

## The Digital Divide: How Social Media Fuels Real-world tensions in Bangladesh?

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### **Abstract**

*Bangladesh's digital landscape has undergone significant changes over the last decade. Sites like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok have grown into useful tools for sharing information, talking to each other, and getting involved in politics. However, the growth of false information, hate speech, and extremist material, as well as differences in who can use digital technologies and how well they know how to use them, have made it harder for people to get along and stay safe. This research looks at how the digital gap affects people's use of social media and how these changes make problems worse in Bangladesh. The study uses a document-based, qualitative approach that looks at secondary sources like scholarly literature, government papers, and trustworthy news stories. It is based on the Digital Divide Theory, the Media System Dependency Theory, and the Social Amplification of Risk Framework. The results show that structural inequality, selective exposure, echo chambers, and artificial amplification make polarisation worse, allow online abuse, and sometimes start fights in real life. Low-effort online action, also known as "slacktivism," may raise knowledge without making big changes in society. This illustrates the importance of staying involved in politics. The study stresses how important it is to improve digital access, knowledge, filter out harmful material, and link online participation to real-world projects. By focusing on these areas, lawmakers and citizens can make digital places safer, friendlier, and more useful. This will strengthen and more reliably support Bangladesh's society as a whole.*

**Keywords:** *Digital divide; social media; misinformation; polarization; civic engagement; Bangladesh; real-world tensions*

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## **Introduction**

In the last ten years, Bangladesh has seen much digital growth. Social media has become the primary means for people to communicate, share information, and connect with others. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok are just a few of the platforms that now reach millions of people and shape public opinion, political debate, and everyday social interactions (Hossen et al, 2025). According to recent reports, social media use in Bangladesh increased by more than 22% in 2024. About 53 million people, or almost one-third of the population, are active users who go online regularly (The Daily Star, 2024). Even with this progress, there are still big differences in how people can access and use digital technologies. Cities usually have faster internet speeds, more gadgets, and better connections than rural regions, where many people have trouble getting online and do not know much about technology (Hossen et al., 2025). The "digital divide" refers to these differences. They make it harder for some people to participate online and can lead to different ways of interacting with social media information. Social networking sites have also been able to influence real-world events, in addition to causing access difficulties. Recent studies have shown that online spaces can encourage people to get involved in their communities, but they can also make people more divided, make debates stronger, and make social tensions worse (Abir et al., 2025; Rahman & Jahan, 2020). It is so easy to share information online that false information can spread quickly and influence how individuals think and act, which can impact their interactions with others in real life. Because of these developments, we need to examine how uneven access to technology and how individuals use social media can be linked to societal problems worsening or improving.

Driven by the persistent digital gap in Bangladesh, this study seeks to investigate the difference in use of social media by diverse demographic, social and economic groups in Bangladesh and how the digital divide (i.e., unequal access to technology and the Internet) shapes their behaviours. It also investigates whether hate speech, fake news, and misinformation on social media lead to actual conflict, protest, and violence in the communities of Bangladesh. Finally, by employing a multi-theoretical lens—integrating Digital Divide Theory, the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF), and Media System Dependency Theory—this research critically analyses the causal relationships between the digital divide. Finally, the study evaluates whether these digital trends catalyse real-world conflict and social unrest, aiming to provide relevant organisations with evidence-based, implementable policy options to mitigate these risks within the Bangladeshi context.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The digital gap is the difference in how easy it is for people to get and use digital technology like cellphones, computers, and the internet. This disparity frequently indicates more significant social, economic, and infrastructural challenges (Robinson et al., 2020; Van Deursen et al., 2020). Millions have entered the digital sphere due to significant improvements in internet connectivity in Bangladesh; as a result, social media has become a primary venue for interaction, networking, and information sharing (Hossain et al., 2024). Still, unequal access between urban and rural areas, differences in digital literacy, and different ways people use the internet continue to make the online world fragmented (Hossain et al, 2023). The Bangladeshi diaspora also has a significant impact on online discussions. People who live outside of their home country often use social media to talk about issues in their home country. This adds different points of view, but it can also change the

way people talk about issues in ways that make differences or misunderstandings worse (Rahman, 2010). In this interconnected space, the melding of local and global perspectives can exacerbate preexisting schisms among various social groups (Vancluysen, 2022).

The spread of false or unverified information online is another problem that will not go away. Without robust fact-checking systems and a large number of people who are proficient in computer use, false information can spread rapidly and influence people's perceptions (Hossain et al., 2023; Kenney & Zysman, 2016). Content that is emotionally charged or sensational—especially when paired with striking imagery—can quickly capture attention, potentially shaping narratives in ways that lack evidence-based support (Cinelli et al., 2021). Democratic societies benefit from a diversity of perspectives; however, growing intolerance towards divergent views can convert constructive discourse into polarised conflict (Lindgren, 2021). Some content creators and influencers, in their quest for greater engagement, may prioritise sensationalism over accuracy, unintentionally exacerbating divisions in the digital realm (Hossain et al, 2024). These processes might spread into real-world settings, affecting social cohesion and stability (Rahman, 2010). Taking these factors into account, it is necessary to examine how the correlation between the digital gap and social media usage patterns might exacerbate real-world conflicts in Bangladesh. The findings of this study may inform the development of inclusive and ethical digital engagement strategies that enhance social cohesion and resilience.

### **Literature Review**

There is a need to have a strategy that encourages appropriate online conduct, fills in the gaps in the system, and makes the group stronger in order to deal with these problems. To bridge the digital gap, we need to make it easier for people in rural regions to get online, improve the amenities there, and encourage the use of cheap technology. Taking lessons that educate individuals on how to utilise technology properly might also help them think critically. To stop hate speech and misleading information and maintain the right to free expression, we need to work together on things like fact-checking, initiatives to raise public awareness, and content regulation. We need to be cautious so that online arguments do not escalate into real-life confrontations. This means setting up quick-response systems, organising campaigns to get people more involved in their communities, and making laws tougher so that support can be delivered right away.

Online campaigns should be linked with real-world actions like campaigning for policy, building communities, and volunteering to get people actually active in politics. The idea is to ensure that groups that are underrepresented have the same opportunities to participate as other groups. Lastly, regulations must be implemented to safeguard vulnerable groups like the media, women leaders, and minorities by making harassment, trolling, and doxxing against the law. People also need to learn how to be secure and private online.

Ultimately, this study argues that social media in Bangladesh facilitates social interaction, communication, and community engagement. However, there are significant hazards associated with it, and not everyone benefits from it. We need a plan that includes access, literacy, regulation, public engagement, and community resilience all at once to produce the best results and decrease tensions. Bangladesh can make digital spaces safer, more helpful, and more open to everyone by narrowing the digital gap, promoting responsible online conduct, and connecting online actions to real-world results. This will help the country thrive and bring people together.

The study stresses how important it is for everyone to have the same access to digital tools. It also shows how important it is to have smart governance, a great business, and a smart society all working together to make digital participation more open to everyone. Severo Leite et al. (2021) say that to close the digital gap, we need a plan with clear goals and a date, as well as strong partnerships, changes to the law, and smart use of resources. Hossen et al. (2025) talk about how quickly Bangladesh's digital world is changing and how important social media has become for people to meet and work together in the community. Over 100 million people use the internet extensively, and nearly 200 million people own cell phones. These changes have impacted how people participate in and make decisions within the country. Although social media allows people to connect and participate, Hossen et al (2025) note that it also has drawbacks that need to be addressed so that society benefits. Zafarullah & Ferdous (2021) focus on youth involvement in digital platforms, particularly the influence of millennials and Gen Z in fostering political participation and inclusive digital projects. Their research highlights how crucial it is to empower youth through seminars, skill-building, and secure online spaces. They contend that utilising the digital skills of the next generation can contribute to the development of a more open and involved society, even though structural injustices still make things challenging.

Occasionally, unregulated online environments may exacerbate social tensions, as Hussain (2015) demonstrates in his critical analysis of the negative effects of social media. According to Hussain (2015), implementing responsible digital engagement and literacy initiatives in Bangladesh could mitigate potential risks and enhance the beneficial effects of social media. Additionally, he maintains that institutional governance and meticulous control are indispensable. Despite the scarcity of studies examining the interaction between these factors and their influence on real-world conflicts, prior research has provided significant insights into the digital divide, social media use, and adolescent participation in Bangladesh. Instead of examining the interplay between social media, skills, and access in transforming society, most research has concentrated on their individual effects. In addition, not much has been said about how the diaspora affects online conversations and how it relates to digital involvement in the home nation. This study aims to tackle these issues by providing data-driven policy and practical suggestions that examine the relationships among social media usage, digital disparities, and the representation of actual violence in Bangladesh.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the interrelation between social media usage, the digital divide, and the increase in violence in Bangladesh. This study employs the Digital Divide Theory, the Media System Dependency Theory, and the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF) to construct a robust theoretical framework. These themes were chosen because they help us understand how people use technology, why some individuals have greater access to it than others, and how what people read online influences their behaviour in real life.

#### ***Digital Divide Theory***

van Dijk (2020) believes that the Digital Divide Theory looks at three different but related ways that people are different: skills, access, and results. The first level, "access disparities," looks at how people in Bangladesh can get to digital devices and a stable internet connection based on their age, gender, level of education, income, and whether they live in a city or a rural region. For example, just 37% of people in rural Bangladesh use the internet, yet 54% of individuals in metropolitan

Bangladesh do. This is a huge change (Aziz, 2020). The second level, skills and usage patterns, examines how effectively and intelligently people utilise digital tools. Many people, especially those who live in rural areas, may have digital devices but not the skills or motivation to fully benefit from participating online (Aziz, 2020). Lastly, the third level, offline outcomes, looks at how digital engagement can lead to real-world benefits, such as economic, educational, and social gains. Even when people have access and skills, they do not always get good results. This can make existing inequalities worse and limit the potential impact of digital inclusion on society (Van Deursen et al, 2020).

### ***Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory***

Media system dependency theory argues that people need media to meet informational, personal, and social needs; the degree of reliance influences attitudes and behaviours (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Social media may evolve into the primary source of information about social events, particularly in situations where other trustworthy sources of knowledge are limited. Users in Bangladesh are increasingly depending on social media for local and national information, rendering the population susceptible to the impact of online content on attitudes, opinions, and likely reactions (Hossen et al, 2025; Hussain, 2015). MSD is especially pertinent for examining how social media affects attitudes toward problems and influences public opinion—potentially leading to real-world conflicts.

### ***Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF)***

The Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF) (Kasperson et al., 1988) discusses how digital networks, societal institutions, and the media influence and amplify people's perceptions of risk. In addition to technical or scientific risks, risks can also stem from how people perceive things, how the media portrays them, and how individuals communicate with each other. Using SARF, the study connects patterns of online involvement to results in the real world. This means that digital behaviour is linked to outcomes in society. By analysing sensational or emotionally charged content, social media material has the power to raise perceived risks, influence community reactions, and spark actual conflict or tension in Bangladesh (Gillespie, 2018; Trottier, 2017).

SARF examines the social and psychological impacts of online material on people's thoughts and behaviours. MSD Theory explores how people rely on media for information and support. Digital Divide Theory investigates structural inequities in access and skill. Together, these three theories provide a comprehensive understanding. This combined framework directs the investigation of how social media use patterns and digital inequities can aggravate hostilities in Bangladesh.

### **Research Methodology**

Investigating the relationship between the digital divide, social media involvement, and social tensions in Bangladesh, this study uses a qualitative, document-centric approach. Because there is no original data gathered, this study depends on a methodical examination and synthesis of reliable online media reports, academic papers, government reports, policy papers, and secondary sources. By this approach, one may fully understand trends in digital access, social media engagement, and their possible societal repercussions. The research employed comprehensive secondary data from various sources. Reports from the government and other organisations provided information on Bangladesh's internet use, digital literacy, social media use, and relevant rules and regulations. Scholarly literature provided theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence regarding the digital divide, media influence, and social tensions in analogous contexts. Furthermore, reputable news and

online reports were examined to pinpoint occurrences where digital media content seemed to align with public unrest or societal controversies. A structured review process was used to make sure that the chosen sources were reliable and useful. We examined reports and articles based on several criteria, including publication date (ideally within the last ten years), the trustworthiness of the publishing organisation, relevance to Bangladesh, and coverage of digital technologies, social media, and public tension. Thematic coding was employed to identify patterns and recurring narratives related to the digital divide, social media influence, and offline societal effects.

The gathered data underwent qualitative analysis through a blend of content analysis and thematic synthesis. Key themes identified included disparities in access to digital devices and the internet, differential use of social media platforms across demographic groups, and the dissemination of information that may influence public perceptions and social interactions. A comparative analysis was performed between urban and rural settings, emphasising regional disparities in digital engagement. This methodology enables the study to critically evaluate the correlation between prevailing digital disparities and online behavioural patterns in Bangladesh, as well as social tensions, without relying on primary data collection. By bringing together information from many reliable sources, the study gives us a strong basis for understanding how digital media affects people and how to respond to it in policy.

### **Real-World Tensions from Digital Divide and Social Media in Bangladesh: Major Findings**

The digital divide in Bangladesh, combined with the way social media works, has caused numerous real-world problems, illustrating the impact of online behaviour on real-world social outcomes. There are real-world effects on social cohesion, trust, and political stability from gaps in internet access, digital literacy, and exposure to false information. These gaps do not just affect how people interact online. Things that happen in digital spaces often have real-world effects, and sometimes they exacerbate tensions to a greater extent than they initially were. Social media can facilitate connections and community involvement, but these advantages are frequently obscured by sensational, divisive, or misleading content.

### ***Misinformation, Disinformation, and Rumours***

Misinformation spreads quickly on internet platforms in Bangladesh, especially in delicate areas like politics, religion, and criminal activity. Social media makes it easier for false or misleading information to spread quickly, usually with the help of photoshopped images, videos, or made-up stories meant to arouse strong feelings (Ehsan & bin Ahsan, 2024). In addition to spreading false information, these digital artefacts also cause social isolation, mistrust, and anxiety, particularly in groups with limited access to alternative information sources or low levels of digital literacy. Adolescents and young adults are greatly impacted by misinformation. More than two-thirds of Bangladeshi youth believe that false information is a major cause of stress, anxiety, and confusion (UNICEF, 25). This group is more receptive to emotionally charged information, especially when it is shared through peer networks, because they primarily get their news from social media and mobile devices. Youth discussion topic in online regarding politics, military, law enforcement agencies, religion, or ideology may also cause uncertainty, which makes them more susceptible to social and political issues.

A major factor in the quick spread of misinformation is the lack of effective fact-checking systems and coordinated digital literacy campaigns. Though their reach is modest, some groups in

Bangladesh—media NGOs and fact-checking units among them—strive to check facts. This allows misleading information to go uncorrected, disproportionately affecting individuals with limited education, those residing in rural areas, and those new to the internet (Haque et al., 2022). As those most in need of accurate information are usually unable to evaluate it critically, the unequal distribution of digital abilities aggravates the systemic inequalities highlighted by Digital Divide Theory. The theoretical consequences of these stories in reality are explained by the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF). Peer networks, media attention, and communication methods can all worsen socially produced risks, according to SARF (Kasperson et al., 1988). Rumours regarding crime, religious conflict, or political events in Bangladesh may get much attention online and spread swiftly across many media and platforms. This amplification makes the risk seem higher to groups, and it also gets people talking, which might lead to demonstrations, mob violence, or being shunned by society.

If individuals have access to inaccurate information and adverse social and political circumstances, they are more susceptible to suffering harm. For instance, accusations of political, military, law enforcement agencies, or religious wrongdoing could widen the gap between cities and rural areas, lead to fights in neighbourhoods, or make people more politicised, all of which would alter how people behave. These trends show the link between digital inequality and the role of social media: people who do not know how to use technology well are more likely to find false information. On the other hand, real networks like neighbourhoods and local governments still have a big impact, even though social media speeds up the spread of information.

People in Bangladesh not only have different ideas because of false facts, lies, and rumours, but these things also make problems worse that were already there. These problems require more than just technological fixes, such as improved fact-checking and content management. To get more people to fight back against the bad effects of false or inaccurate information, we also need laws, neighbourhood efforts, and lessons on how to use technology safely. All of these things show how greatly unfettered sharing of information and digital changes can impact trust and relationships between people.

### ***Hate Speech, Extremism, and Radicalisation***

Hate speech, radical ideas, and other very strong views are being shared on social media sites in Bangladesh. It is easier for hurtful pictures, videos, and texts to get around quickly these days, which has made social weaknesses worse. This is especially true for groups that are already at a disadvantage because of their race, religion, or income. These problems are made worse by algorithmic suggestion systems, which create echo chambers where users are constantly exposed to politically extreme information. This makes things more divisive and reinforces biases that people already have (Tasnim et al, 2024; Hossain et al, 2025). It is unfortunate when people from different groups lose trust in each other. Much of the content that causes disagreement changes how people see different groups and makes them more suspicious, anxious, and angry. Reports say that online campaigns or posts that go viral that target Bangladeshi minorities can make people feel left out, make threats, or even cause protests in some places. This illustrates how online hatred can have real-world effects. For marginalised groups, these kinds of situations often lead to more social and economic upheaval, which feeds the loops of exclusion and discrimination.

The Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) provides a useful framework for understanding these concepts. More and more, people are turning to social media for

their political, social, and informational needs, especially when there are not many or any reliable sources of information available. This makes it easier for internet information to change people's thoughts and actions, which means that hate speech and radical stories can have a bigger effect on people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Because they get their news, neighbourhood information, and political talk from social media, some groups in Bangladesh are more likely to be affected by these factors. This makes it more likely that online anger will turn into physical fights, problems between communities, or random acts of violence.

The capacity to use technology is intimately related to online behaviour and social inequality. Individuals who struggle to analyse their reading are more susceptible to influence. Social media is frequently used in Bangladesh to disseminate hate against different groups, including political parties, military, law enforcement agencies, interest-driven organisations, and radical networks, exploit these weaknesses to disseminate extreme ideas. By spreading extremely controversial material that encourages more engagement, social media algorithms worsen current divisions. Apart from the problems they create, radicalisation and hate speech have negative effects. The lengthy consideration of radical ideas can degrade democratic debate, normalise hate, and compromise community cohesion. People from poor backgrounds may see economic differences worsen if they are reluctant to participate in social or online activities due to concerns about harassment or retaliation.

It is necessary to use several different approaches. Setting rules for content control, encouraging people to participate in essential media, knowing how to utilise technology effectively, and promoting open online debates are all critical things to do. Better forecasts and reduced internet hate speech turning into actual-world violence will become a reality for policymakers and the general public if they grasp the interaction between structural inequality, computer amplification, and social media dependence.

### ***Polarisation and Echo Chambers***

Social media channels called "echo chambers" expose people mostly to truths, concepts, and stories that confirm their preexisting convictions. Different viewpoints are concurrently marginalised or eliminated. In Bangladesh, these digital platforms worsen confirmation bias by lowering people's willingness to consider different points of view and therefore raising their chance of accepting information that uncritically upholds their already held convictions. The propensity of people inside the same group to have comparable beliefs aggravates political and social differences and impairs the capacity to participate in meaningful conversation. The significant disparity in rural and metropolitan access to technology and knowledge also exacerbates these consequences. People living in urban regions are more inclined to be exposed to a larger range of information sources, have simpler access to more channels, and can more easily critically assess media. People in rural areas tend to share less frequently due to limited access to technology, restricted internet, and a reliance on a few well-known social networking platforms. This makes their susceptibility to localised or viral stories rise. This inconsistent exposure raises the chances of offline disagreements, which in turn promotes environments that aggravate polarisation and strengthen past ideas (Siddiquee, Maji & Laha, 2022; Haque et al, 2022).

There is a structure to the Digital Divide Theory that facilitates our comprehension of these processes. Due to unequal access to technology and digital literacy, certain groups are unable to

partake in numerous online activities or evaluate material critically. When selective exposure is combined with algorithmically curated feeds prioritising connection over truth, echo chambers that reinforce each other emerge. People are constantly given information that backs up what they already believe, while information that supports different points of view is often left out. It is harder to agree on things, communicate clearly, and understand each other when this happens. These digital echo chambers have a significant impact on the real world. Political mobilisation, interpersonal relationships, and even conflict can all be impacted by online polarisation.

Arguments on social media concerning contentious political or religious matters, for example, frequently cause people from different communities to become less trusting of one another, which can result in protests, conflicts, or social exclusion. Digital environments are dynamically interacting with local contexts and societal structures, as demonstrated by the iterative cycle of offline reaction and online reinforcement (Lindgren, 2021; Trottier, 2017).

Echo chambers can also hinder pluralistic discourse and strengthen political partisanship. When people believe that opposing viewpoints pose a threat to their social or ideological identity, they may react defensively by spreading counternarratives, harassing particular people, or launching campaigns against those they view as enemies. These acts exacerbate the situation by creating feedback loops that worsen problems both offline and online. To lessen the effects of echo chambers and division, we need to take a more diverse approach. Reducing echo chambers can be achieved by expanding digital learning programs, ensuring equitable access to technology, and fostering diverse perspectives.

Some changes that could help slow down fast growth could be made to the platform itself, such as adding fact-checking, reviewing material suggestions, and making algorithms clearer. Discussion boards and other forms of interactive media are important community-based projects that help people with different opinions work together and connect in helpful ways. Bangladesh's echo chambers and divisions illustrate how people's natural desire to receive information exacerbates social problems when they lack fair access to the internet. We need to deal with these problems if we want to make society more open, informed, and united.

### ***Offline Violence and Escalation***

There are more and more heated online arguments in Bangladesh. In this case, it shows how closely internet conversations and face-to-face interactions are linked. Political messages, popular videos, and emotional pictures are all examples of online content that could lead to real actions, like destroying property, attacking, or large-scale protests. Instead of staying away from social media, these cases demonstrate how it can influence people's behaviour and have a direct impact on society. One of the main reasons for these problems is how digital material affects people.

The 1976-created Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory, developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, illustrates how readily information from the internet can be applied in the real world. People who get their news, advice, and social cues from social media are more likely to believe fake news online when they cannot get local news or other types of media. In Bangladesh, social media is quickly becoming the main way that people in both cities and rural areas learn about local events, polls, and community disputes. This makes it more likely that they will interact with material that is controversial or divides people. Online arguments are more likely to escalate into physical altercations when institutional and structural problems are present. Limited law enforcement

resources, long-term involvement, and a lack of governmental supervision all contribute to the potential for conflicts to escalate without resolution. Local governments often fail to take sufficient action to stop popular content or explain the potential consequences, allowing the community to organise quickly. The digital divide between cities and rural areas exacerbates this problem. People in cities usually have access to fact-checking tools and different points of view. In contrast, people in rural areas get information that has been filtered or not fully examined, which makes it more likely for people to misunderstand and act out (Rifat, 20224).

Communities are more or less likely to be victims of internet violence depending on their history and current political situation. Digital stories that deal with racial, religious, military or political differences can cause problems in the real world. For example, fake information or upsetting tweets about elections, religious practices, or illegal activities have sometimes led to protests, mob violence, or fights between groups. These examples demonstrate how online material can lead people to perceive more risks, encourage collaboration, and ultimately yield results that can be observed and discussed further online.

Online escalation must be stopped by taking several steps. Regulatory systems need to be strengthened to properly monitor the online activities. However, teaching people how to use technology and think critically might help them think about what they are being asked before they answer. Local governments or community leaders can lessen the severity of growing problems by moving quickly. Platforms are responsible for filtering content and ensuring algorithms do not prioritise content that makes people feel bad. Policymakers and citizens can reduce the likelihood of online arguments turning violent by addressing both the social and technological aspects of the issue.

Finally, offline violence and its worsening in Bangladesh are caused by a complicated mix of digital content, user dependence, structural inequality, and societal conditions. When you combine SARF and MSD Theory, you get a full picture of how online risk perceptions and dependence on digital media can help people quickly get together in real life. This makes it clear how important it is to do everything you can to stop this from happening.

### ***Targeted Harassment and Privacy Harms***

Social media platforms are sometimes making online contents through coordinated online attacks, doxxing, cyberbullying, and other forms of digital abuse. These actions frequently target individuals or groups that are socially, politically, or culturally marginalised, such as activists, journalists, human rights advocates, female leaders, and minority communities. The repercussions of such harassment extend beyond the digital domain; the conflation of public and private spheres facilitates the swift transmutation of online abuses into offline threats, encompassing intimidation, social ostracism, and physical violence (Foucault, 1995; Nissenbaum, 2010; Boyd, 2014). Many different ways targeted harassment works. Algorithmic amplification and virality make it easier for private or harmful information to spread quickly, which makes victims more visible and attacks more intense. Tagging, commenting, and sharing on social media make it easier for harmful content to spread, which can exacerbate reputational damage and emotional distress. Additionally, digital anonymity empowers offenders, enabling individuals or organised groups to perpetrate attacks without immediate consequences, thereby intensifying the psychological and social effects on victims (Boyd, 2014).

Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) elucidates the significant real-world repercussions of online harassment. In situations where people use social media for socialising, networking, and sharing information, attacks on digital visibility can make it hard to live and work, limit freedom of speech, and make people less likely to get involved in their communities. For instance, women who engage in political discussions online may be harassed, which makes them less likely to participate in civic activities both online and offline. This keeps gender-based inequalities alive in public spaces. Privacy harms are just as important. Personal information, such as home addresses, family details, or employment records, can be exposed on purpose or by accident. These kinds of breaches not only put people's safety at risk, but they also make people less likely to trust digital platforms, make them less likely to participate, and make it harder to build inclusive online communities. The absence of widespread awareness about digital security, along with inadequate legal protections, fosters an environment where harassment and privacy infringements can endure with minimal repercussions (Nissenbaum, 2010).

There are very bad effects on society. Targeted abuse reinforces patterns of fear and isolation, pushes vulnerable groups to the edges, and makes systemic injustices worse. When false information or stories that divide people are added to serious cases of organised online abuse, it can lead to violence or public shame. This highlights the importance of establishing quick-response systems, enacting laws that describe and punish digital abuse, and supporting public awareness programs that educate people on how to protect their privacy, behave responsibly online, and file reports. Finally, abuse and invasions of privacy in Bangladesh show how behaviour patterns, social frailty, and technological progress can affect each other. To address these issues, we require a comprehensive plan that encompasses holding platforms accountable, educating users on technology, enacting protective laws, and engaging at the local level. This will ensure that digital spaces remain safe, friendly, and open to participation by everyone.

### ***Slacktivism and Symbolic Activism***

People in Bangladesh can now be more involved in public life thanks to social media. People can now leverage digital platforms, such as petitions, likes, shares, and comments, to make a difference in addressing political, social, and humanitarian issues. However, much of this participation is either not very challenging or is merely for show. This is known as "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2011; Christensen, 2011). Although these actions may draw attention to an issue or show support, they rarely make a significant difference in the real world or lead to substantial policy changes. For instance, viral campaigns about helping people after a disaster, fighting corruption, or promoting gender equality may get much attention online. However, turning this digital visibility into real-world community results or changes to the law is often hard to do. There are a few reasons why slacktivism happens. First, social media is designed to make it easy and cheap for people to interact quickly, which is good for their mental health. People believe they are supporting a cause when they like or share something. Second, the algorithm's focus on interaction gives more weight to content that sparks debate than to that which encourages in-depth reflection or persistent action. Because of this, users may think their online activity is more important than it is, which can give them a false sense of strength and make them less motivated to take real action. In Bangladesh, this is especially clear because people in urban and rural areas have limited knowledge of technology. As a result, some individuals engage in various ways, not fully understanding the impact of their digital actions on the real world.

Some people argue that symbolic action does not make a significant difference in the world, but it can still have a positive impact. Even if they do not try hard, people can change their views, show support for a cause, and prompt institutions to take action. However, the most important question is how to move people from awareness of online problems to action in their communities. If we do not have a plan to turn your digital activity into real-world projects, such as community organising, recruiting volunteers, or advocating for policy change, social media efforts may only generate excitement for a short time before people lose interest and stop using them. The Digital Divide Theory and the Media System Dependency Theory together explain these changes scientifically. People who get a lot of their news and knowledge about politics from social media may think that they are more involved. Concrete effects, on the other hand, are limited because people cannot act or cannot access offline ways to act. Symbolic action may remain the main way people get involved in rural or marginalised areas where physical involvement is limited by structural hurdles, making it harder for people to have a bigger impact on government.

To improve social media's ability to engage people in important political activities, interventions should focus on long-term lobbying and building people's skills. Digital literacy programs can teach people how to collaborate, evaluate campaigns, and identify opportunities to take action in the real world. By arranging volunteer activities, linking digital action with policy lobbying, or making specific calls to action, platforms and civil society groups can help with offline translation. Symbolic digital participation can help build a culture of thoughtful, long-term, and strategic participation, making it a powerful tool for social change. In Bangladesh, slacktivism and symbolic action show how hard it can be to make changes in the real world and keep up an online presence at the same time. First, social media may assist more people in becoming aware of and interested in something. If you want your political activity actually to make a difference, though, you need to employ strategies that link online participation to long-term in-person involvement. This is more likely to happen to groups that struggle to access and secure funding within their own organisation.

The findings suggest that the complex interplay between digital inequality, disinformation, and social media usage exacerbates the situation. People who do not utilise technology frequently are more likely to trust misleading or hazardous information that spreads through social networks and their algorithms. Combining Digital Divide Theory, MSD, and SARF into a single theory illustrates how psychological, social, and societal factors interact. With this idea, problems in the real world become things that happen online. Bangladesh needs a detailed plan to solve these issues. This method should ensure that everyone has access to the internet, encourages critical thinking about technology, and utilises rules, community engagement, and platform-level modifications to prevent physical harm from escalating due to online arguments.

## **Discussion**

This study looked into the link between people in Bangladesh, the digital gap, and the use of social media. It highlighted how changes in structure, digital content, and online behaviours may impact things that happen in the real world. The findings indicate that disparities in access to digital technology, digital proficiency, and algorithmically enhanced information contribute to societal division, escalate conflict, and hinder public participation. The findings suggest that the digital divide in Bangladesh has a significant impact on social media usage and the vulnerability of individuals to online harm. The Digital Divide Theory (Van Deursen et al., 2020) posits that

disparities in internet access, technological proficiency, and device availability hinder the participation of certain individuals in online conversations. For instance, individuals residing in rural regions are more likely to trust false information and be harassed online because they cannot quickly locate counterarguments or fact-checking tools (Haque et al., 2022). These faults in how the system is set up make it difficult to get active in politics. There is a greater chance that online discussions may turn into real-life conflicts.

A great example of the processes mentioned in the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF) (Kasperson et al., 1988) is how quickly false information can spread, especially about politics, religion, and crime. Sensational or intense material makes risks seem bigger, which changes how people act in real life and stirs up public opinion. It seems that being exposed to digital risks is a problem that affects all generations (Muhammad & Arafat, 2024) because young adults and teens are especially at risk. These reasons make it clear that programs that teach people how to use technology better and encourage them to think critically about what they find online are very important, especially in places where internet access is limited. Asnim et al. (2024) and Hossain et al. (2025) say that social media sites in Bangladesh have made it easier for hate speech and extreme stories to spread, which has often made communities more divided and built more echo chambers.

The Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) says that people who get most of their news and tips from social media are especially at risk. The community no longer trusts one another, especially regarding racial and religious diversity. This shows how dangerous unregulated online places can be for society and how important it is to hold platforms responsible and regulate them.

The results show that echo chambers and limited interaction exacerbate opinion differences in Bangladesh. Confirmation bias gets stronger when people from different areas, especially towns and the country, do not have the same level of digital skills. This makes it harder to see other points of view. Adding these behaviours to structural inequality makes society more divided, which makes it more likely that people will engage in real-life conflicts. To stop polarisation, we need to make it easier for people to access digital spaces and support a wide range of critical thinking in those spaces. Online content that makes people feel very strongly can lead to violence in real life, such as riots, property damage, or attacks on individuals. Putting SARF and MSD Theory together shows how these problems get worse: What people read online changes how they think about danger, and when people rely on digital media for news, they act as a group (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Kasperson et al., 1988). Weak legal systems and delayed responses exacerbate these risks. This highlights the importance of having quick-response systems, governmental protections, and community-level knowledge programs to mitigate the escalation of online arguments.

The merging of public and private spaces on social media increases the dangers of targeted harassment, cyberbullying, and doxxing (Foucault, 1995; Nissenbaum, 2010; Boyd, 2014). Women leaders, journalists, and minority groups are examples of vulnerable groups that are at risk of both physical and mental harm. This shows how online abuse can lead to harm in the real world. To solve these problems, we need legal protections, accountability from platforms, and programs that teach people how to use technology safely and respond to harassment. The study underscores the constraints of online civic engagement when it is merely symbolic or minimal in effort (Morozov, 2011; Christensen, 2011). Although awareness and attention may increase, substantial social change is frequently negligible. Digital Divide Theory and MSD Theory together suggest that using social

media without engaging in offline activities can exacerbate inequalities in civic influence, particularly in communities that are already disadvantaged. The main goals of interventions should be to turn online activities into useful projects that happen in real life, to encourage long-term advocacy, and to improve people's ability to join effectively in public life.

### **Conclusion**

The digital gap, social conflicts in Bangladesh, and social media use are all complex topics examined in this study. People's interactions with online information are significantly influenced by differences in access to digital technology, the material that is enhanced by algorithms, and digital literacy. These things frequently lead to fights, division, abuse, and a lack of interest in politics in real life. There are various ways that social media may benefit and damage society, such as through echo chambers, hate speech, distributing inaccurate information, and symbolic activities. People can profit from talking about politics and being active in politics, but it can also undermine the security and cohesiveness of society. The Media System Dependency Theory, the Digital Divide Theory, and the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF) may all be used together to build a holistic framework for looking at these developments. Socially enhanced perceptions of peril might result in offline mobilisation, abuse, or confrontation. Also, when people acquire most of their news from social media, they are more inclined to trust extreme reports and become divided. The digital divide also makes it tougher for certain people to use the internet and find their way around online areas.

We need to establish a whole strategy that solves the faults with the way things are set up currently, encourages people to act responsibly online, and makes society stronger. To bridge the digital gap, we need to make it easy for people to get online, fix the infrastructure in rural regions, and enable them to utilise affordable products. Taking some digital literacy lessons might also help people think more critically. To maintain the right to free speech, we must all work together to regulate content, educate the public, and combat hate speech and misinformation. To stop online discussions from developing into real confrontations, we need to take precautions ahead of time. Some of these efforts are creating strong laws, initiatives to raise awareness in the community, and quick-response systems that let people take action right away.

It is also important to link online activities to real-world events, such as neighbourhood planning, policy petitions, and service initiatives, to get more people interested in politics. The idea is to provide groups that are not well-represented with the tools they need to be able to participate on an equal footing. Finally, restrictions prohibiting eavesdropping, doxxing, and abuse are necessary to keep vulnerable individuals safe, such as women leaders, members of minority groups, and the media. People should also learn how to keep their rights and safety online.

In conclusion, this study suggests that social media sites in Bangladesh may encourage individuals to become more involved in politics, engage in more conversations, and form connections with one another. Even so, its advantages are not shared properly, and there are enormous hazards. To obtain the best outcomes and keep individuals emotionally stable, it is vital to look at all of these things at once: access, knowledge, power, political engagement, and community resilience. Bangladesh might make digital spaces safer, more helpful, and simpler to get to by eliminating the digital gap, promoting responsible online conduct, and connecting online activities to what people do outside. This will help the country grow and bring people together.

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