

THE ROLE OF MAINSTREAM AND NEW MEDIA IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A CASE OF SHAHBAGH MOVEMENT

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Abstract

A social movement is a planned attempt by many individuals to influence or oppose certain significant aspects of society. They have impacted laws, regulations, and even political structures. Recently, it has been observed that both the mainstream media and new media play crucial roles in developing social movements. The new media can accelerate the recruitment and mobilisation of social movements. It can influence and set the agenda concerning any movements for the traditional media. However, movements based on new media platforms could only sustain if they received the support of the mainstream media. This paper uses the Shahbagh movement as a case study to examine how mainstream and new media played a crucial role in bringing it to the public's attention. This article argues that the Shahbagh movement has shown that new media can influence mainstream media's agenda and the development of a social movement in Bangladesh. It contributed to accelerating the resource mobilisation and recruitment of the Shahbagh movement and made it the leading news for the traditional media. At the same time, this paper also examines how the Shahbagh movement lost its ability to be newsworthy.

Keywords: Mainstream Media, New Media, Social Networks, Movement, Shahbagh Movement

Introduction

A social movement is an organised attempt by many individuals to change or protest certain issues of society. They have influenced changes in political institutions, legislations, and regulations (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Mario Diani (Diani &

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Bison, 2004 as cited in Porta and Diani 2006) has stated that social movements are a distinct social process comprised of mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action: are involved in political and/or cultural conflicts with clearly identified opponents to promote or oppose social change, are linked by dense informal networks and share a distinct collective identity with a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause. Tilly (1978 in Diani 1992) relates the emergence of social movements to a broader 'political process'. Those whose interests are not recognised, they try to get access to the established polity 'claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support.' Nowadays, it is used most commonly with reference to groups and organizations outside the mainstream of the political system. Social movement intends to create support and bring forth the importance of the cause before the public by grabbing the media's attention or taking media's assistance as an effective strategy to reach out to more significant numbers of individuals (Berenson, 2018; McCurdy, 2012). The news media create the public agenda by, first, determining which events and societal problems are relevant to the citizenry and, second, focusing public attention on these events and concerns. Media coverage of social movement ideas and organisations makes the issues legitimate since it indicates to the larger public that the movement's claims are credible (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2013).

The emergence of new media and social media networks has further restructured the relationship between these social movements, the public sphere, and the form of to-and-fro information flow, resulting in social network structures. Social media networks have replaced the pre-existing mobilisation structures, becoming the new coordinating tool for almost all social movements in the world in recent years (Shirky, 2011). The significance of new media, such as social networking sites, has developed so rapidly that they have become a tool of social and political movements (Soares & Joia 2015). New media i.e. social media, has two types of influence on social movements. The first was to accelerate recruitment, mobilisation, communication and dissemination of information and to expand spaces of mobilisation, which were absent in traditional mobilisation techniques (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Social movements can reach millions of people inside and outside the country through Facebook and Twitter. The rapid spread of information helps validate and expand information and override mainstream media bias. This transformation has allowed social movements to propagate a narrative that works to their advantage and creates sympathy for their cause (Clark, 2012).

The second effect of social media networks is that they have led to essential changes in the traditional processes and tactics that stimulate participation and organisation. On the other hand, social networking sites do not follow the core values of journalism or fact-checking before spreading false information. Due to a massive surge in online content consumption on social media, business organisations, political parties, and various social groups have begun to share misinformation or fake content to influence online users and their decisions for financial and political gains (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). Misinformation (rumours, fake news and malinformation) can disastrously affect social movements by destroying the credibility of the cause, questioning the commitment of the organisers and even may result in the failure of the movements (Webb & Emam, 2021). Mainstream news media cannot match the speed of new media as they have to fact-check or investigate stories before publication. They struggle to quickly counter false information on new media (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). Berenson (2018) states that the new media challenge the old traditional mainstream media, yet it is seen that people rely more on the news credibility of traditional mass media such as television and print media. He further remarks that social movements based on new media platforms could only sustain if they received the support of the mainstream media; new media alone is not yet powerful enough to continue a movement.

This paper uses the Shahbagh movement as a case study to examine how both mainstream and new media played a crucial role in bringing it to the attention of the public. This article argues that the Shahbagh movement has shown that new media can influence mainstream media's agenda and the development of a social movement in Bangladesh. It contributed to accelerating the recruitment and mobilisation of the Shahbagh movement and made it the leading news for the traditional media. At the same time, this paper also examines how the Shahbagh movement lost its capability to become newsworthy.

Theoretical Contexts and Issues of Framing

The researchers examine the Shahbagh movement from the perspective of the new social movement. A theme relevant to the new social movement is that it encompasses cultural, symbolic forms of resistance in addition to or as a substitute for more conventional political efforts (Cohen, 1985). This cultural orientation disregards conventional objectives, techniques, and tactics to study new identities, meanings, and symbols. The new social movements are essentially cultural and social, with politics coming in a distant second. Instead of using the state as a tool for their actions, which Claus Offe refers to as "bypassing the state," they are

located in civil society or the cultural realm as a significant space for collective action (Offe, 1985).

Although the many past and present social movements worldwide differ in many ways, they all generally go through a life cycle marked by four major stages that have long been recognized - *emergence, coalescence* (recruitment, mobilisation, strategies to attain the goal, taking assistance from media and so on), *institutionalization or bureaucratization* (may create an institutional structure for fundraising and permanent staff) and *decline* (achieve their goals and no more reason to continue; or fail) (Blumer, 1969).

This paper examines the Shahbagh movement through the lens of new social movement theory. Shahbagh Movement, also known as *Ganajagaran Mancha*, was the first of its kind. In 2013, young students and bloggers of Bangladesh were able to mobilize large numbers of people who demanded the amendment of existing legislation using social media platforms. They used the new media to transform a justice system that failed to serve the common people and asked for death sentences for the war criminals who opposed the emergence of Bangladesh and never apologized to the nation for their controversial roles (Chowdhury, 2013). They claimed this would provide justice to the families of martyrs and, finally, heal the wounds of the 1971 Liberation War (Masud, 2013; Mustafa, 2013). Professor Ali Riaz (2013) has argued that the Shahbagh movement can be termed as a revolt against the existing system and structure of the country. It was asking for accountability from the government, state and the court. It expressed the frustration of common citizens who could not keep their faith in the judgment of the court. It showed the people's disappointment when the rumour went around that some influential interest groups were striking secret deals with a controversial political party (De, 2015). The movement, the organizers and the mass participants did not want to change the society or the government; they wanted justice for the atrocities committed during the independence war. They stood together against the system that prevented the punishment of war criminals for years and against a political party that assisted the Pakistani army in committing war crimes against its own people. The tune of the movement was, therefore, truthfully nationalist (Zaman, 2015). The activists were able to channel nationalist sentiments throughout the world among the Bangladeshis using the new media. They considered it a 'moral choice' as 'it is experienced as an injustice, coupled with the sense of efficacy, solidarity and hopefulness...and take the risks that acting to create change entails' (Marshall, 2010: 8). The authors have also examined whether Shahbagh movement has been able to go through the four major stages of social movements and achieved its desired goal.

The authors further have applied framing theory and agenda setting theory to analyse media's stands in portraying the Shahbagh movement. Berenson (2015) explains that 'framing' news means the processes in which journalists, who are in the dynamic process of constructing meaning, present their interpretation of subjects and events as a news narrative. Framing is generally associated with "agenda setting," in which the journalists decide "what is important." McCombs & Reynold (2002: 58) refers to agenda-setting as the "ability (of the news media) to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda." The study of agenda-setting outlines how the media filters, attempts to influence viewers and establishes a hierarchy of news prevalence (McCombs & Stroud, 2014). In light of this, research on mass media and social movements typically applies two approaches. The first approach focuses on the institutional reasoning/logic governing mass media operations and investigates how these logics affect the dissemination of movement messages. It leads to "gatekeeping" in the newsroom, where editors and journalists decide which events to cover and which to ignore (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The media is more likely to cover large protests, feature a visible opposition, and address problems currently on the political or public agenda than events that lack one or more of these traits (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2013). In addition, as a theory of mass communication, framing refers to how the media packages and presents information to the public. According to the theory, the media highlights specific events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage specific interpretations. In this way, the media effectively influences how people view reality (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Such coverage can undermine a social movement if journalists marginalise activist groups in news reports that portray the overall movement negatively and maintain the political status quo (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2013).

The Shahbagh movement came into being due to online appeals to the common citizens through social networking sites. The mainstream media did not initially cover it or view it as newsworthy. This study examines the factors that made the mainstream media consider the movement as its agenda, cover it and frame it as the leading news. Moreover, it explores how the majority of the mainstream media countered misinformation when anti-movement messages were disseminated through the new media and a few mainstream media outlets; and how they continued to frame their reports to grasp public attention.

Methodology

The development of the Shahbagh movement has been derived and analysed from secondary resource materials such as academic journals, websites, online and printed

newspaper articles and social media posts. For content analysis of daily newspapers, researchers considered three mainstream newspapers, the Daily Prothom Alo, the Daily Star and the Daily Ittefaq, and the online news portals of bdnews24.com, the Financial Express and the BBC News. Researchers analysed the months of February to May 2013 to understand the causes, development and consequences of the Shahbagh movement. One of the limitations of this study is that the researchers did not have access to television news. Television news channels provide them in exchange for payment. The authors did not receive any financial support to conduct this study, so they had to rely on the available news footage on YouTube.

In-depth key informant interviews with Shahbagh movement activists and journalists formed the basis for further analysis. The activists were interviewed to understand how the movement gradually gained momentum and created such a stir on social networking sites attracting public attention that the mainstream media had to cover it.

The Shahbagh Movement – A New Social Movement in the Era of New Media

The Awami League (AL) promised to put war criminals on trial in their 2008 election manifesto (Ahamed, 2009). After a landslide victory, the AL-led government amended the 1973 International Crimes (Tribunal) Act in 2009 and established a special tribunal to put war criminals on trial. Beginning in 2010, the government began to arrest the most notorious war criminals (Hassan, 2013). The opposition political parties were against the trials because most of the war criminals were senior leaders of the opposition parties, Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP (Khan, 2013).

Before the verdict of the first case came out, a rumour was spread that AL had struck a deal with the Jamaat-e-Islami. Therefore, the ICT Act could not impose death sentences, and the war criminals would receive lenient sentences (Sarkar, 2013). Despite being proven guilty of allegations, when the Tribunal gave Kader Molla a life sentence on 5 February 2013, a sense of discontent and injustice against the nation prevailed among the people (Sarkar, 2013). It received extensive criticism in the media and social networking sites. In the late afternoon of 5 February, a group of young bloggers made an appeal on the social networking site Facebook to the nation under the banner of Blogger and Online Activist Network (BOAN) to gather at Shahbagh junction, Dhaka, on that very evening to protest against the verdict (Choudhury, 2013; Chowdhury, 2013; Ullah, 2013). Only a few hundred people gathered in protest. The mainstream media did not give enough attention to cover it. However, thousands shared the message on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter in the following days.

Mostly young people, particularly students of different educational institutions in Dhaka, came to join the activists in the first few days (Choudhury, 2013; Chowdhury, 2013; Financial Express, 2013; The Daily Star, 2013; Ullah, 2013). The protesters began to sit in on the evening of February 5. The young bloggers declared the Shahbagh road junction as the *Ganajagaran Mancha* (The National Awakening Platform). The sit-in protesters, primarily youths, vowed to stay there as long as needed for their cause (Mustafa, 2013). These young people had never witnessed the liberation war but were inspired by the spirit of 1971; they declared this protest their 'second liberation war' and appealed to the nation to join them via social media (Murshid, 2013).

The movement was not organised by an organisation or political party; instead, it was initiated by young people who questioned injustice and demanded that it be rectified. They used social media and online networking to generate public support and encouraged the masses to join them spontaneously. They demanded change in a non-violent and festive manner (Riaz, 2013). Thousands joined the demonstrators, and the demonstration expanded to encompass all four sides of the Shahbagh intersection. As leading news, the mainstream media began live broadcasting and reporting the movement's daily activities and events. Young people from other cities and Bangladeshi diasporas, particularly international students, expressed their support through social networking sites and blogs (Mustafa, 2013). Prominent civil society personalities, writers, media personalities and the teachers of the University of Dhaka expressed their support for the cause (Chowdhury, 2013; Mustafa, 2013). The movement received extensive national and international media coverage (Shariff, 2013). The young protestors brought together thousands of people, regardless of age, class and religion, to join the movement. The young activists shared every programme and event of the movement with the nation via social media platforms. The citizens participated in their programs and demonstrations spontaneously (bdnews.com).

The government put an amended ICT Act bill before the Parliament on February 10 to make an appeal against the verdict of Kader Molla and try other criminals under new legislation (Choudhury, 2013). With the adoption of the new ICT Act, the movement became more popular among the common citizens, and its importance increased in the mainstream media. They presented it as a movement that raised a sense of patriotism and nationhood in the country (Chowdhury, 2013). The supporters protested peacefully and festively. They did not instigate any aggressive acts or clash with the police (Choudhury, 2013). The young activists of the Shahbagh movement demanded to change legislation, and when the government

amended the ICT act, their primary goal was achieved. They even officially ended the non-violent movement after a grand rally declaring that occasional gatherings would be arranged (Mustafa, 2013).

The Shahbagh movement threatened religion-based political parties, particularly Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh, for their role in the 1971 liberation war (Ghosh, 2013; Qayum, 2013). The Jamaat-e-Islami party was in a critical position as most of its top leaders were war criminals, and they could feel that public sentiments were growing against them (Ghosh, 2013; Qayum, 2013). For their political survival, they needed to change public perception regarding the movement. They used religion as a tool to discredit the whole Shahbagh movement. Their activists began using social media platforms to spread maligning information about the movement and labelled the activists 'atheists.' They intended to establish the entire movement as an 'anti-Islamic' movement (Qayum, 2013; Riaz, 2013). One of the organizers Razib Haider, an online blogger, was brutally murdered on February 15. He was a self-declared atheist and had written blogs online criticizing different religions, including Islam. His words were spread widely online via social media sites. Jamaat-e-Islami activists used the writings of Razib Haider as a tool to label all the organizers as atheists and Shahbagh Movement as a movement against Islam in Bangladesh on social media platforms. They were able to divide the nation along the lines of 'atheists' and 'believers' (Khan, 2013; Qayum, 2013). Several print media and television channels framed the circulating misinformation as the lead news. In a Muslim-majority country like Bangladesh, knowing about the public sensitivity regarding religion, the opposing parties could polarise public opinion, and the anti-Shahbagh groups successfully executed it (Qayum, 2013).

In order to counter the Shahbagh movement, a countermovement was formed by a religious group, Hefajat-e-Islam, with the support of the Jamaat (Hassan, 2013; Qayum, 2013). Their supporters worked both online and on the ground like the Shahbagh activists. On one side, they were spreading false information about the organisers and discrediting the movement using social media like Facebook and Twitter; on the other side, they held large rallies in Dhaka demanding the government act against the Shahbagh protesters (Hassan, 2013; Qayum, 2013). Their supporters began to clash with the police violently in Dhaka and other cities. They also declared to siege Dhaka city on May 5 if the government failed to arrest the 'atheist' organisers of the Shahbagh Movement. On May 5, 2013, violent clashes erupted between the police and the supporters of Hefajat-e-Islam around Dhaka (Hassan, 2013). Large parts of the capital turned into battlegrounds during the mayhem, putting the lives of ordinary citizens at risk. They burnt

vehicles, government and non-government offices, and private properties (The Daily Star, 2013). The government gave strict warnings to stop the clashes and leave the capital. When the perpetrators continued, the government sent police and para-military troops to get the situation under control (The Daily Star, 2013). The opposition party BNP initially claimed thousands of Hefajat activists were killed during the operation, but the government disputed the claim (bdnews24.com, 2013; Kabir, 2014). The Hefajat-e-Islam supporters also used social networking sites to circulate photographs of Haiti earthquake victims, claiming them to be innocent victims of police atrocities at Shapla Square (Kabir, 2014).

After the crackdown on Hefajat-e-Islam, on May 6, the government forbade all kinds of gatherings and rallies at the Shahbagh junction without acquiring permission (Hassan, 2013; Qayum, 2013). The organisers continued to maintain their presence on social networking platforms and blogs. Ordinary citizens began to distance themselves when religion was dragged into the debate (Sajjad & Härdig, 2017). The Shahbagh movement successfully emerged with the assistance of new media, received massive support from the common people and attention from the mainstream media, achieved its primary goal of amending the ICT act and declined as it lost its significance in the socio-political scenario (Blumer, 1969).

New Media to the Mainstream Media: Framing Shahbagh Movement's Agenda through Media Lens

Soares and Joia (2015) have maintained that the agenda arises from the moment citizens, who are either dissatisfied with the economic, political and social conditions or with repression, express their indignation via social networks or when indignation is provoked by some image showing repression that spreads rapidly via social media and, in the current Internet jargon, 'goes viral.' The beginning of the Shahbagh movement on the internet occurred due to existing political and social conditions. The people's concerns were shared utilizing new media tools (social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter) that increased the intensity of social connection, thereby fomenting the movement. Furthermore, increased information flow and emotional intensity have led people to respond to the online appeals of young activists and support the movement.

A cultural activist and an active Shahbagh movement participant expressed that cultural activities had encompassed a significant part of society. Any social movement must incorporate cultural elements to get momentum or attract public attention. He remarked that the liberation war has a vibrant cultural history associated

with songs and music. When the young activists appealed to the mass people to support them for the cause of amending the ICT Act to punish the recognised war criminals, the cultural activists were among the first to respond to them. He added that the *Sommilito Sangskritik Jote* (a group of cultural artists from various fields) supported the movement. Many cultural artists (singers, writers, musicians, painters etc.) from various sectors physically began to participate in the Shahbagh movement. A filmmaker and active organiser of the movement mentioned that the activities at the Shahbagh junction had all the elements of a front-page story; for example, thousands of individuals from various professions joined the young organisers, and prominent and well-known figures supported the cause. Moreover, nearly all of the country's progressive socio-cultural, professional, and political parties attended and openly affirmed their support for the movement's spirit.

In Bangladesh, for the first time, people witnessed that a movement can be set in motion using social media platforms. Initially, the mainstream media did not give importance to a gathering of a few hundred individuals at the Shahbagh intersection. Responding to the online appeals, mainly students from mainstream academic institutions began to gather at the Shahbagh. In the following days, the support base became more expansive, and citizens from all social classes joined physically and supported them. The Shahbagh protests were large, had a visible opposition, and addressed issues that were on the political and public agenda - they had every essential characteristic which influenced the mainstream media's agenda-setting. The spirit of the movement was dominantly nationalist. When the Ganajagaran movement began in 2013 in response to the war criminals' trials, hundreds of young people joined to achieve the movement's goals. Their massive presence amplified the newsworthiness of the movement. It was impossible for any media outlet, be it digital, print or television, to ignore the vast protests. The online activists began circulating mainstream news coverage clips through social media networks and gained more support for their cause. The efforts of new and mainstream media have set the agenda as a nationalist event and created massive popular support for the movement within the country and abroad. The government recognized the young protestors' collective action. The Shahbagh Movement achieved its primary objective of amending the ICT Act by the government.

A senior reporter working at a leading English daily newspaper said, 'The social media movement forced the mainstream media to make it their agenda. The Ganajagaran movement was initiated through social media, and then it was picked by the mainstream media. This is the first big example of social media's influence in Bangladesh.' He added that this movement was so potent that print

and electronic media continued to report on it for more than a month on the front page and during prime-time news broadcasts. He opined, ‘...but the news of Shahbagh movement was biased and more one-sided.’ The movement had a political connotation, and the political connotation was one-sided when it came to coverage. He further expressed, ‘We know media should represent both sides of an event, but the emotion was the key driving force that in certain cases lacked professionalism.’ The interviewee field reporter’s words resonated with the remarks of the English daily’s senior reporter. He also acknowledged that the movement originated due to its widespread presence on social media, and the mainstream media had to emphasise it because of its massive popularity. He remarked that even during the massive popular phase, the Shahbagh movement received some criticising statements in the comment sections of the online news portals, and it happened before the emergence of the anti-liberation groups. A few print media have reported on the Shahbagh organisers’ flaws in maintaining journalism’s credibility and neutrality. The senior reporter admitted that the mainstream media had always gone with the flow of public sentiment concerning the movement. It gave the movement positive publicity when it was popular and subtly criticised it when opposing opinions appeared on social media. It monitored social networking sites to assess the appeal of the movement.

The young activists took the assistance of mainstream media alongside their regular activities on the new media platforms to inform people and gather public support. When Islamic activists discredited this movement online, the Shahbagh movement activists continued their ‘digital fight’ online to counter the propaganda. At the same time, they took the assistance of mainstream media to clarify the misinformation before the mass audience. The Shahbagh movement activists attempted to fight misinformation by issuing press statements (press notes) on various themes and presenting them before the mainstream media. They denounced the propaganda and attempted to clarify their position in front of the media and the general public. The writers have extracted the substance of these statements to demonstrate how the organizers attempted to enlighten people about their movement and denounce the propaganda (Rasul, 2015). The pro-liberation media has been professionally responsible for publishing news of the movement since the very first day of Ganajagaran Mancha, according to a press release issued on February 26, 2013 (Rasul,2015). When the mainstream media framed these press notes as their agenda and began to broadcast them, the media agenda eventually became public agenda. Here, the media agenda got merged with the public agenda. Thereby, it can be said that social media has the capacity to influence and create agenda in the public sphere.

A senior editor of a television channel commented that the Shahbagh movement organisers failed to counter the fake news or misinformation effectively on the new media. They issued press notes condemning the actions of anti-liberation groups and supporting media (Rasul, 2015). The secular mainstream media reported their views to counter yellow journalism. However, the anti-Shahbagh and anti-liberation sections gained attention by giving inflammatory statements or instigating violence. The senior journalists of mainstream media admitted that they did not take any concrete action to counter the anti-liberation groups' circulation of fake news. Instead, because of the dramatic stands and statements of the two groups (Shahbagh organisers and the opposing one), all major media outlets framed them as the leading news and grabbed public attention more.

The editor of a television news channel maintained that the Ganajagaran Mancha's news collection or treatment should be examined in three stages. In the first step, they determined that online activists protested at the Shahbagh intersection, which had little news value. He stated that the youths in Bangladesh occasionally formed human chains to protest societal injustices and anomalies. They were rarely mentioned in the media and drew little attention from the general public. That is why, on the first day, when the young bloggers and activists assembled at the Shahbagh junction demanding the execution of war criminal Quader Mollah, they barely received any public attention, nor the media reported their assembly. He indicated that in the second stage, Ganajagaran Mancha received support from the government. It was perhaps the only movement whose program had received direct support from government and private institutions. He stated, 'When the state apparatus openly supports a social movement, its significance to the media skyrockets and acquires greater significance. For example, on the eighth day of the movement, practically all governmental and private institutions of Bangladesh participated in the 'three-minute silence' program from their respective positions. No major media outlet could overlook the newsworthiness of the Shahbagh movement, so they broadcasted it 'live' and had it as their leading story.' In the third stage, he stated that the government amended the International Criminal Court (ICT) Act after twelve days of persuasion from the Ganajagaran Mancha movement. The National Parliament passed the International Crimes (Tribunals) Amendment Bill, 2013, on 17 February. Previously, the state had no legal recourse if it disagreed with the sentencing under the ICT Act. The state, like the defendants, now had an equal opportunity to appeal the decision due to the amendment. The initial triumph of Ganajagaran Mancha was the outcome of legislative reform. With the massive rally on 21 February, the activists' continuous sit-in program also

ended. Ganajagaran Mancha continued their programme with occasional press notes and online activities. However, the editor added that due to the controversy surrounding the 'non-Islamic' claim made by anti-movement activists, the media began to distance itself from them. Ganajagaran Mancha's future broadcasts began to have less news value, and after the crackdown on Hefajat-e-Islam and prohibition of any gatherings at the Shahbagh junction, the agenda of the Shahbagh activists was rarely reported by the media. It ceased to appeal to the public, and the media ignored their future endeavours (Rasul, 2015).

The news consultant of an online news portal mentioned, 'Several newspapers and a television channel portrayed a negative image of the Ganajagaran Mancha. The Daily Amar Desh, the Naya Diganta, the Sangram, and the Television Channel Diganta were small groups of mainstream news organisations supporting war criminals'. They supported the anti-Shahbagh organisers and tried to gain empathy for the war criminals. As a result, during Ganajagaran Mancha's actions, he added 'These media have spread various false and misleading information. They did not consider this to be a mass uprising in the country. These media organisations tried to portray the Shahbagh movement as a movement led by the Awami League'. Furthermore, these media agencies have launched personal attacks against the Shahbagh movement's supporters and organisers, ranging from slandering their reputations to labelling them as atheists. It harmed the image of the movement. They promoted it as an anti-Islamic movement instead of one inspired by the nationalist spirit. Their massive propaganda propagated through social media caused a societal schism that the mainstream media failed to address effectively (Islam, 2013). Both the chief editor of a leading English daily newspaper and the editor of a television channel agreed that the mainstream media did not always reveal the facts about the movement, which could have countered the propaganda disseminated through social media efficiently. They both opined that, as the issue of religion was involved, the major newspapers and television news channels did not address it for fear of alienating their Islamic readers.

All of the key interviewees acknowledged that the new media rapidly provided the audience with information, gained quick support among the youth and made the movement so outstanding that the mainstream one was compelled to frame it as their leading agenda. However, it later became evident that the citizens still considered the mainstream media more trustworthy and reliable, and the movement thrived when it got coverage from the mainstream media. The movement became more appealing to national and international audiences when mainstream media broadcasted live and presented it as their top news. The television channel editor

opined that social media in Bangladesh has yet to grow so strong that a movement could thrive without the support of the mainstream media. When the mainstream media outlets began to distance themselves from the movement and gave less significance to reporting its events, despite the active presence of the organisers on online platforms, it never again gained popularity or momentum, causing the audience to lose interest.

Conclusion

The study has observed the development and decline of the Shahbagh movement in light of the new social movement theory. It was also conducted based on the theoretical framework of the media's agenda-setting and framing concept to comprehend how the media (mainstream and new media) played a crucial role in the development of the movement, gaining support and coming to public attention. Even though the Shahbagh movement began as an ordinary movement, it quickly gained media attention and achieved a unique status due to the ideas it upheld. Due to the movement's massive presence on social media and popularity, it became the mainstream media's agenda for leading stories. On the other hand, the media focused on positively framing the news when the movement gained traction. Its purpose became to emphasise the movement's main agenda, i.e. to enhance public support for the death sentence for war criminals. The same analysis came up in the key informant interviews of prominent journalists.

Once the mainstream media framed it as their leading agenda, they went with the emotion of the larger public and portrayed it positively as a nationalist movement. They did not encounter or report the criticisms that came at the early stage of the movement. The new media contributed to accelerating the recruitment and mobilisation of the Shahbagh movement, but the mainstream media's agenda of publicising the movement's objectives ensured the movement's success. The media heavily influenced the retrials of war criminals and the amendment of the ICT Act. Therefore, when the movement lost its newsworthiness, the mainstream media reported it occasionally, causing the audience to lose interest. The online organisers could not revive the movement's spirit without the mainstream media's support.

It is clear from the facts acquired from this study that as long as the mainstream media has the trust and association with public opinion, it will be able to set the agenda for the public or the socially significant elements or social movements will get portrayed with importance in the media. Even though social media platforms are widely used, they have yet to catch up to mainstream media regarding acceptance

and reliability. The mainstream media can give any concept or issue an appropriate format and make it a part of the public agenda. If the general population grows concerned about a situation, the mainstream media will make it an agenda. Again, the media may create an agenda, and the public may likely endorse it. Thus, the mainstream media influence the development and decline of social movements and can frame and put them on the public agenda.

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