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Social Media, Political Awareness, and Civic Responsibility Among Youth

¹ Abu Sayed, ² Md. Tahmid Bin Sayed
^{1,2} Carmichael College, Rangpur, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Md. Tahmid Bin Sayed

Abstract

Social media has become a major channel through which youth access information, develop political awareness, and engage with civic issues. This study examines how social media influences political knowledge, critical thinking, and civic responsibility among young individuals in the Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. Using a structured questionnaire that included demographic items, Likert-scale statements, and open-ended questions, the survey assessed patterns of social media use, perceptions of political content, and attitudes toward democratic participation. The findings show that most respondents rely on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok for political updates, which has contributed to improved awareness of national issues and government policies. However, youth also reported

exposure to widespread misinformation and expressed concern about exaggerated or distorted political content. While many believed they could identify unreliable information, fewer consistently verified content before sharing. Social media further encouraged civic responsibility by promoting discussions about public issues and reinforcing the importance of voting and community engagement. Overall, the results suggest that social media plays a significant role in shaping political understanding and civic attitudes among youth in Rangpur Division, highlighting the need for strengthened digital literacy and responsible online behavior to support informed and active citizenship.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Awareness, Youth Engagement, Civic Responsibility, Misinformation, Digital Citizenship

Introduction

The rise of social media has become a defining feature of contemporary adolescence, profoundly shaping how young people communicate, form relationships, and interpret their social environment. Research shows that adolescents develop distinct patterns of social media use influenced by peer interaction, motivation, and online activity levels, demonstrating the deep integration of digital platforms into their daily lives ^[1]. Social media has also emerged as an important arena for observing public issues and youth engagement, especially during periods of rapid social and political change ^[2]. Young users are consistently exposed to large volumes of digital content created by peers, influencers, celebrities, and organizations, which collectively influence their behavior, lifestyle choices, and social attitudes ^[3]. The broader social environment, including mass media exposure and family dynamics, further shapes adolescent development and reflects the combined impact of offline and online influences ^[4]. At the same time, while digital platforms offer opportunities for connection, learning, and support, they also expose youth to cyberbullying, emotional distress, and harmful interactions, making social media a complex and highly influential component of adolescent development ^[5]. Taken together, these findings illustrate that social media has rapidly become a central element of youth life, shaping social behavior, learning patterns, and personal development.

Beyond social interaction, social media has become a primary space for youth political learning, opinion formation, and civic expression. Studies consistently show that online platforms shape how young people engage with sociopolitical issues in both virtual and offline public spheres. Research on Moroccan students, for instance, demonstrates a strong correlation between social media use and virtual civic participation, with political interest and self-efficacy playing major roles in shaping online political behavior ^[6]. Digital media also enables youth to construct new political identities, as seen in global climate activism where young people use online platforms to articulate social concerns and develop emerging political subjectivities ^[7]. Among university students, digital media is closely linked to political discussion, participation, and content creation, reinforcing the idea that young adults view online environments as active spaces for political socialization rather than passive news channels ^[8]. Evidence from Jordan suggests that social media positively influences political participation, with gender moderating the

strength and nature of this relationship [9], while studies in Pakistan reveal that social media platforms serve as key sources of political news and significantly contribute to political awareness among young users [10]. Platform design also shapes political expression: in China, information-centered platforms such as Weibo encourage political discourse, whereas private communication platforms like WeChat tend to limit it [11]. Collectively, these studies confirm that social media functions as a powerful political socialization tool that shapes how youth form political opinions, engage in public debate, and participate in civic life across diverse cultural contexts.

Civic responsibility, meanwhile, plays a foundational role in shaping how young people participate in democratic life, and recent research highlights the diverse ways in which youth assume such responsibilities both within and beyond formal political structures. Studies on young women's informal leadership show that youth often take on meaningful civic responsibilities in grassroots settings, even when these contributions remain underrecognized due to gendered expectations and structural barriers [12]. Emotional engagement also shapes civic participation; in digital civic media surrounding climate change, emotions such as fear, despair, and anger influence how young people practice critique, empathy, and moral meaning-making [13]. Digital citizenship education similarly affects civic attitudes: expressive media activities in schools encourage online civic engagement, while protective educational approaches promote respectful and restrained online behavior, suggesting that different strategies shape different civic outcomes [14]. Broader discussions of student participation indicate that while democratic aims in education are often constrained by institutional pressures, youth involvement remains vital for sustaining democratic values within schools and communities [15]. Large-scale European studies further show that digital skills, perceptions of misinformation, and online engagement significantly shape young people's civic attitudes, underscoring the link between digital competence and responsible citizenship [16]. Research on civic education likewise emphasizes that civic values and moral responsibility are essential to preparing informed youth citizens [17]. Contemporary analyses of youth political participation reinforce this view, suggesting that although digital tools expand opportunities for civic engagement, meaningful participation requires digital literacy, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility [18]. Collectively, these findings highlight civic responsibility as an essential component of democratic participation and social contribution among youth.

Despite these opportunities, significant gaps in social awareness and information literacy continue to shape how young people interpret and respond to online content within rapidly evolving digital environments. Research from Africa shows that growing social media use exposes youth to a complex mix of information, misinformation, and disinformation, creating psychological vulnerabilities and long-term risks for informed citizenship and democratic participation [19]. Studies indicate that political engagement itself may increase misinformation sharing, as politically involved youth often share unverified content due to emotional investment and algorithmic reinforcement [20]. Additional research warns that invalid misinformation

warnings can unintentionally undermine trust in legitimate news and weaken political memory, demonstrating the need for careful design of corrective interventions [21]. Broader scientific analyses reveal that although claims of widespread misinformation exposure are common, actual exposure is concentrated among smaller groups of highly motivated users, creating unequal risks across youth populations [22]. In politically polarized contexts such as the Philippines, youth become more susceptible to fake news, reducing their ability to distinguish accurate from false information [23]. Although governments and educational institutions continue to implement digital literacy initiatives, findings show that young people struggle to navigate misinformation effectively unless training is explicit, sustained, and aligned with their real online experiences [24, 25]. Studies also reveal that youth often trust message sources within their social circles and are therefore more likely to share misleading information impulsively on platforms such as WhatsApp [26]. Emerging research suggests that empowering youth through critical media production and interactive forms of learning can strengthen their ability to detect and resist misinformation, although improvements remain uneven across different age groups and digital contexts [27, 28]. Overall, these findings highlight persistent gaps in critical thinking and information-processing skills among youth, underscoring the need for stronger digital literacy education, targeted interventions, and collaborative strategies to mitigate misinformation in digital spaces.

Despite high engagement with social media, many young people may lack the political depth, critical evaluation skills, and civic responsibility necessary to navigate digital information responsibly. Heavy reliance on online platforms for political learning exposes youth to misinformation, emotional influence, and polarized narratives, which may distort political awareness and weaken informed participation. These gaps underscore the importance of examining how social media influences youth political understanding, civic responsibility, and ethical behavior online.

In addressing these issues, this study explores how social media influences political awareness among individuals aged 16 to 26, investigates whether social media promotes or reduces civic responsibility, and analyzes how youth perceive misinformation along with the moral and ethical responsibility they associate with sharing political content online.

Accordingly, this research aims to measure the level of political awareness young people gain through social media, examine youth attitudes toward civic responsibility and democratic participation, explore ethical perceptions and critical thinking behaviors related to misinformation, and identify patterns in social media usage that influence political learning and information interpretation.

This study holds significance across multiple fields. In sociology, it contributes to understanding how digital environments shape youth identity and behavior. In political science, it provides insight into how social media informs political awareness and participation. For public administration, it offers evidence relevant to digital literacy policy and youth civic education. From a social philosophy perspective, it highlights ethical concerns related to truth, responsibility, and civic duty in digital spaces.

Methods

Study Design

This study used a quantitative, survey-based cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between social media use, political awareness, civic responsibility, and misinformation perceptions among youth. The design was selected because it allows for systematic measurement of attitudes, behaviors, and awareness levels within a specific population at a single point in time. A structured questionnaire containing Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses was used to gather data from participants. The cross-sectional approach enabled the researchers to analyze current patterns of digital engagement and civic attitudes among youth and to explore associations between key variables such as social media exposure, political learning, and ethical responsibility online.

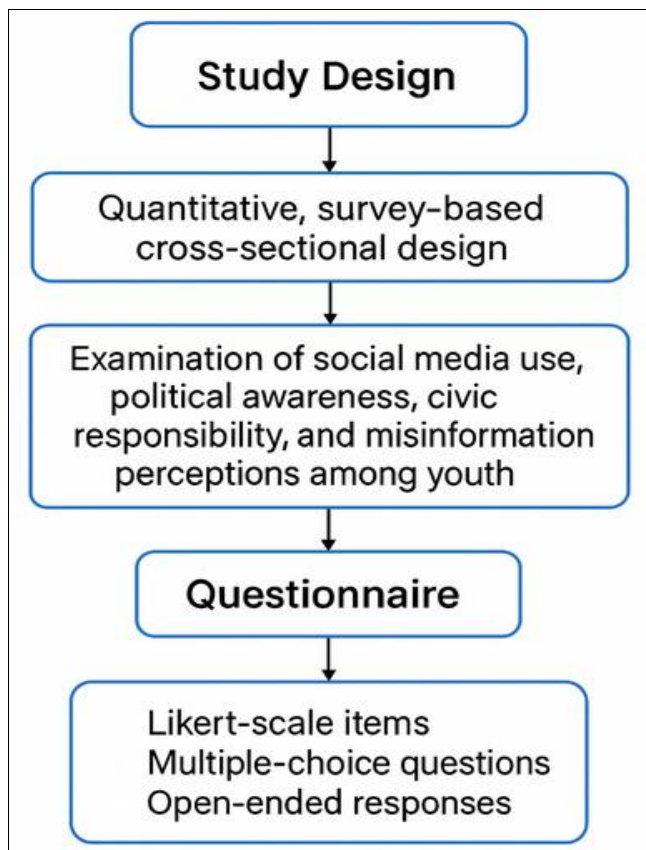


Fig 1: Overview of the quantitative, survey-based study design illustrating the sequence from research design to questionnaire administration and data interpretation

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of youth aged 16 to 26 years, as this age range represents a critical developmental period in which individuals actively engage with social media, form political opinions, and develop civic attitudes. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants due to the accessibility of youth populations within educational institutions and online platforms. The final sample included 120 respondents, and all participants voluntarily completed the survey. This sample size was considered adequate for descriptive and correlational analysis within a cross-sectional research design. Participation was open to all individuals within the specified age range regardless of gender, educational background, or district of residence.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The instrument consisted of eight sections that covered demographic characteristics, social media usage patterns, political awareness, critical thinking, misinformation perception, civic responsibility, attitudes toward society and democracy, and open-ended reflections. Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for Strongly Disagree to 5 for Strongly Agree, allowing for systematic assessment of participants' attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaire also included multiple-choice items to capture usage behaviors and open-ended questions that provided participants the opportunity to share detailed qualitative insights. This combination of closed-ended and open-ended items enabled a comprehensive examination of both quantitative trends and contextual explanations related to social media engagement and civic participation among youth.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a four-week period using digital distribution channels to ensure accessibility for youth aged 16 to 26. The online survey was shared through educational institutions, social media platforms, and student networks. Participants were provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose before accessing the questionnaire, and they were able to complete it independently at their convenience using a computer or mobile device.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that no personally identifiable information would be collected. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process. All responses were automatically recorded in a secure digital database and used exclusively for academic analysis. Only aggregated findings are reported, and no individual participant can be identified from the results.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out through an online survey distributed to youth aged 16 to 26 across different educational institutions and social media platforms. The questionnaire was administered using a digital form, allowing participants to access and complete the survey at their convenience. Participants were approached through institutional networks, student groups, and online channels where the survey link was shared along with a brief explanation of the study's purpose.

All participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their identities would not be collected at any stage of the process. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. No personal identifying information was requested, and all responses were used solely for academic research. Participants were assured that their data would be stored securely and analyzed only in aggregated form, with no individual response being disclosed.

Data Analysis

The collected survey data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistical techniques and qualitative interpretation. Responses from the Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions were first coded and

entered into statistical software for processing. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were generated to summarize participants' demographic profiles and patterns of social media use. Mean scores were calculated for all major constructs, such as political awareness, critical thinking, misinformation perception, and civic responsibility, to identify overall tendencies and levels of agreement among youth respondents.

To enhance clarity and interpretability, the quantitative findings were visualized using bar charts to illustrate distribution patterns across Likert-scale variables and demographic groups. Additional graphical representations, such as pie charts, column graphs, and comparative line charts, were utilized where necessary to display relationships, trends, and variations among key variables. These visual tools supported clearer interpretation of differences in participant responses and facilitated the identification of emerging patterns in the dataset.

Open-ended responses were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Each qualitative response was reviewed and coded line by line to identify meaningful segments. Similar codes were then grouped together into broader themes that captured participants' perspectives on political awareness, misinformation, and civic responsibility. This analysis provided deeper contextual insights that complemented the quantitative findings and highlighted nuanced views that may not be fully captured through numerical data alone.

By integrating descriptive statistics, graphical analysis, and thematic interpretation, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of youth attitudes and behaviors related to social media use, political learning, and civic engagement.

Results

Demographic Profile

This section presents the findings of the survey conducted among 120 youth participants from the Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. The results are organized according to the major components of the questionnaire, including demographic characteristics, social media usage patterns, political awareness, misinformation perception, civic responsibility, and attitudes toward society and democracy. The demographic distribution of respondents by gender, age group, education level, and district of residence is summarized in **Table 1**. Both descriptive statistics and thematic interpretations of open-ended responses are reported.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	96	80.0%
	Female	24	20.0%
Age Group	16–18 years	36	30.0%
	19–22 years	60	50.0%
	23–26 years	24	20.0%
Education Level	SSC/HSC	42	35.0%
	Diploma	30	25.0%
District of Residence	Bachelor (Honours)	48	40.0%
	Nilphamari	30	25.0%
	Panchagarh	24	20.0%
	Kurigram	36	30.0%
	Rangpur	36	25.0%

Social Media Usage Patterns

Social media use among youth participants was found to be highly frequent and time-intensive. As shown in **Figure 1**, the majority of respondents reported using social media for **2–3 hours per day**, followed by those who spent **1–2 hours daily**, indicating that social media has become a significant part of their everyday routines. Only a small proportion reported less than one hour of daily use, reinforcing the prevalence of persistent online engagement among youth.

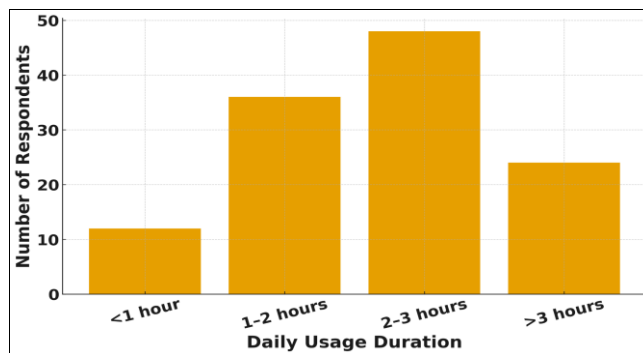


Fig 1: Distribution of daily time spent on social media among youth participants

In terms of platform preferences, youth most commonly use **Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok**, which aligns with broader national usage trends in Bangladesh. The frequency distribution of platform usage is illustrated in **Figure 2**, where Facebook emerges as the most widely used platform among respondents, with YouTube and TikTok also maintaining substantial levels of engagement.

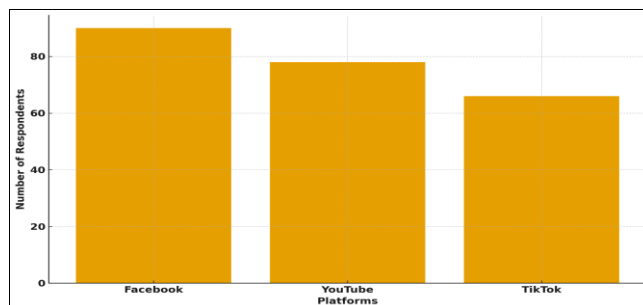


Fig 2: Distribution of social media platforms used by youth

When asked to identify their **single most preferred** platform, Facebook again dominated youth preference, followed by YouTube and TikTok. These results are presented in **Figure 3**, while the precise percentage breakdown of platform preference is summarized in **Table 2**.

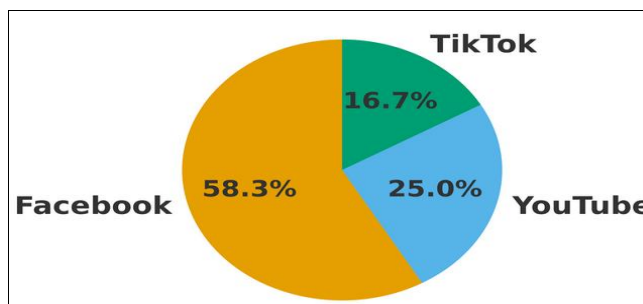


Fig 3: Most preferred social media platforms among youth participants

Overall, the findings show that youth are highly active on social media and primarily use platforms designed for quick information and entertainment. The dominance of Facebook indicates that much of their public discussion, news exposure, and political engagement takes place within that platform.

Table 2: Most Preferred Social Media Platforms Among Youth Participants (n = 120)

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	70	58.3%
YouTube	30	25.0%
TikTok	20	16.7%

Political Awareness Scores

Political awareness was assessed using five Likert-scale items, and the results show a generally high level of political learning through social media. As shown in **Figure 4**, the strongest agreement was found for the influence of social media on political opinions, followed by improved awareness of national issues and government policies. Understanding political events in depth received slightly lower ratings, indicating that youth are informed but may not always engage with detailed political analysis.

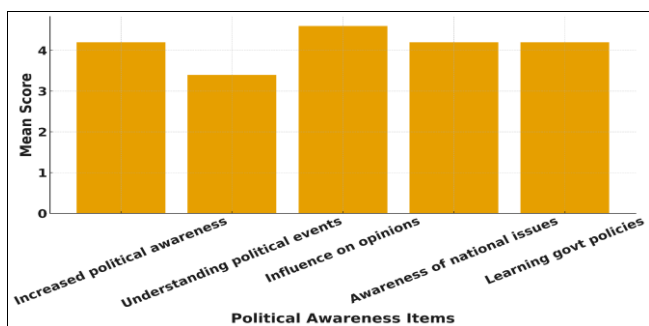


Fig 4: Mean scores for political awareness items among youth participants

To support these findings, **Table 3** presents the mean and standard deviation (SD) for each political awareness item. All mean scores exceed the midpoint value of 3.0, reflecting generally positive perceptions of social media as a source of political learning.

Table 3: Political Awareness Scores (n = 120)

Political Awareness Item	Mean	SD
Increased political awareness	4.2	0.90
Better understanding of political events	3.4	1.10
Influence on political opinions	4.6	0.70
Awareness of national issues	4.2	0.80
Learning about government policies	4.2	0.80

These findings reveal that while social media effectively exposes youth to political information and helps them remain up-to-date with national issues, the development of deeper political understanding may still be limited, suggesting the need for complementary offline learning and critical media engagement.

Civic Responsibility Scores

Civic responsibility was measured to understand how social media influences youth engagement in community and democratic activities. As shown in **Figure 5**, respondents

generally agreed that staying informed, sharing helpful information, and participating in social and political issues are important civic behaviors. Overall, the results suggest that social media encourages positive civic attitudes among youth.

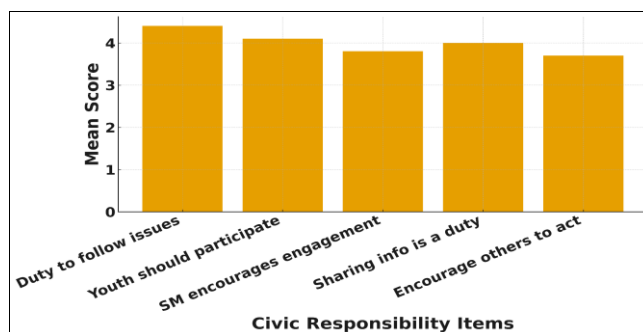


Fig 5: Mean scores for civic responsibility items among youth participants

To provide a clearer view of these results, **Table 4** summarizes the mean, standard deviation (SD), and agreement levels for each civic responsibility statement. Most respondents agreed that staying informed and contributing responsibly online are important, although actions such as encouraging others to participate received slightly lower support. This suggests that while youth acknowledge civic responsibility, their engagement may not always translate into active participation.

Table 4: Civic Responsibility Scores and Agreement Distribution (n = 120)

Civic Responsibility Item	Mean	SD	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Duty to follow issues	4.4	0.7	82%	13%	5%
Youth should participate	4.1	0.8	74%	19%	7%
SM encourages engagement	3.8	0.9	66%	24%	10%
Sharing info is a duty	4.0	0.8	72%	18%	10%
Encourage others to act	3.7	1.0	62%	23%	15%

Overall, these results highlight that social media contributes to shaping civic awareness and a sense of responsibility, although translation into consistent real-world civic action may still remain limited for some youth participants.

Misinformation Awareness

Misinformation awareness was measured to assess how youth evaluate political content online. As shown in **Figure 6**, most participants recognized that misinformation is common and often exaggerated by influencers, although fewer consistently verified content before sharing.

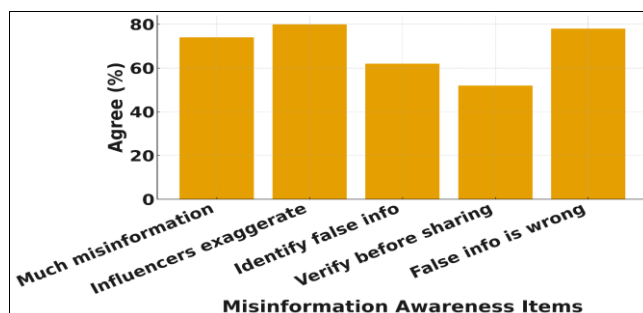


Fig 6: Percentage agreement levels for misinformation awareness items among youth participants

The percentage distribution of agreement levels for each misinformation awareness item is summarized in **Table 5**, showing a clear recognition of misinformation risks but some inconsistency in verification behaviors.

Table 5: Misinformation Awareness Percentage Distribution (n = 120)

Misinformation Awareness Item	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Social media has much misinformation	74%	18%	8%
Influencers exaggerate political facts	80%	14%	6%
I can identify misleading content	62%	25%	13%
I check accuracy before sharing	52%	27%	21%
Sharing false info is morally wrong	78%	12%	10%

These findings indicate that while youth are aware of misinformation, critical evaluation and fact-checking are not always practiced, which may leave them vulnerable to misleading political narratives.

Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Analysis of the open-ended responses revealed three key insights: social media increases youth awareness of national and political issues, misinformation remains a major concern, and political content is often shared without verification. Examples include comments such as “*Social media increased my awareness about what is happening in the country,*” “*Fake news is a major issue because people believe everything they see online,*” and “*Youth share posts carelessly without checking whether it is true or false.*” Overall, these responses support the quantitative results, indicating that while social media enhances political awareness, misinformation and careless sharing continue to pose challenges.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that youth in the Rangpur Division are politically aware and actively engage with sociopolitical information through social media. Results indicate that platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok play a significant role in shaping political opinions and increasing awareness of national issues. Most respondents recognized civic responsibilities such as staying informed and sharing accurate information, and they expressed positive attitudes toward participating in discussions about public issues. However, although overall perceptions of social media as a political learning tool were favorable, a gap remains between awareness and consistent civic action, indicating that passive online engagement does not always translate into offline participation.

The results also show that misinformation remains a prominent challenge, even among digitally active youth. While many participants believed they could identify false information, fewer consistently verified the content they encountered before sharing it. This highlights a mismatch between ethical awareness and actual behavior. Youth understand that sharing false information is morally wrong, yet impulsive reactions, confirmation bias, or social influence still lead to careless dissemination. Consequently, social media both supports and threatens civic responsibility: it encourages learning and engagement, but it can also amplify misinformation and limit meaningful participation.

These findings align with previous studies that describe social media as a powerful political socialization tool that enhances awareness and virtual political participation among youth. Similar to research conducted in Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco, this study confirms that young users rely on digital platforms for political updates and identity formation. At the same time, the results reflect global concerns regarding misinformation, consistent with literature showing that youth remain vulnerable to false content and may unintentionally contribute to its spread. The relationship between digital literacy and civic responsibility observed here also supports earlier claims that effective critical thinking and information verification skills are necessary for responsible online engagement.

From a broader sociopolitical perspective, the influence of social media on youth participation has important implications for democratic development. Increased access to political information may empower young citizens, giving them greater voice in public affairs. Platforms like Facebook, where youth spend most of their time, serve as important spaces for political expression and informal civic learning. However, algorithm-driven environments can also intensify polarization, reinforce selective exposure, and enable emotionally driven misinformation to spread more rapidly. This suggests that while social media expands opportunities for engagement, it can simultaneously disrupt informed democratic participation if critical skills are not well developed.

Philosophically, the results highlight the ethical responsibilities of digital citizenship. Youth recognize the moral duty to avoid spreading misinformation, but they do not always fulfill this epistemic duty, which requires seeking truth and carefully evaluating information before sharing it. The tension between moral understanding and digital behavior raises concerns about how truth and responsibility are interpreted in online spaces. As social media becomes a key source of political knowledge, young individuals must navigate questions of credibility, manipulation, and consequence, emphasizing the need for a stronger culture of ethical information-sharing and reflective participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media plays a dual role in the political socialization of youth: it enhances political awareness and civic interest, while also creating risks related to misinformation and superficial engagement. Strengthening digital literacy, critical thinking, and moral responsibility is therefore crucial to ensure that social media contributes positively to informed and active citizenship.

Conclusion

This study examined how social media shapes political awareness, civic responsibility, and perceptions of misinformation among youth in the Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. The findings show that young people are highly active on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, and these platforms significantly influence their political opinions and understanding of national issues. Social media not only provides faster access to political information but also encourages youth to stay informed and recognize their civic duties. However, although participants acknowledged the moral importance of responsible information sharing, many were still inconsistent in verifying political content before sharing, revealing a gap between awareness and practice. Overall, the results highlight that social media plays a dual role: it promotes

youth engagement and political learning, while also exposing users to misinformation risks. Strengthening digital literacy and ethical online behavior is therefore essential for ensuring that social media supports informed citizenship and contributes positively to society, governance, and democratic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the positive role of social media in youth political engagement. Young people should focus on developing stronger critical thinking skills when interacting with political content online, carefully verifying information before sharing it, and engaging in respectful and responsible discussions that contribute to a healthier digital environment. At the same time, government bodies and educational institutions have an important role in promoting digital literacy through structured media education programs, awareness campaigns, and improved content regulation mechanisms aimed at reducing the spread of misinformation. Finally, future research should expand the sample size to include a broader and more diverse youth population, conduct comparative analyses between different regions or demographic groups, and adopt longitudinal approaches to better understand how social media shapes political behavior and civic responsibility over time.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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