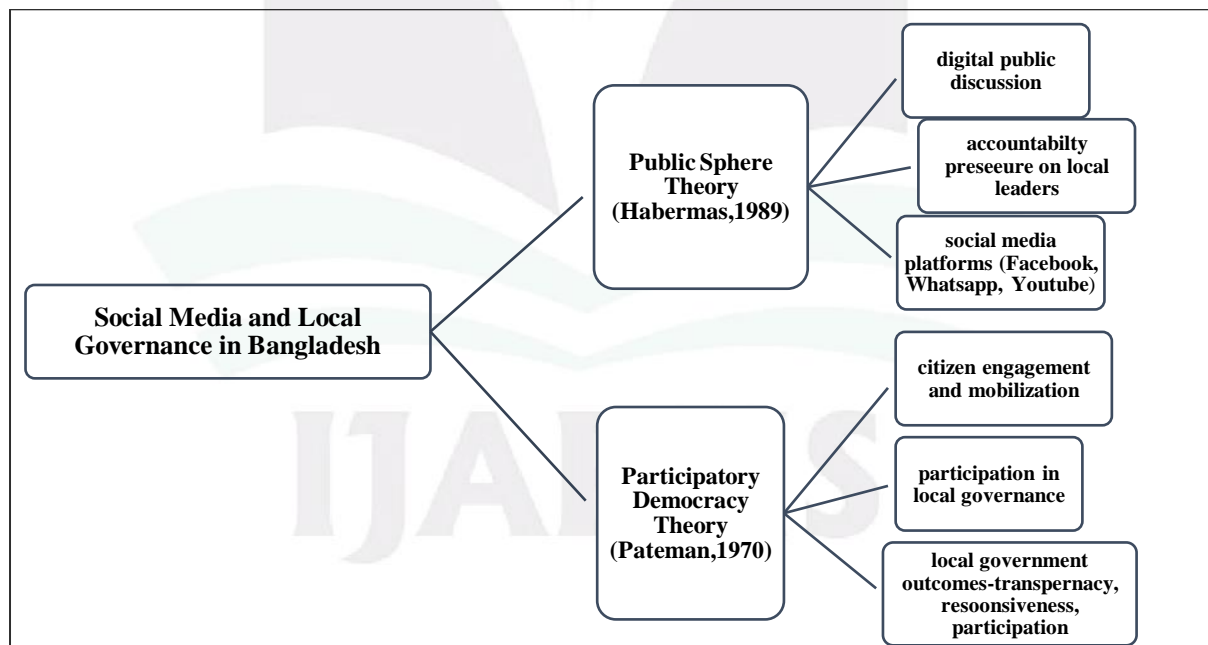


Figure 1: Diagram showing relation to social-media and local governance in Bangladesh perspective based on Public Sphere Theory and Participatory Democracy Theory.

Together, these theories position social media as a tool that can both broaden political deliberation (public sphere) and expand direct citizen participation (participatory democracy), offering a framework to assess its role in shaping local government politics, awareness, and governance outcomes in Bangladesh.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses findings over three core dimensions of the research question - awareness, participation, and governance outcomes with explicit emphasis on local government politics in Union Parishads (UPs) in Bangladesh.

Citizen Awareness and Local Government Politics

Findings show that social media significantly contributes to political information flow and awareness of Union Parishad activities, although usage varies by locality and political alignment. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the number of internet users in the country is 132.8 million, of which 119.06 million are mobile internet users and 13.74 million are internet service provider (ISP) and public switched telephone network (PSTN) users. In early 2024, there were 52.90 million Facebook, 33.60 million YouTube, and 37.36 million TikTok users nationwide, according to the advertising resources of the relevant organisations. (Hossain, 2025). A survey by BIGD revealed that 73% of citizens follow news via Facebook, including updates on local governance (BIGD, 2023). In UP politics, Facebook is increasingly used to: Announce village meetings, budget discussions, and development schemes. Also to Promote political achievements of elected UP chairmen and members, share political party communications at grassroots level, build visibility before elections. The analysis reveals that social media has become a noteworthy channel by which citizens gain awareness of local government politics in Bangladesh, especially in Union Parishads. Rather than solely traditional public meetings or announcement boards, Union Parishad chairman and members increasingly post updates, photographs and live streams of local development work and budget allocations on Facebook in order to showcase their political activity and service provision (Islam & Rahman, 2020). Example: In Madaripur district, Shiruail Union Parishad, UP representatives and officials use Facebook pages to share relief allocation and road construction updates, which increased citizen awareness. They give news of distributing TCB products to card holder through respective facebook page. (Shiruail Union Parishad fb page).

Social media has increased accountability in local government where communities are able to look over their leaders' shoulders more than ever before. But this visibility has brought with it increased political competition, where MPs of the ruling party and those associated with opposition often become locked in competing cycles of posting and seeking credit for projects. Therefore, while social media increases political consciousness, this consciousness is politicized especially during pre-election seasons where party competition for project credit and politically motivated campaigns/rumours are high.

Citizen Participation and Political Contestation

Study shows that Union Digital Centres (UDCs) linked to UPs reduce cost and time barriers for citizen participation also ensures public accountability. (Abedin et al., 2022). In terms of participation, the findings indicate that social media has created new spaces for citizens to engage in local-government politics beyond election rallies and ward meetings. Citizens are using comment threads, Messenger, and Facebook posts to report issues, question Union Parishad members, and demand response to local concerns. During Union Parishad elections (2021)-youth volunteers used Facebook Live to show campaign rallies, local candidates used

Facebook groups for vote appeals, supporters posted slogan videos, posters, live debate videos. In Gopalganj and Rangpur, public Facebook posts accused UP chairmen of favouring ruling party supporters for government allowances, showing digital checks on political favouritism. However, participation is also politically filtered: opposition supporters fear backlash for critical posts, independent candidates struggle against party-network campaigning, some UP officials remove critical comments or block citizens.

Governance Outcomes, Transparency, and Local Political Power

Evidence suggests that social media can improve accountability in Union Parishads by allowing officials to display development project completion photos, disclose relief beneficiaries online, and respond quickly to citizen complaints (Hassan et al., 2021). Sometimes chairman, members or UP secretary personally post on their social media about Union Parishad's important notice for example- Pakshi Union Parishad official facebook page. However, the effectiveness of these tools is constrained by local political dynamics. Many Union Parishad still experience weak committee functioning and selective transparency, with social media posts often emphasizing ruling-party achievements while overlooking opposition contributions or administrative shortcomings (The Daily Star, 2023). Consequently, while digital platforms enhance visibility and reputational accountability, local political control and elite capture limit the full democratic potential of social media in promoting transparent and accountable governance.

Dimension	Role of Social Media	Local Political Dynamic	Outcome
Awareness	High public reach, informs voters	Party branding & competition	Better awareness but politicized
Participation	Citizens engage & question	Patron-client constraints	Conditional participation
Governance	More transparency in cases	Selective disclosure; partisan control	Partial accountability gains

Figure 2: synthesis of the results and discussion

Summary of the Discussion

Social media enhances:

- Grassroots political communication
- Information access and visibility
- Opportunities for citizens to question UP officials

But its influence is shaped by:

- Local party politics
- Patronage networks
- Power dynamics and fear of retaliation
- Digital literacy & access gaps

Limitations of the Study

This study was mainly relied on secondary data but the availability of secondary data of the research on social media and local government is still limited. As a result, local level examples, empirical findings were sometimes supplemented by credible media reports and documents. Moreover, social media using in rural areas can be informal and undocumented which made it harder to capture complete patterns through secondary sources alone. Despite these limitations, the study offers insights about social media impact on local government politics.

Conclusion

Social media in Bangladesh has empowered people from its 4,578 Union Parishads (UPs) to find out more about what their local government is doing, ask questions of them and know more about the development projects being implemented. It has created new channels for ordinary people to have a say and keep their leaders in check. But this is constrained by local politics, favouritism and power hierarchies, as well as unequal access to the digital tools required. So, social media, while it has a role to play, doesn't automatically make politics fair or equal for all. To make better use of social media, the government would need to enhance digital access, educate people in how to use these tools and prevent online engagement from being either unfair or politically biased.

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