

# Original Research Article

## Use of Social Media for Political Communication among University Students in Bangladesh

### **Abstract:**

The use of social media for political thought and expression has given the study of political communication a new dimension. We endeavored to discover in social media which political topics students found more interesting in conversation. In addition, this study combines communication theories such as uses and gratification and communication action to analyze political interest in social media and the formation of political opinion. Specifically, we attempted to compare the extent of political communication participation based on gender and academic education. A survey reveals that male students are more involved in political communication than female students. And final year students are more engaged in political communication via social media than their first, second, and third-year counterparts. Using the quantitative method of data collection and program language R to analyze them, this study also explores students' expression of political opinions through social media has a relationship to their political needs. The results here show that freedom of expression given in our constitution if exercised properly, students will be able to engage in political communication.

**Keywords:** Political communication, Social media, public university students, gender, communication action.

### **Introduction**

In the past decade, internet usage by citizens, particularly social media, has been a crucial feature of societal growth. Social media now acts as both a platform for involvement and a source of information, as opposed to newspapers, television, and web searches, formerly used as sources of information. Social media's diversity of interaction, campaigning, and protesting outlets facilitates political engagement. Literature is abundant on the media outlets that influence how political participation is conceptualized, especially the newspaper and television sectors (Neil, 1985; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; McLeod et al., 1999).

There is limited research in the academic literature on the effect of social media and the internet on political participation. Even in research that investigates the impact of technology, the concept of political participation is typically operationalized in terms of offline involvement activities. Very few researchers have incorporated online political participation into their analysis. Unquestionably, technological advances in society have resulted in an expansion and influence on our understanding of political activity.

In democratic nations, parties are required to participate in public policy deliberations. Historically, politicians and journalists have begun and dominated political debate. Mass media have always been a part of political debate, although their composition has changed over time (Chadwick, 2006; Gil De Ziga et al. 2012). Internet users are increasingly capable of creating their content due to the rapid development of Web 2.0 technologies and social media. Using political blogs or discussion forums, people can voice their thoughts, participate in discussions, and meet others who share their viewpoints. Professional journalists no longer serve as gatekeepers, analyzing and selecting news for television and newspaper dissemination. It is believed that the proliferation of social media usage influences, among other things, Internet-based public discourses within the political landscape of individual youth (Eveland, W. P., Hayes, A. F., Shah, D. V., & Kwak, N., 2005).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the political communication of public university students on social media. We have learned which issues they deemed most important and fascinating and how people respond to certain political problems, whether they participate in social media political debates. In addition, we have come to know about the formation of political opinions in their daily lives. Social media also reveals how students respond to social movements. They are either active or a passive participant. It is also beneficial to provide pupils with an overview of the political landscape of this country.

### **Research Questions**

This research is conducted based on the following questions-

**RQ1.** Which political topic students found more thoughtful in social media?

**RQ2.** Do students create any opinion by knowing or by doing political activities through social media?

**Literature review:**

In recent years, research has been undertaken on how the popularity and number of users of social media have increased (Wigand, 2010; McAfee, 2006). Over 800 million individuals worldwide use Facebook (Solli-Sæther et al., 2015). Information technology's mechanism has been altered due to the prevalence of social media applications. Access to the technical infrastructure was a key barrier for those who wished to disseminate knowledge within a community before the recent past. Due to extensive internet connections, this bottleneck has been substantially lessened (Kwak, N., Williams, A. E., Wang, X., & Lee, H., 2005).

Individuals' opinions, ideologies, and emotions surrounding a particular problem can be significantly influenced by the media's coverage of that issue. The formation of opinions is mediated by media information as a result of the selection and presentation of information by the media. By promoting a certain aspect of a larger topic, the media influence how viewers perceive and comprehend a problem, as well as how they form opinions about it. Opinions are influenced by the media as a result of the numerous ways in which information is delivered. Using language, tone, emphasis, placement of certain facts and arguments, and norms, journalists organize breaking news around a certain interpretive angle. Omission or exclusion is another popular strategy employed by the media to influence public opinion. According to Beattie and Milojevich (2017), the media imposes ideological boundaries for public discourse by omitting facts or points of view that individuals may deem significant. The media has a tremendous impact on how people perceive, interpret, and evaluate the world (Schuck and de Vreese, 2006), and to influence public opinion, they alter the information individuals use to make decisions, provide guidance on how to frame an issue, etc (Terkildsen and Schnell, 1997). According to Schur and de Vreese (2006), the media have an important role in affecting perception, interpretation, and evaluative direction, as well as altering the information citizens rely on, recommending how they should approach a problem, and persuading them (Terkildsen and Schnell 1997). In one of two ways, opinion formation is influenced by the content of news media. The recipient's acceptance of the new consideration generates new beliefs about the item, which are strengthened by the new consideration (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Therefore, the information provided by the media can either activate or modify the audience's current worldviews or build new schemata in the lack of ideas about the problem (Scheufele and Scheufele 2010).

***Political Communication and social media:***

In addition to being an efficient method for gathering public opinion, apps based on the internet that provide user-generated content by way of a platform for the creation and exchange of user-generated content are referred to collectively as social media. It expands upon the fundamental ideas and technological underpinnings of Web 2.0. (Haenlein and Kaplan, 2010). Recent advancements in social media, such as social networking sites, blogs, micro blogging, and wikis, have all played an important part in defining political communication not only in the United States but also around the world. This includes political communication in the United Kingdom (e.g., Aday et al. 2010; Benkler, 2006; Bennett, 2003; Farrell and Drezner, 2008; Sunstein, 2002; Tumasjan et al. 2010). Social media platforms provide the most potential as a political instrument because they improve democratic participation and involvement. A public participation process tries to incorporate public choice, demand, and ethics into the policy-creating processes that are carried out at the governmental and corporate levels (Creighton, 2005).

In recent studies, it has been stated that social media and Internet can be utilized to bridge the gap between government officials and the public (Coleman, 2005; Zittel, 2003). Social media, the internet, and other cutting-edge technology allow people to engage with their government in new ways. Assuring new forms of political communication and involvement simply based on technical breakthroughs and procedural procedures. New kinds of political representation and representative democracy are envisaged if representatives and citizens remain in continual communication (Coleman, 2005; Zittel, 2003).

It is feasible to develop and disseminate messages more efficiently using social media, leading to increased citizen participation in public debates. The makeover allows minorities to express themselves in several ways. The internet and online media can generate public opinion in opposition to the current social order, triggering what Howard Rheingold calls 'dramatic changes in the cultural-ecological system' (Healy, 1997: 65). Due to two factors, alternative media can play an essential role in encouraging citizen participation in public discourse. As an introduction,

alternative media are unrelated to a capitalist system and political power, in contrast to regular media, which fail to represent a variety of perspectives.

As a result of current media's links to mainstream interests, a need for alternative media has emerged. Second, the use of alternative media has broadened the scope of citizen interaction. 'Content interaction' aids in the consumption of media content by those receiving it, and 'interpersonal interaction,' in which technological links are made between information providers and those receiving it, are two main types of interactivities (Massey and Levy, 1999).

### ***Political communication and gender:***

There is a lot of attention paid to how female and male politicians communicate in the study of political communications and gender. Understanding how female politicians engage in a male-dominated political context has been a key focus of this study. Female communication, according to Campbell (1960), shifts from an overtly dramatic tone to one that is based more on a personal journal and narrative, anticipatory rather than catastrophic. Inquiry and interconnectedness were the focus of this study (Lofgren and Karlsson, 2016). Byström uses a classification similar to Campbell's (2004) to look at how men and women in politics communicate in various media situations. Women's Twitter conversation is seen to be more individualistic and participatory, according to Meeks et al. (2016). Besides the communication style differences mentioned above, gender-related research suggests that voters judge and perceive politicians differently based on their gender.

By commenting, sharing, following, and liking on social media, individuals and groups may stay up to date on digital news (Hyun and Kim, 2015). Media outlets have honed their techniques for distributing news to social media consumers via the technologically mediated landscape of social media (Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka, 2016). While news consumption has not decreased in the age of social media and broadcasting, it is being spread on online digital platforms to satisfy people's wants for information.

According to Khan (2017), obtaining news is one reason why social media users utilize these sites (e.g. 63 percent of Americans use Twitter and Facebook as primary news sources). Moreover, social media are becoming significant traffic drivers for news websites and have revolutionized how news items are delivered and digested, since more people acquire news

online than via radio or newspapers (Haddow and Haddow, 2014). Social media have evolved into digital platforms where news is delivered and consumed given that the news media has established a strong presence on social networking sites and news sharing is their most common activity (Napoli, 2015).

Consequently, social media has supplied news media with a vast array of options to set social media dialogues and form opinions, as well as multiple ways to make news media information accessible online via a variety of digital platforms published by news media. By offering elitist hints, scientific explanations, interpretations, or redirecting attention to other topics, news agencies guarantee that their content is digested by their target audience (Beattie and Milojevich, 2017).

***Hypothesis:***

H1- Final year students are more engaged in political communication in social media.

H2- Male students are more engaged in political communication than female students.

**Theoretical Framework**

The goal of the current study is to harmonize J. G. Blumler's Uses and Gratification and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action within a broader sociocultural context.

The Theory of Communicative Action is where Habermas attempted to introduce the concept of rationality. This idea is neither prophetic nor concentrated on an individual. Habermas started a fresh movement in contemporary sociological theory. Max Weber's 'Social Action' highlighted the limitations of individualism for him. He gave rationality a more general social context. By basing the idea on social and natural sciences, he enhanced his pragmatic side. Rationalization exhibits a certain level of fragmentation, according to Weber. Science, industry, and law are three distinct areas of value (Bohman, 2014). This leads to a conflict of opinion, which could lead to a social catastrophe.

Although the idea has only recently been applied to the media, its roots are deeply ingrained in how we perceive why people seek out political information. The idea of uses and pleasure is predicated on four premises. First users actively seek information and have a purpose in mind when they access a medium, as opposed to passively processing information. They will search

for the greatest medium to satisfy their demands, and alternative media can do so (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Although many variables influence the receiver's precise uses and pleasures, we may identify five potential general motives from the literature for taking part actively in communication. First and foremost, users seek information (Katz et al. 1973); this is acknowledged as a key element of all studies and acknowledges that they must get something from a communication channel. The urge to escape daily stress is the second cause. Third, entertainment may be provided by the media. The desire to socialize with others could be the fourth justification. Media can also contribute to the formation of a feeling of personal value by fostering the growth of personal identity.

U&G researchers initially focused on political communication and conducted several studies revealing relationships between satisfaction, exposure, attitudes, and understanding of politics (Clark and Tan, 2011). McLeod and Becker (1977) were one of the most comprehensive investigations on the link between media satisfaction and political outcomes. Grateful and avoidance mechanisms explained a large amount of variation in a few political variables, including issue accuracy, the likelihood of voting, interest in campaigns, the intensity of political conversation, and the perceived differences between candidates. Based on these data, they created a transactional reward model. Audience orientations, in addition to demographics and other aspects of media exposure, were found to clarify the effects of the media. There is a substantial correlation between information-seeking and gratification-seeking and campaign-viewing behavior, as demonstrated by the study.

### **Methodology**

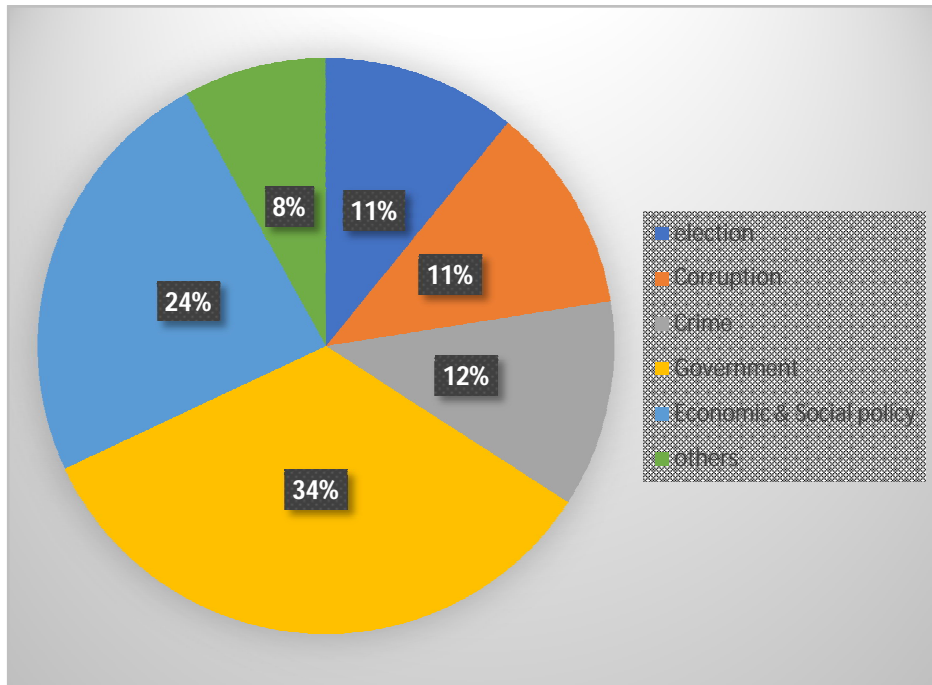
This quantitative study is mainly conducted on the survey method. Around 800 students from 5 public universities have been selected to conduct the research. The universities are University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Bangladesh University of Professionals and Khulna University. A total of 800 students have been selected from first year to fourth year, 200 in each year. Convenience sampling is used to conduct the research. Programming language 'R' has been used for multivariate, statistical, and universal analysis.

### ***Basic information about the participants***

398 female and 402 male students participated in this study. The main goal of the study was to know which political topic students found more thoughtful in social media. We asked them

several questions to find out their opinions. 595 (75%) respondents use Facebook as a social media platform. 205 (25%) of them use both Facebook and Instagram.

Fig 1: Pie chart of the kind of political topic discussed by the students



Source: R programming language

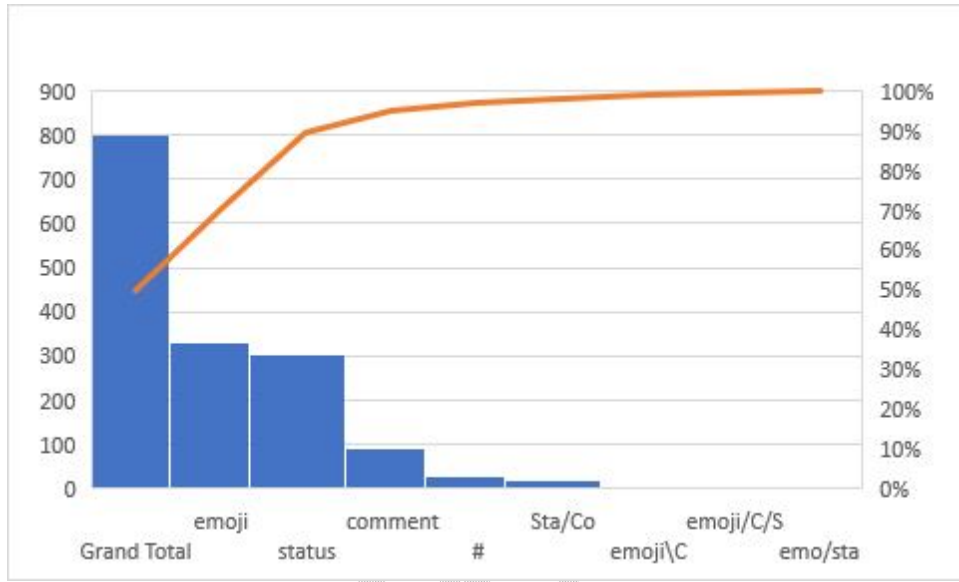
We asked the respondents in social media what kind of political topics do they discuss. According to Fig. 2, 34% students like to discuss about government-based issues in social media while the number is 24% for economic and social policy related topics. There are other issues like crime, election, corruption and many more.

### **Expression of opinion about political communication in social media**

Communication styles vary from person to person. When asked which medium students choose to express their opinions on social media, various topics come up. Fig. 2 depicts that 41% (329) students report expressing their opinions through emojis. 302 (37.75%) people talk about giving status on Facebook. 91 (11.3%) people said that they express their opinion by commenting on various posts. 29 (3.6%) students say they present themselves through hashtags (#). 20 (2.5%) students reported using two mediums, comments, and status. 13 people are using emojis and

comments. 13 others are using emojis, comments and statuses. 3 people choose emoji and status as a medium of opinion expression.

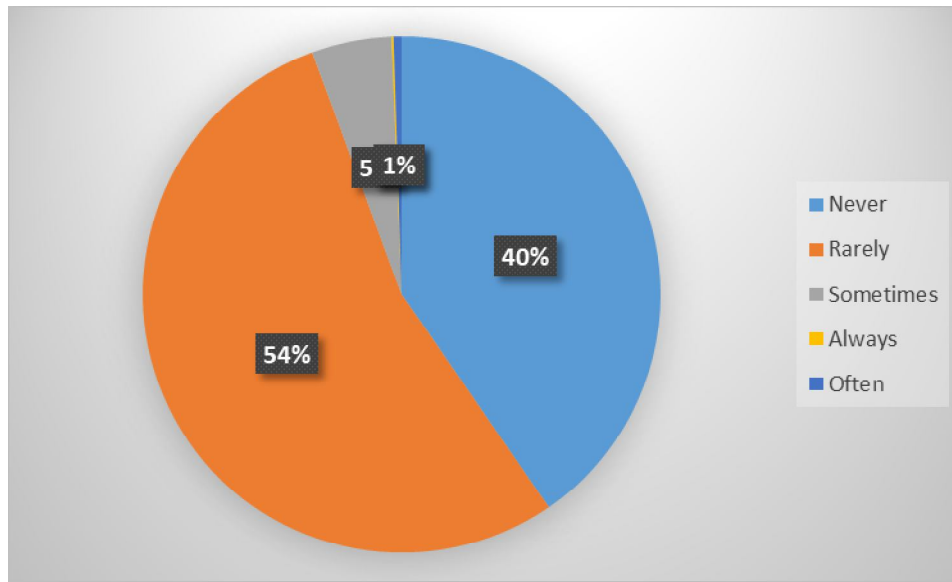
Fig. 2 Graph showing political communication in social media



Source: R programming language

**Students create any opinion by knowing or by doing political activities through social media**

Fig. 3 Graph showing political activities through social media



Source: R programming language

Being the modern public sphere today, social media has its place as a platform for the youth to express their opinions. But are they creating any opinion by knowing or doing political activities through this media? We tried to explore it and collected the data of the respondents related to opinion formation. Out of 800 respondents, 432 (54%) students rarely create any opinion through social media according to Fig. 3. Again 323 (40%) students said that they never created opinions via media, but 40 (5%) students sometimes do so. Another 4 (0.5%) students said social media often create their political opinion and there was only 1 student whose opinions are often created through social media.

### ***Hypothesis Testing***

A t-test is an inferential statistic used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups and how they are related. T-tests are used when the data sets follow a normal distribution and have unknown variances

Degrees of freedom refers to the maximum number of logically independent values, which are values that have the freedom to vary, in the data sample.

Alpha, the significance level, is the probability that you will make the mistake of rejecting the null hypothesis when in fact it is true. The p-value measures the probability of getting a more extreme value than the one you got from the experiment.

H1- Final year (under graduation) students are more engaged in political communication in social media.

Here the mean value of engagement of 4<sup>th</sup> year student is 2.14625 and mean value of engagement of 3<sup>rd</sup> year student is 1.83625

Our null hypothesis is that the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 3<sup>rd</sup> year student is same,

Where the alternative hypothesis is, the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 3<sup>rd</sup> year student is not same,

Here we will compare the alpha value and p value to get the result, here alpha value is 5% = 0.05 and from the t-test we get the p value =  $1.395e-08 = 0.00000001395$ , which is very low,

We know if alpha value > p value, we may reject the null hypothesis, and take the alternative hypothesis, here we reject that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in political engagement is same, which was our null hypothesis. Now we take the alternative hypothesis, that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in political engagement is not same.

Here the mean value of engagement of 4<sup>th</sup> year student is 2.14625 and mean value of engagement of 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students is 1.713333

Our null hypothesis is that the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year student is same,

Where the alternative hypothesis is the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year student is not same,

Here we will compare the alpha value and p value to get the result, here alpha value is 5% = 0.05 and from the t-test we get the p value =  $2.2e-16 = 0.00000000000000022$ , which is very low,

We know if alpha value  $>$  p value, we may reject the null hypothesis, and our findings may be significant and take the alternative hypothesis, here we reject that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students in political engagement is same, which was our null hypothesis. Now we take the alternative hypothesis, that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students in political engagement is not same.

Here the mean value of engagement of 4<sup>th</sup> year student is 2.14625 and mean value of engagement of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students is 1.63625.

Our null hypothesis is that the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 1<sup>st</sup>-year student is same where the alternative hypothesis is, the mean value of engagement of political communication of 4<sup>th</sup> year students and 1<sup>st</sup>-year student is not same,

Here we will compare the alpha value and p value to get the result, here alpha value is  $5\% = 0.05$  and from the t-test we get the p value =  $2.2e-16 = 0.00000000000000022$ , which is very low,

We can reject that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in political engagement is same, which was our null hypothesis. Now we take the alternative hypothesis, that the mean value of 4<sup>th</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in political engagement is not same.

Here the mean value of engagement of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students is 1.836254 and mean value of engagement of 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students is 1.713333.

Our null hypothesis is the mean value of engagement of political communication of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year student is same,

Where the alternative hypothesis is, the mean value of engagement of political communication of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year student is not same,

Here we will compare the alpha value and p value to get the result, here alpha value is  $5\% = 0.05$  and from the t-test we get the p value = 0.0123, which is very low,

We know if alpha value  $>$  p value, we may reject the null hypothesis, and our findings may be significant and take the alternative hypothesis, here we reject that the mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students in political engagement and mean value of 2<sup>nd</sup> year in political engagement is same,

which was our null hypothesis. Now we take the alternative hypothesis, that the mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in political engagement and the mean value of 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students in political engagement is not same.

Here the mean value of engagement of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students is 1.836254 and mean value of engagement of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students is 1.63625.

Our null hypothesis is that the mean value of engagement of political communication of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 1<sup>st</sup>-year student is same,

Where the alternative hypothesis is, the mean value of engagement of political communication of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 1<sup>st</sup>-year student is not same,

Here we will compare the alpha value and p value to get the result, here alpha value is 5% = 0.05 and from the t-test we get the p value = 0.0005377, which is very low.

Here we can reject that the mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in political engagement and mean value of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in political engagement is same, which was our null hypothesis. Now we take the alternative hypothesis, that the mean value of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in political engagement and the mean value of 1<sup>st</sup>-year students in political engagement is not same.

H2 - Male students are more engaged in political communication than female students.

Here we will do a t-test to check whether male students are more engaged in political communication than female students.

Here the null hypothesis is,

H<sub>0</sub>: Engagement in political communication of male = Engagement in political communication of female

Here alternative hypothesis is

H<sub>1</sub>: Engagement in political communication of male  $\neq$  Engagement in political communication of female.

Welch's test as the variance is unequal variance. The mean of males engagement in political communication is 1.959 and the mean of females engagement in political communication is 1.706558. Here alpha value is 5% = 0.05, and from the t. test we get the p value = 1.302e-11 =

0.00000001302, which is very low. So we can reject the null hypothesis, that engagement in political communication of males and females is equal. So the engagement in political communication of males and females is not equal. Those male students are more engaged in political communication than female students.

## **Result and Discussion**

As per results of our survey, public university students are required to remain updated on political discussions, recognize new trends, and identify significant users inside various social networks. A significant objective of future political communication, from the standpoint of politicians, is to expand "e-participation" by actively engaging in social media while monitoring the social web.

This is, however, not a simple process due to time and budgetary constraints, as well as a big number of distinct social media platforms, a vast quantity of information, and the complexity of unstructured data.

Based on the results, it seems that most respondents utilize online media and consider themselves politically informed as a result. 34 percent of them prefer to discuss governmental matters the most. Economics and social policy have a significant influence in 24 percent of student discussions. Again, crime and corruption occupy a special place in their discourse, each occupying 12 and 11 percent respectively.

Another research reported that 70% of social media users in the United States seldom or rarely post or share about political or social issues (McClain, 2021). When questioned about five probable reasons why they do not post about these topics, the top two reasons cited by users are concern that their posts or shares will be used against them and a desire to avoid being attacked for their opinions. Ali Riaz (2022) refers to the culture of fear, stating that people refrain from criticizing the government for fear of displeasing authority.

Because of this concern, 41% of students view emojis as a secure means of expressing their ideas. Because he does not want to write or say anything that could be used against him. If they were provided with a safe environment in which to share their viewpoints, they might be able to have a more productive discussion about their views on the country, politics, and social concerns.

Our first hypothesis testing, however, suggests a solution to this problem. We have shown by a t-test that Final year (under graduation) students are more engaged in political communication in social media than 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students. That is, as the students become senior and mature, their inertia of political communication is decreasing.

We proved through our second hypothesis testing that; male students are more engaged in political communication than female students. In Europe as a whole, women's reported interest in politics is 16% lower than men's, according to the survey. The most plausible explanation for Gillie's (2019) statement is imbalanced gender representation. In social sciences, "you cannot be what you cannot see" is a well-established principle. Seeing people who resemble us in certain occupations or careers increases our likelihood of visualizing ourselves in such positions. Another possible explanation is the tendency of women to underestimate their intellect and abilities. Fraile (2014) argues on the LSE's European Politics and Policy blog that early intervention is crucial for ending this vicious cycle.

The two researchers remark that gender equality measures are typically meant to address gender differences among adults, yet childhood socialization may continue to be gendered even in nations with higher levels of gender equality.

### **Conclusion:**

The contributions of this paper are as follows. This study commences with a comprehensive literature analysis on the relevance of social media to political communication. Specifically, we highlight several recent empirical types of research associated with public social networking platforms like Facebook. Second, according to our demographic findings, public university students in Bangladesh have a strong interest in social media-based political communication. We also observe a significant increase in Bangladeshi students' use of social media in recent years. This study demonstrates, thirdly, that many students are unwilling to voice their opinions on social media. Users are concerned that their posts or shares will be used against them and wish to avoid being attacked for their ideas, according to empirical studies. In addition, as students mature and advance intellectually, their engagement and interest in political communication rise. Finally, we see that female students are less interested in political communication than their male counterparts. Multiple studies have shown that gender equality measures and early childhood socialization can make a significant difference in this area.

Due to its origins in communications literature, the uses and gratifications theory applies to social media. Social media is a communication tool that enables users to communicate with hundreds or even billions of people around the globe. Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported utilizing social media for social engagement in this study. Respondents stated that Facebook is a place to communicate and socialize with others, and they have more interaction with individuals via social media than in person, and social media affords them a social life. Respondents reported that they use social media to connect with and stay in contact with family and friends, interact with people they do not often see, converse with old acquaintances, and make new friends. Participants in the survey reported using social media to engage with a wide variety of individuals, including friends, relatives, spouses, coworkers, old friends, old acquaintances, and new friends. So their political needs can be fulfilled through this media by communicating with anyone close or any political actor.

In social media, the communicative action of two or more individuals is determined by their interaction and coordination. Students express their communication actions through hashtags, statuses, comments, and emojis. So our study complies with both theories.

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