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The Role of Social Media and Impact on Voting Behavior in Rangpur-3 Constituency: 11th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Social media has fundamentally transformed political communication, creating new opportunities and challenges for political parties, electoral stakeholders, and voters. This study aims to: (1) explore the role of social media in election campaigns; (2) examine the impact of social media on urban voters' attitudes and voting behavior in the Rangpur-3 constituency; and (3) investigate how political candidates use social media platforms to influence voters and mobilize electoral support. The study adopts a qualitative research approach. The findings reveal that political parties, candidates, and other electoral stakeholders extensively utilize social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, to disseminate election manifestos, campaign messages, and policy commitments to attract voters and secure electoral support. Among these platforms, Facebook emerges as the most widely used medium for communicating campaign messages and engaging with the electorate before elections. The study further finds that voters' trust and political preferences are dynamic and may fluctuate throughout the election period, influenced by campaign messages, online interactions, and changing voter perceptions.

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1. Introduction

Social media has transformed political communication by providing interactive digital platforms through which individuals, political parties, and institutions exchange information and engage in public discourse (Ji, 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). To enhance people's common knowledge, social media brings various benefits to the contemporary world. Over time, the media has become the fourth

estate due to its diverse roles across sectors. However, the media is playing an immense role in upholding democratic principles, including electoral and voting rights and voting behavior (Ji, 2023). Social media is an essential tool for shaping, forming, and reflecting public opinion in any democracy. Social media has become an essential tool for political communication during elections (Tetteh & Kankam, 2024). It is the most recent and fastest-growing phenomenon in Internet communication used in election campaigns. In Bangladesh, people got the opportunity to use the internet for the first time in 1996. After the internet, the single most popular networking site that is widely used by the people of this country is Facebook. News and information circulate quickly through Facebook. Therefore, on and off, especially during the election, it had a remarkable impact on the people of Bangladesh (Naher & Minar, 2018). Social media was heavily used by all political parties and candidates to energize voters during Bangladesh's 2018 11th National Parliamentary Election. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Google+ emerged as major players in the 11th National Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh. The idea of social media has radically changed from that of the media in the previous 10th National Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh. The amazement is a result of the development and introduction of digital media. Placards, festoons, banners, and other forms of political communication are becoming obsolete, and some of them have found new homes in new media by transforming their old forms into digital ones, ushering in a new era of political activity and involvement (Zaman et al., 2018). In order to compete with one another for breaking news, political parties and candidates use these platforms rather than more conventional media. In Bangladesh, all of these significant players have seen significant growth. Bangladesh currently has 49.31 million Facebook users. With 67.65% of users being men and 32.35% being women (Datar portal, 2024).

In this light, we can observe that the influence of social media is changing the trend of voting behavior, especially among urban voters. Therefore, the candidate can motivate the voters by using different social media tools. Voting behavior refers to the decisions individuals make regarding whether to vote and whom to support in an election (Bratton, 2013). Social media has become the new election battleground for Bangladesh's nationwide parliamentary elections. Eventually, what started as a mere virtual platform for discussions became a miracle tool for the dissemination of information, advocacy, and voter mobilization.

At present, with the rapidly developing digitalization of our country and society and the respective hardware and software improvements in information technologies, virtual reality, especially social media, has become less expensive, easier to use by a non-specialized audience, and thus more accessible to the general public. These types of virtual reality or social media experiences would influence people's political decision-making in a voting scenario in comparison with traditional text-based information. This would highly affect voting behavior. The role of social media with positive or negative arguments would influence voting behavior (Kraus et al., 2021). In both developing and developed countries, social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blogs, are important means of communication. Therefore, it has a significant impact on our society. Apart from this, many crimes are taking place on social media. Evil people set traps due to their interest, where common users face some problems due to a lack of knowledge about social media. Even people confront social and political harassment.

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The importance of Rangpur-3 as a constituency in the context of the 11th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh can be analyzed from multiple dimensions. Rangpur-3 holds historical importance as it was the home constituency of the late President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, the founder of the Jatiya Party (JP). As a key constituency in the Rangpur division, it often garners national attention during elections. Rangpur-3 comprises diverse socio-economic groups, representing urban and semi-urban areas, which makes it an ideal case for studying the impact of social media on voters with varying access to digital platforms. On the other hand, the youth population and first-time voters in Rangpur-3, many of whom are active on social media, play a critical role in shaping voting behavior.

As the internet has gained more traction in the region, Rangpur-3 is an example of how traditional election campaigns are being impacted by digital technology, especially social media. In the case of political parties and candidates, the platforms are being used to communicate with constituents, so it's a case study worth examining for how social media can be used in the modern political campaign. The study of Rangpur-3 helps understand the importance of social media and how it can impact the preferences of voters and their turnout, considering the local political dynamics. The small-scale focus on Rangpur-3 not only gives the ability to serve a politically relevant and historically significant constituency, but it also serves as a microcosm for studying the role of social media in election campaigns and the effects of such media on voting behaviors in Bangladesh.

The 11th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh was a great landmark in the political arena of the nation. As people got more and more connected to the internet and social media sites such as Facebook became more popular, political campaigns changed their approach. The Rangpur-3 was no exception, as it had a unique political situation. The aims of the study are, respectively, to explore the process of election campaign through social media, to find the impact of social media in determining the urban voters' attitude towards voting in the party of the voter in Rangpur-3 constituency, and to find the ways candidates play to the electorate for voting in the party they choose by using social media campaign.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Social Media in Election Campaigns Globally

Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) are rightly referred to in discussions of misinformation or of the impact of fake news on voters' behavior. While Chakravarty & Roy (2017) may challenge the equity of social media access in a very diverse Indian society, are urban strategies effective in reaching rural voters? Howard & Kollanyi (2016) could have delved deeper into the use of computational propaganda models as well as how bots or automation influenced the debate. While Guess, Nyhan & Reifler (2020) are correct to point out that misinformation is a problem, their results indicate that there is not much of an immediate effect on the voting decision.

2.2 Influence of Social Media and Voting Behavior in Bangladesh

The reason for this is that the traditional influence system, elite mobilization, and institutional challenges are pointed out by Jahan (1980) and Wahab (1986); continuity of institutional erosion and politicized elections are highlighted by Hasanuzzaman (2018). Tactical uses of platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp

– particularly during local elections – are discussed by Sakib et al. (2024) and Siam & Islam (2023). This paper aims to clarify the theoretical contribution of digital pluralism, opportunity and risk, as explained by Al-Zaman (2020). However, there is a lack of critical thinking, polarization, or echo chambers in Haque & Liza (2024), which are in favor of creative political messaging, voter education, and participation. Akter (2023) highlights some loopholes in the Election Commission and the party in power. The review reveals that social media has been transforming the nature of electoral activities in Bangladesh with a particular impact on the youth and urban population. It also exposes a multifactorial process of digital empowerment and manipulation, posing real threats to democratic integrity on the side of misinformation, digital divides, and inadequate institutional control. A thorough institutional reform and media education, however, are clearly recommended in the literature as prerequisites for social media to contribute to democratic consolidation, and not to increase political polarization.

After reviewing the above research, we can say that, while existing research explores the broader national or urban-level trends in the role of social media in Bangladesh's elections, studies specifically focusing on semi-urban or rural constituencies are inadequate, especially in the context of the 11th Parliamentary Election. The socio-economic and political dynamics of semi-urban regions often differ significantly from urban areas. This study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes in specific constituencies, particularly those in semi-urban regions, and will offer insights for future political campaigns in Bangladesh.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. On the other hand, it also collected primary and secondary sources to evaluate the study. As part of primary data collection, the study conducted several Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in the Rangpur-3 constituency. A total of twelve (12) KIIs were conducted with relevant stakeholders using semi-structured interviews. The target groups consisted of election experts, election observers, media, election campaigners, and voters. The KII questionnaire primarily examined how they consumed political information on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, and the impact such information had on their political beliefs and voting. The secondary data referred to the wide range of credible and authentic sources such as books, peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, online publications, official reports, and digital campaign sources of political parties during the election.

3.1 Demography of the Respondent

Key informants' interviews have been used in the study for the collection of qualitative data and insights from people who are closely involved in the electoral process or witnessing it closely. The researcher prepared an interview questionnaire for guiding the activities of the interview discussion and to ensure that the required information is obtained. Respondents were between 18 and 70 years of age, which included young and old voters. The majority of the respondents were actively engaged in election observations or analysis, and the ex-post facto analysis gave them a unique insight into how social media played a role in creating awareness and voting behavior in Rangpur-3 constituency.

4. Theoretical Underpinning

4.1 Social Media

Social media is a collection of digital platforms and technologies that enable people to produce, share, and interact with content and information in virtual communities and networks. They offer a variety of functions to suit different user preferences and purposes, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms allow users to communicate through user-generated content in different media (text, images, videos, audio) with others, groups, and organizations in different geographical locations (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; van Dijck, 2013).

4.2 Voting Behavior

Voting behavior is an important part of the study of electoral dynamics and democratic participation. It is about decisions people make in regard to who they will vote for and whether they will vote or not (Dalton, 2013). This behavior includes both doing something (e.g., voting, turning out) and not doing something (e.g., abstention, political disengagement) (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This is affected by a variety of factors including socio-economic status, attitudes to politics, party identification, media exposure and perceptions of government performance and quality of life (Campbell et al., 1960; Norris, 2004).

4.3 Psychological and Sociological Theory

The psychological theory outlines that an individual prefers affiliation with a solid political association that is determined by the psychosocial groups. Time and resources are two key indicators of the psychosocial groups. This theory differentiates the loyalty and relationships of an individual over a certain period of time. People's adoration and friendliness vary over a definite time due to the psychosocial groups. The pattern of partnership is a key factor that expands their whole lives. However, their political and environmental factors are key determinants of social positions. Finally, their political behavior and support are affected by these environmental influences (Bukari et al., 2023).

Basically, partnership is transmitted through an inherent process that determines people's fondness for a political party or candidate's motivation. However, an individual gets motivated in the above-mentioned sector by their societal cluster, cohorts, and family members. On the other hand, socialization plays a pivotal role in nurturing people's mental setup. Therefore, political involvement is enriched through evaluation and other informative gestures. Later, an individual makes politically motivated decisions. Finally, political leaders build up their relationships with voters and citizens from different perspectives over time. This process determines the voting decisions of an individual. This sociological approach determines voting behavior from different perspectives. On the other hand, social media enhances the determinant relationship between voting behaviors and voting targets (Bukari et al., 2023).

4.4 Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura proposed social cognitive theory in 1977. Basically, he deduced this theory from the Miller and Dollard theoretical tests. However, Albert Bandura

termed the theory "social learning theory" primarily in the 1960s. This theory highlighted the social influence that rotates the interior and exterior social support. The behavior of the individual is affected by the social environment. This theory aims to identify people's behavioral regulations that control goal-redirected behavior. This theory articulates the creature's deed and their emotional needs, e.g., aspiration, sentiment, and outlook (BU, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021).

4.5 Agenda Setting Approach

The concept of agenda setting was developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. They proposed that some issues are common and others are different from them. As per their proposition, the dependent variable is public agendas, and the independent variable is media agendas. Generally, spectators get motivated by the media. It has a huge influence on society and its people that affects choices and the aired context (Riezebos et al., 2011).

There are some correlations between political party perception and voting behavior. Political interest, political trust, and religion are relevant factors in identifying voting behavior and political party perception. Political opinion derives from political interest. Political trust determines political perception and voting targets. On the other hand, voting behavior differs due to the religious perspective, as it is a sociological factor (Riezebos et al., 2011).

The above-mentioned theories and approaches are relevant to this current study. It has some linkages with the proposed study entitled the Role of social media in Election Campaigns and Its Impact on Voting Behavior.

5. Results

5.1 Social Media's Role in Bangladesh's Parliamentary Elections

The course of the parliamentary polls in Bangladesh since 1973 is a story of an evolution of political communication tools and the channels of it, especially the rise and expansion of democracy and social media. The first eight Parliamentary elections (1973-2001) were conducted almost exclusively through traditional media such as print, radio, television, and face-to-face rallies. Thus, no discernible impact was observed from the use of social media on voter awareness or the electoral results. However, there was a significant change in the 9th parliamentary election of 2008. With the advent of internet access, especially in urban areas, social media emerged as an additional, but new, medium for political messaging. But its impact on voting behavior was minimal. Political uses of online campaigns were constrained because most citizens, particularly in rural areas, continued to use traditional ways of getting information. In Bangladesh, parliamentary elections took place without any involvement of social media from 1973 to 2001, where only traditional campaigning methods like print, radio, and television were used (Islam & Islam, 2024). In 2008, social media first came into the electoral arena in the 9th election, mainly in the cities, but with little effect on voting (Rahman & Ahmed, 2015). Social media use was more noticeable in the 10th election in 2014, but was used more for political expression than political mobilization, and had a limited impact because of an opposition boycott (Saleem et al., 2021). By the 11th Parliamentary Election in 2018, platforms such as Facebook had become increasingly important for political communication and electoral campaigning in Bangladesh, particularly in terms of campaign outreach and digital engagement

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(Zaman et al., 2018; Siam & Islam, 2023). This trajectory is part of a larger trend of digitalization across electoral politics globally, and in Bangladesh (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016)

Table 1: *Summary of Evolution (1st–11th Parliamentary Election)*

Election Range	Role of social media	Impact on Voting
1st–8th (1973–2001)	None	None
9th (2008)	Emerging, urban-based	Minimal
10th (2014)	Moderate use, more expressive than mobilizing	Limited; boycotted election
11th (2018)	Significant in urban and youth outreach, esp. Rangpur-3	Influenced youth, visibility, candidate branding

5.2 Social Media Strategies Used in Rangpur-3 Constituency

In the 11th Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh, contesting candidates in Rangpur-3, a politically sensitive seat, extensively used social media strategies. In the 11th Parliamentary Election, social media strategy was heavily used by the contesting candidates in Rangpur-3, which is a politically sensitive seat and is the home constituency of the late former President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Hussain Muhammad Ershad. These strategies targeted young voters to challenge the alternative narrative and to spread campaign messages beyond conventional approaches and influence voters (Akter, N 2023). Political campaigning was mostly done on Facebook in Rangpur-3. The official web pages provided daily updates, multimedia, and live communication with candidates to communicate with voters.

YouTube was also leveraged to deliver longer video formats, like campaign films, voter endorsements, and political event coverage. Micro-targeting was used extensively, especially for party activists and youth wings, with the help of Facebook, Messenger, and WhatsApp groups (M Begum¹, personal communication, May 04, 2024). Candidates' and digital teams' content strategy, however, varied, with some creating live videos and streaming rallies, speeches, and community interactions as they happened to demonstrate accessibility and transparency. Memes and Political Cartoons: widely used among younger audiences, used for satire or to discredit opponents (M. Hasan², Personal Communication, May 05, 2024). There were also digital manifestos, too, with visual breakdowns of the development plans posted for ease of understanding with the public. Emotional and identity appeals were common in posts, and those that fit one or both were also often used to provoke emotional commitment. Posts related to local pride, the party's history, or future development were also common and often stimulated emotional engagement.

¹ Anonymous

² Anonymous

(Sanjid³, Personal Communication, May 12, 2024). There was a wide range of engagement with content, depending on the popularity of the candidate and the quality of the content.

There are several figures that are followed, such as follower growth. A significant number of candidate pages' followers have increased throughout the campaign. In post engagement, likes, shares, and comments were particularly high around contentious topics and pledges, such as jobs and infrastructure issues. Furthermore, memes and short videos were distributed to those outside the constituency, particularly when retweeted by a local influencer or a page (F. Jannat⁴, Personal Communication, May 04, 2024). In Rangpur-3, the 11th Parliamentary Election was a turning point with regard to the use of digital media, especially Facebook. Voter engagement has traditionally been accomplished through rallies and posters, but social media was also becoming important as an auxiliary and increasingly effective means of voter engagement.

5.3 The Process of Election Campaigns Using Social Media

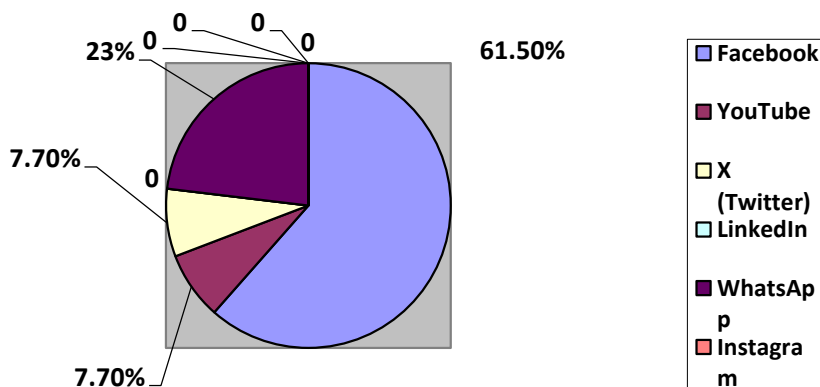
Social media have become an important means of campaigning in the country's 11th parliamentary elections, especially in Rangpur-3. Digital strategies were becoming more complementary or even replacing traditional approaches of door-to-door canvassing, mass rallies and posters. The first platforms identified by the local population were Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and, to a lesser degree, Twitter, which were the most popular among the candidates and political parties. Facebook was the key platform as it had the highest penetration in both urban and rural areas in Rangpur. Most of the powerful candidates set up their Facebook pages and followers' groups where campaign-related messages were posted. These platforms were used to share campaign schedules, broadcast live speeches and events, post promotional videos, graphics, and manifestos, and engage with followers via comments and messages. However, social media also became a battleground for information warfare. Campaign teams had dedicated units to respond to negative propaganda, clarify candidate positions, and flag and report fake news. Some candidates also used prerecorded voice messages or WhatsApp broadcasts to deliver direct messages to voters. On election day, social media platforms were used to remind people to vote and encourage continued participation throughout the day.

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Figure 2: *The Percentages of Social Media Usage*

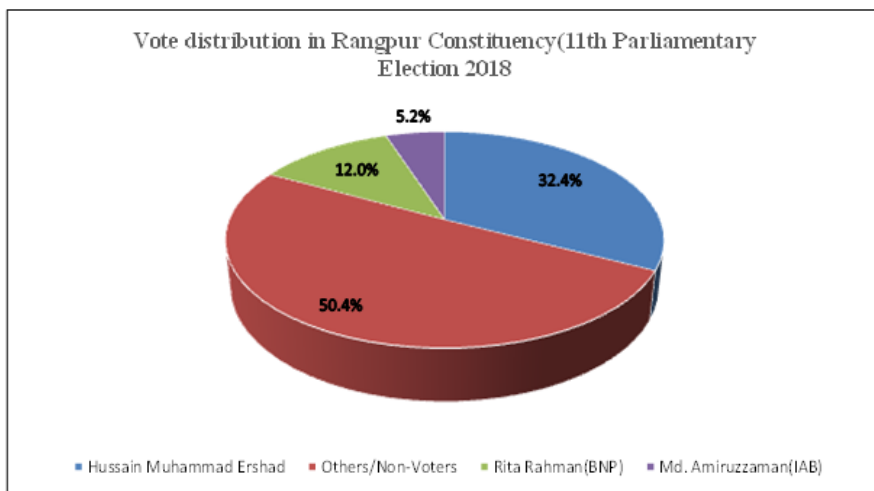


61.50% of the respondents used Facebook, 23% of the respondents used WhatsApp, 7.70% of the respondents used YouTube, and 7.70% used X in using social media. However, electoral stakeholders in Bangladesh are less familiar with other types of social media (Figure 01).

5.4 Candidate-Centric Campaigns

Rangpur-3 constituency encompasses Rangpur Sadar and Rangpur City Corporation, except for some Ward Numbers, namely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Total voters were 441,671 (four hundred forty-one thousand six hundred seventy-one). Among them, male voters were 221,109 (two hundred twenty-one thousand one hundred nine). And female voters were 220,562 (two hundred twenty thousand five hundred sixty-two). Total centers were 175 (one hundred and seventy-five). In this constituency, 3 (three) latent candidates were Hussain Muhammad Ershad from Jatiya Party (JP) with the symbol of a plough, who achieved 142,926 (one hundred forty-two thousand nine hundred twenty-six) votes and won the seat. His closest competitor was Rita Rahman from BNP with the symbol of a sheaf of paddy, who secured 53,089 (fifty-three thousand eighty-nine) votes. Another noteworthy candidate was Md. Amiruzamman from Islami Andolon Bangladesh with the symbol of a hand fan, who won 23,177 (twenty-three thousand one hundred seventy-seven) votes (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2018).

Figure 3: *Vote Distribution Among Candidates in the Rangpur-3 Constituency During the 11th Parliamentary Election*



The 11th Parliamentary Election in Rangpur-3 gained special attention due to the candidacy of former President Hussain Muhammad Ershad. His campaign heavily relied on Facebook Live sessions, promotional videos, and posts showcasing his personal involvement in community work and development promises (The Business Standard, 2019). On the other hand, Hussain Muhammad Ershad prioritized local government and the continuation of previous policies to attract his political activists and voters (M. Rahman⁵, Personal communication, May 16, 2024).

Basically, some candidates were highlighting local issues such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which resonate with the Rangpur-3 electorate. On the other hand, some candidates boosted their posts by paying to promote campaign posts to increase visibility among undecided or swing voters (I. Sabbir⁶, Personal Communication, May 09, 2024). While the candidate-centric campaigns had strong engagement, some voters questioned the authenticity of posts, and others noted unequal digital access, especially in rural areas with limited internet coverage (M. Rahman⁷, Personal Communication, May 16, 2024).

5.5 Mobilization and Call-to-Action

In the 11th Parliamentary Election of Rangpur-3, social media channels mobilized people, becoming a form of digital mobilization. Candidates not only used social media to push out campaign messages, but also to engage supporters, coordinate activities, and issue calls to action for voting and local involvement. Ershad's Facebook page was regularly updated with countdowns to election day as well as images and graphics calling on persons to "vote for development. A few posts appealed to religious, nationalistic, or community-based sentiments to reinforce the notion of voting as a moral obligation and civic duty, such as "Your one vote can

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shape Rangpur's future; don't let others decide for you (S. Ali⁸, Personal Communication, 12 May 2024). They generated a sense of digital community and urgency through the calls-to-action, which led to many more passive voters participating in the election, according to interviews and online sentiment analysis. "It wasn't really my intention to vote, but I saw everyone talking about going, so I had to go too (M. Akter, Personal Communication, May 21, 2024). Social media was engaged by local influencers, community leaders, or respected figures to endorse the candidate or party. Also, social media shared posts or videos with these influencers promoting certain candidates. Party members were asked to post, tag, and create a "ripple effect" in getting the campaign message out. Social media was not only used to communicate in Rangpur-3, but it also served as a platform for movement building.

5.6 Issue-Based Campaigning

For the 11th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh, the central theme of issue-based campaigning was the use of social media to spread awareness and promote party agendas and engage voters (Khan, 2013). Issue-based campaigning is different from the traditional way of campaigning, where it was more about personality politics or party loyalty, but more about particular socio-economic, developmental, or policy issues that resonate with the voters. Candidates focused on local issues in their campaigning. They were drawing the attention of the locals to problems like agricultural development, road building, or education in Rangpur-3 by making connections between national policies and their effects on a constituency. It also analyzed the opponents past actions or decisions with data, anecdotes, or quotes from voters. Development projects were showcased via social media campaigns. Special consideration was given to infrastructure development in Rangpur-3, like roads, bridges, and electrification (R. Zhiny⁹, Personal Communication, May 23, 2024). Employment/Education are the key areas of candidates' importance. Moreover, some posts and videos offer job creation, vocational training, and enhancing educational institutions. A health care service was also a worry of theirs.

Some candidates say they will make health services more available, particularly in rural areas and maternal health (M. Hasan¹⁰, Personal Communication, May 16, 2024). They also had farmer rights and agricultural subsidies in their activities. Since the Rangpur area was predominantly agricultural, the campaign focused on topics such as fair prices, subsidies, and the modernization of agriculture. The campaign sought topics of fair prices, subsidies, and modernization of agriculture, given that the Rangpur area had predominantly agricultural priorities. Most significantly, candidates put youth engagement and the concept of Digital Bangladesh first. Their messaging was about technology, startup culture, and opportunities for the youth. They accented anti-corruption and governmental reform too. Anti-corruption rhetoric was sometimes incorporated into the campaign, as was an outcry against frustrated existing systems (R. Zhiny¹¹, Personal Communication, May 23, 2024). Stream updates from campaign events, rallies, and interviews to create momentum

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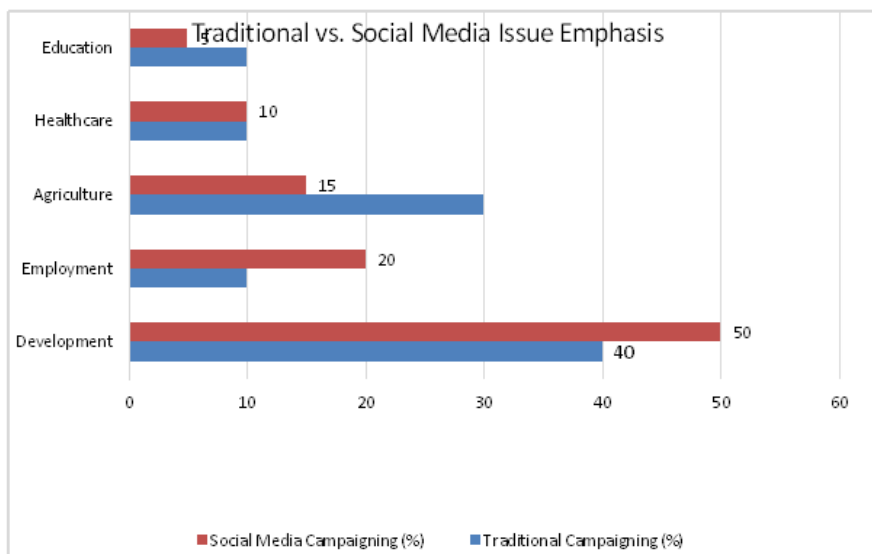
⁹ Anonymous

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¹¹ Anonymous

and engagement. Through social media, provide updates on voting day, including polling station information, reminders, and encouragement to vote (M. Hasan, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

Figure 4: *Traditional VS. Social Media Issue Emphasis*



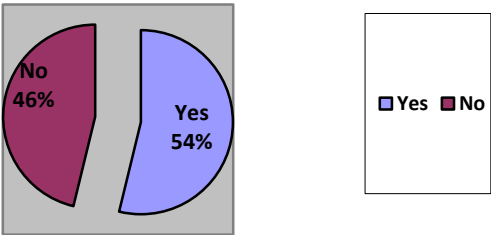
5.7 Trust in Social Media

Social media platforms have affected trust criteria among voters, particularly in the credibility of political content shared on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. During the 11th Parliamentary Election, one of the key issues that influenced voters' decisions in the constituency of Rangpur-3 was their low trust in social media. Youth and urban residents felt that social media was a major source of political information, a sentiment that was rising across the board. Youth and urban voters were more likely than their older, rural counterparts to see social media as a main way to learn about politics. It was much easier to use than old media such as television and newspapers. The level of trust was also associated with the source of the content, with posts from official party pages being more trusted than those from verified candidate accounts. Likewise, content from trusted sources, such as friends, family, and local influencers, also helped to strengthen peer influence. But the anonymous or less well-sourced pages and groups were frequently looked down upon, especially by the educated voters. Although social media provided a platform for a variety of different viewpoints, unfortunately it also attracted disinformation, including rumors, manipulated videos, and false claims which were prevalent in the last weeks of the campaign (M. Akter¹², Personal Communication, May 21, 2024). Likewise, voters were worried about how difficult it is to verify content, and some were wary of taking political messages online for granted.

¹² Anonymous

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Figure 5: Percentages of Trust in Social Media



53.80% of the respondents trust social media, whereas 46.20% of the respondents do not believe in social media in Bangladesh. The people who do not believe in social media do so because it sometimes leads to the circulation of misinformation and disinformation, which can spread quickly and influence opinions. Unlike traditional media, social media posts are not always verified for accuracy. Social media platforms may not have sufficient regulations to ensure the accuracy of information. On the other hand, it has been found that social media has mixed reactions among voters during the Rangpur 3 election campaigns.

5.8 Process of Social Media to Keep an Eye on Voters or Target Voters

Social media played an effective role in targeting voters in the Rangpur-3 constituency and assessing its impact on their behavior during the 11th parliamentary election. Social media platforms collect extensive data from user profiles, including age, gender, and location. Also, voters’ interests, such as pages liked and videos watched. Similarly, engagement behavior such as likes, shares, and comments. In the Rangpur-3 constituency during the 11th Parliamentary Election, many voters were active on Facebook and other platforms, making their preferences and behaviors visible (S. Ali¹³, Personal Communication, May 12, 2024). Understand voting patterns, preferences, and engagement levels of voters in Rangpur-3. The candidate used geo-targeting tools to reach voters in the Rangpur-3 area. They desired to develop content that addresses local issues relevant to Rangpur-3 voters. They also tried to ensure the messages align with the constituency’s cultural and social values. As well as used local landmarks, dialects, or symbols to make the campaign relatable. They monitor what content users engage with, such as likes, shares, and comments. It analyzes user posts and comments to gauge public opinion on candidates or issues. It identifies trending topics and emerging issues that can influence voter behavior (R. Akter¹⁴, personal communication, July 15, 2024).

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5.9 Social Media Targeting Process Based on Age, Gender, and Location

Table 6: Social Media Targeting Process Based on Age, Gender, and Location

Target Factor	How Social Media Monitors	How Political Campaigns Use the Data (Targeting Strategy)
Age	Tracks date of birth, age range in profiles, interaction with age-specific content (e.g., memes and youth rallies); older voters get policy-related posts)	Young voters are shown engaging content (jobs, tech, policy-related posts).
Gender	Analyzes profile data, engagement with gender-related themes (e.g., health, education and empowerment)	Women are targeted with messages on welfare, safety, and rights; men with economy and leadership issues.
Location	Detects GPS, IP address, check-ins, tagged places, and language/dialect used in posts	Rangpur-3 voters receive local issue content (e.g., flood control, road repairs, local leadership).

5.10 Impact on Voter Behavior

Political leaders and candidates influence voters by using social media platforms. Therefore, it manipulates voter behavior and opinions. Thus, Peer influence played a role in reinforcing existing beliefs or encouraging alignment with the majority view within one’s network (K. Mostafa¹⁵, personal communication, July 15, 2024). Some political activities and fans used social media to spread rumors, fake news, or manipulated videos, especially during the campaign period. Therefore, it confused or misled voters, which led to distrust in certain candidates and emotionally charged decisions rather than rational choices. Besides, social media was actively used to encourage voter turnout, inform about polling station locations, and organize campaign events or digital rallies. This increased participation in the election process, particularly among younger, urban, and tech-savvy voters in Rangpur-3 (R. Sultana¹⁶, personal communication, July 10, 2024).

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5.11 Estimated Percentage Breakdown of Social Media's Impact on Voter Behavior

Table 7: Estimated Percentage Breakdown of Social Media's Impact on Voter Behavior

Impact Area	Estimated Influence (%)	Explanation
1 Political Awareness & Information Access	25%	Social media helped voters stay updated with candidate profiles, party agendas.
2 Shaping Political Opinion	20%	Repetitive exposure to political posts, videos, and slogans influenced thinking.
3. Peer Influence & Group Behavior	15%	Content shared by friends/family increased engagement and shaped opinions.
4. Misinformation & Fake News	10%	Misleading content swayed undecided voters or reinforced bias.
1. Voter Mobilization & Participation	20%	Social media motivated people to attend rallies, vote, and share views.

5.12 The Awareness and Perception of Candidates

The awareness and perception of candidates refer to how well voters know the candidates and their political, social, or personal attributes and how these attributes shape voters' opinions. However, candidates used social media to create a positive public image by posting photos/videos of social work or public engagements, sharing endorsements from community leaders, and using well-designed posters and slogans. That helped shape a favorable perception among voters, especially young and urban populations who consume digital content more frequently. Due to side-by-side visibility on social platforms, voters could easily compare qualifications, political experience, and public support; analyze campaign style and messaging quality; and react to how candidates responded to local issues or criticism (I. Sabbir¹⁷, personal communication, May 9, 2024). This strengthened voters' ability to make informed comparisons, possibly influencing swing or undecided voters. In some cases, fake news or manipulated content was circulated to damage the image of rival candidates. Therefore, it misled certain voter groups, especially those who lacked fact-checking skills or critical media literacy, altering their perception unfairly (R. Sultana¹⁸, personal communication, July 10, 2024).

¹⁷ Anonymous

¹⁸ Anonymous

5.13 The Effects of Social Media in Identifying Urban Voting Behavior in Rangpur- 3 Constituency

In urban parts of Rangpur-3, especially within the Rangpur City Corporation, social media played a pivotal role in both influencing and revealing voting behavior during the 11th Parliamentary Election. Commonly, the multifaceted effects of social media in identifying urban voting behavior and providing insights into how social media has reshaped political engagement in the Rangpur-3 constituency. Urban voters, due to better internet access and higher digital literacy, were more active on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter, making them more susceptible to and expressive about political narratives online. Moreover, social media allows urban voters to learn about candidates, parties, and policies, often in real time. Also, social media provides a platform for alternative and independent voices, giving urban voters access to diverse viewpoints.

5.14 The Ways of Candidates in Influencing the Voters by Using Social Media Campaigns

Posting achievements like societal and unemployment issues and past initiatives resonates with urban challenges in Rangpur-3 by giving direct messages to voters. Using storytelling to highlight personal connections to the constituency or showcase beneficiaries of their programs. Candidates targeted campaigns by age, gender, and profession. Youth-oriented messages like engaging younger voters with modern, relatable content, memes, and trend-based posts. Regarding women's issues, they were highlighting policies aimed at women's empowerment and safety in urban areas. Using social media platforms' geolocation features to target ads specifically to voters in urban areas of Rangpur-3 (M. Hasan¹⁹, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

To mobilize voters through peer influence, the candidate encouraged local influencers or respected figures to endorse their campaign online. They posted testimonials from local voters about why they support the candidate or the importance of voting. On the other hand, they created shareable content, for example, hashtags and short videos, to amplify their message through voters' own networks. They also provided voting information to voters. Candidates posted practical information such as polling station locations, voter ID requirements, and election dates to remove barriers to participation. Through social media, they shared updates with voters about election-related events, rallies, and deadlines to keep voters informed. They used countdowns, reminders, and motivational posts to urge people to vote (M. Hasan²⁰, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

Most importantly, candidates tried to build credibility and trust among voters. They highlighted themes of community growth and progress in Rangpur-3. They also tried to share motivational quotes or speeches to inspire civic responsibility and pride in voting by using local traditions, language, and symbols in campaign content to resonate with voters. Besides, candidates explained the potential impact of urban voter participation on the constituency's future development.

¹⁹ Anonymous

²⁰ Anonymous

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5.15 The Perception of Youth on Social Media

One of the interviewees opined that he uses social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for political engagement too. During an election campaign, he accesses social media several times a day for political updates and information. He participated in online discussions on Facebook and Twitter (A. Raihan²¹, personal communication, July 15, 2024).

An interviewee says, “I use Facebook nearly all day. As a student of political science and a political analyst, I think every activity is interesting. Social media plays an important role alongside mainstream media, but sometimes rumors spread through it. At that time, I try to verify the authenticity. Social media campaigns always commemorate voters (users) and help organize through the media. At first, increase mass awareness and verify authenticity before sharing any information (A. Siddiqua²², personal communication, July 13, 2024).” Secondly, people should bring those who spread disinformation under the law. At present, more or less 5 crore people are using digital devices and social media platforms. Day by day, this platform is growing in Bangladesh. On the other hand, anybody can easily access and publicize any news, including election campaigns. Therefore, political parties are trying to make proper use of their election and other campaigns. At last, social media is becoming more widespread day by day (M. Haider²³, personal communication, July 11, 2024).

5.16 Challenges and Limitations in Rangpur-3 Constituency

Despite the increasing influence of social media on voting behavior, the Rangpur-3 constituency faces several challenges and limitations in leveraging its full potential during elections. Analyzing the role of social media in election campaigns and its impact on voting behavior in the Rangpur-3 constituency during the 11th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh presents unique challenges and limitations (M. Hasan²⁴, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

Sometimes voters get confused due to manipulation and biased information from new media platforms. Basically, some supporters who are blinded and biased, they post fake content without justifying its authenticity and origins, which creates problems for voters in deciding their vote during the election. The government and election commission are unable to monitor fake and biased content properly due to policy issues and other factors too. Therefore, the government formulated some laws and policies on ICT and social media monitoring. Some voters feel unsafe and lose their trust in social media (M. Dalim²⁵, personal communication, June 09, 2024).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In the 21st century, social media plays a significant role in the democratic process, establishing and strengthening the accountability of political parties as well as the

²¹ Anonymous

²² Anonymous

²³ Anonymous

²⁴ Anonymous

²⁵ Anonymous

government. Basically, a country is run by the representatives of the Parliament. Therefore, they need to contest in parliamentary elections. The Election Commission arranges the local and parliamentary elections where the candidates and political parties participate in the election process. Before holding the election, the candidates and political parties arrange elections and other sorts of activities for the elections (Ward, 2004).

Nowadays in democratic states, the media has been regarded as the fourth pillar of the state. The strengths and weaknesses of the political parties, governance, and their political activities. The political culture of a state is judged by the performance of its four wings, such as elected representatives or members of parliament, bureaucracy, judiciary, and media, especially social media (Khan, 1996). However, during national parliamentary elections, political parties and candidates use social media for their electoral campaigns. On the other hand, social media convey information and messages according to their desires (Cook, 1999) and break news. Media, especially social media, provide constant discussion and debates representing different thoughts that cover significant issues of regional, national, and international importance during elections (Yaser et al., 2011). Thus, it becomes a linkage institution between government, political parties, candidates, and voters. Therefore, in the 11th National Parliamentary election of Bangladesh, the scenario was that politics and media became interdependent. Nevertheless, media, including social media, strongly influenced voters' thoughts, beliefs, motives, and mobilized their voting behavior.

How people viewed the legitimacy of political content on sites like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, and how this trust affected their political decisions, was vital for political parties and competing candidates. Furthermore, the dissemination of false information must be monitored by the election commission during the election cycle. It has been identified that false political claims and rumors spread widely during the 11th Parliamentary Election, frequently without any kind of confirmation. This false information occasionally caused political unrest or deceived voters, particularly when there were weak fact-checking systems in place. Therefore, the government needs to implement the relevant laws and policies that reduce and limit fake content and news during the election. On the other hand, government and law enforcement agencies should not misuse the laws and policies that violate the democratic and political freedom of the citizens during the implementation stages of electoral laws and policies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest in conducting this study.

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