



Youths' Perception of Digital Security Act 2018: A Study on the Youth of Bangladesh

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Received: 4th October 2022

Accepted: 16th November 2022

Published: 6th December 2022

ABSTRACT

Freedom of speech is one of the most important fundamental rights ensured by the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. However, when this right is abused, it destroys the peace and harmony of the country. But without any surveillance, digital platforms can turn into places of controversy which may trigger mass people into communal violence and riots. Thus, the government of Bangladesh has introduced Digital Security Act 2018 to secure the responsible use of the Internet and digital platforms. In this study, the researchers attempted to take a look at the perception of Bangladeshi youth on the Digital Security Act 2018. This study followed survey and in-depth interview methods to gather data. Researchers found out that most young people feel the digital security act is working against freedom of expression on social media. They demand viable changes to this act and agreed to the notion that responsible digital citizenship can ensure freedom of expression on social media.

Keywords: Youth, Perception, Digital, Security

INTRODUCTION

Today is the age of digital media. Digital media indicates those media encoded in machine-readable formats. Social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, and What's App are the most used social media around the world. These digital media platforms facilitate getting connected and sharing ideas and information among people around different parts of the world in a budget-friendly way. However, with all the benefits, social media has also brought the dark sides that became a platform for infuriated discussions and hostile usage of language (Mondal, Silva & Benevenuto, 2017). In their research from the social media platforms-Twitter and Whisper- Mondal, Silva & Benevenuto (2017) identified ten hate categories- race, behavior, physical, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, gender, disability, religion, and others. That's why it is essential to foster responsible digital citizenship among people, especially the youth. Like some other countries, Bangladesh has its digital security act that was passed in 2018. Since then, Digital Security Act 2018 is working as a legal guide on digital platforms. But sometimes digital citizens find it as a tool of oppression or hindrance to their freedom of expression. Though the main objective of the Digital Security Act 2018 is to promote a safe and secure environment in digital space, this act sometimes works against people's freedom of speech. Again, another problem is, that many people are using digital media and social networking sites to conduct crimes and harass others, especially women. They are malpracticing their freedom in digital space. This study aims to identify youths' perceptions about the Digital Security Act 2018 and suggests necessary actions to capacitate young citizens in Bangladesh to express themselves freely, appropriately, lawfully, and safely in the public sphere.

Research Questions

The central idea of this research revolves around two major questions. These are-

1. How do the youth of Bangladesh take the Digital Security Act 2018 as the legal guide for freedom of expression in digital space?
2. What are the most effective actions to ensure responsible digital citizenship among Bangladeshi youth?

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this present research are-

- To identify actions that will help to secure freedom of expression in digital media.
- To analyze attitudes of the youth about the Digital Security Act 2018 and freedom of expression in digital media.
- To determine measures that will enhance responsibility for digital citizenship among young people.

Freedom of Expression in Digital Platform

Freedom of expression is indubitably the most debated issue in the current world. The right to freedom of expression is recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The General assembly of the United Nations (UN) accepted it in 1948 and included the right to freedom of expression in article 19. Most democratic countries vowed to protect this right by law in their constitution. Freedom of speech and expression including freedom of the press is the very foundation of democracy. Without ensuring free expression, criticism and open discussion democracy can't function smoothly (Hoque, 2017, p. 56). Although freedom of expression is recognized by the Constitution of Bangladesh (Government of Bangladesh, 1972), its actual presence has never been firmly established (Riaz, 2012).

Bangladesh has entered into the digital era. Here, digital appliances have become a blessing for mass people. The emergence of the Social Web or Web 2.0, and the use of social media and new mobile devices (tablets and smartphones) have fostered a new participation ecology (Jenkins et al., 2009). Today, adolescents and youth spend a significant amount of time on digital platforms. They see digital spaces as places of communication and expression. They consider the shift from the private to the public sphere in everything they post or share (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2015; Sánchez et al., 2015). Therefore, it is vital to have freedom of expression in digital space as well. But misapplication of this freedom can also be found easily on digital platforms. In this regard, the government of Bangladesh approved Digital Security Act (DSA)- 2018 to lessen the offenses. Governments can (or at least attempt to) regulate the activities of both gatekeepers and users, including matters about the freedom of speech (Koltay, 2019, p. 6). But we can see that both social media users and governments suffer from mutual schizophrenia. On the one hand, governments try to force digital and social media users to remove certain pieces of content such as hate speech, and user-generated content that may jeopardize children or violate personality

rights, on the other hand, digital and social media users are trusted to judge the legal status of such pieces of content. It is indispensable to balance the rights of the citizen and the duty of governments.

In this digital era, people want to have freedom of expression while sharing their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions on different political and social issues. But when they have to fear certain laws and acts, they surely can't share or raise their voice against any governmental oppression. Hence, they get trapped in the spiral of silence. Those who want to break this chain, sometimes get punished by law. These types of events set examples before social media users. Acts should be in favor of people, not to keep them in fear. Digital Security Acts should ensure digital responsibility amongst citizens. Freedom of expression in digital space will be upheld by this too.

Responsible Digital Citizenship

In today's world, digital technology has become a necessity. It is not a luxury anymore. Digital media has become a part of our day-to-day life. It is almost unthinkable to exist in a society without any interdependence with the online world. Over time, many people are becoming dependent on the internet to complete their tasks with ease. Therefore, it is also essential to learn about responsible digital citizenship.

Responsible digital citizenship means taking part in online community life safely, ethically, and respectfully. Digital citizenship, specifically responsible use of the Internet and social media, was proposed as one of the critical elements in building digital trust in IT processes (Marcial, Palama, Maypa & Launer, 2022, p. 6855). A digital citizen is anyone who advocates and adheres to the responsible use of the technology people use every day, such as the internet, computer, smartphones, and any other digital devices. Responsible digital citizens should have the skills to use social media respectfully. To sustain harmonious online community life one must behave lawfully and righteously using social media. Digital citizens should be aware of the fact that hacking, stealing information, illegally downloading, and damaging other people's work, identity, or property is a heinous crime. They should protect others' privacy as well. They should be well aware of their rights and responsibilities when using various online platforms.

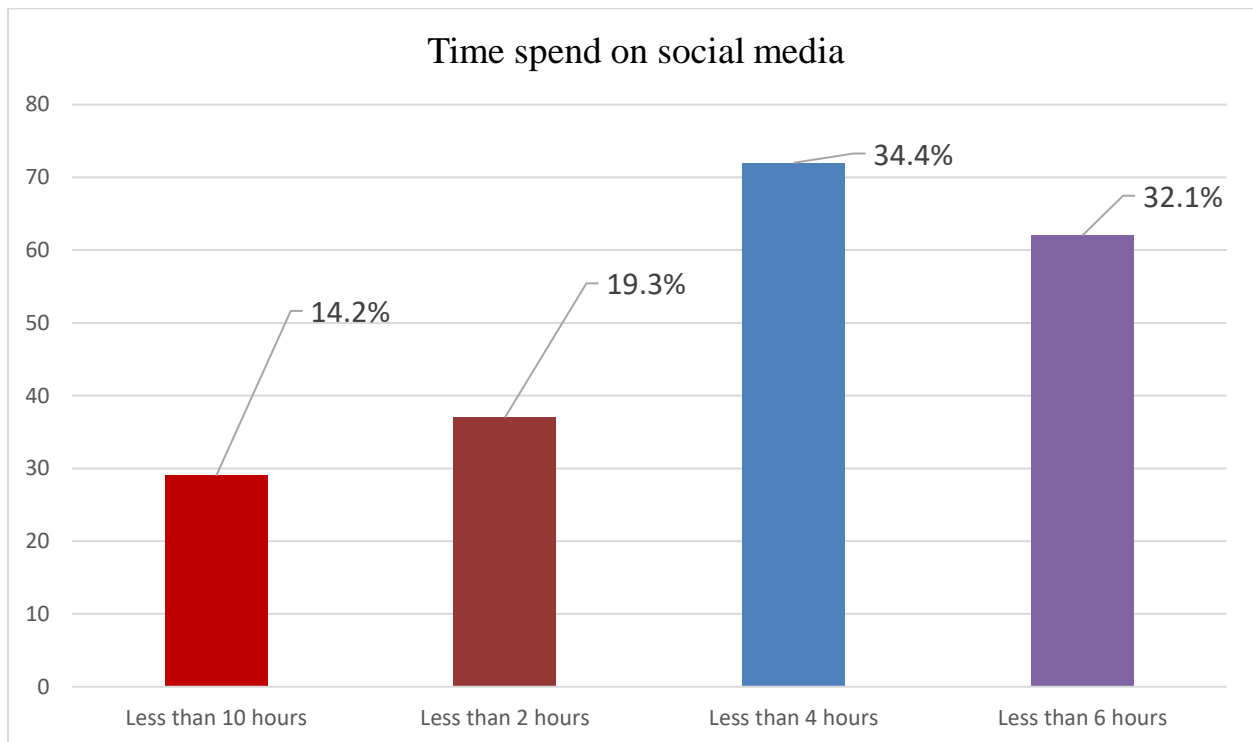
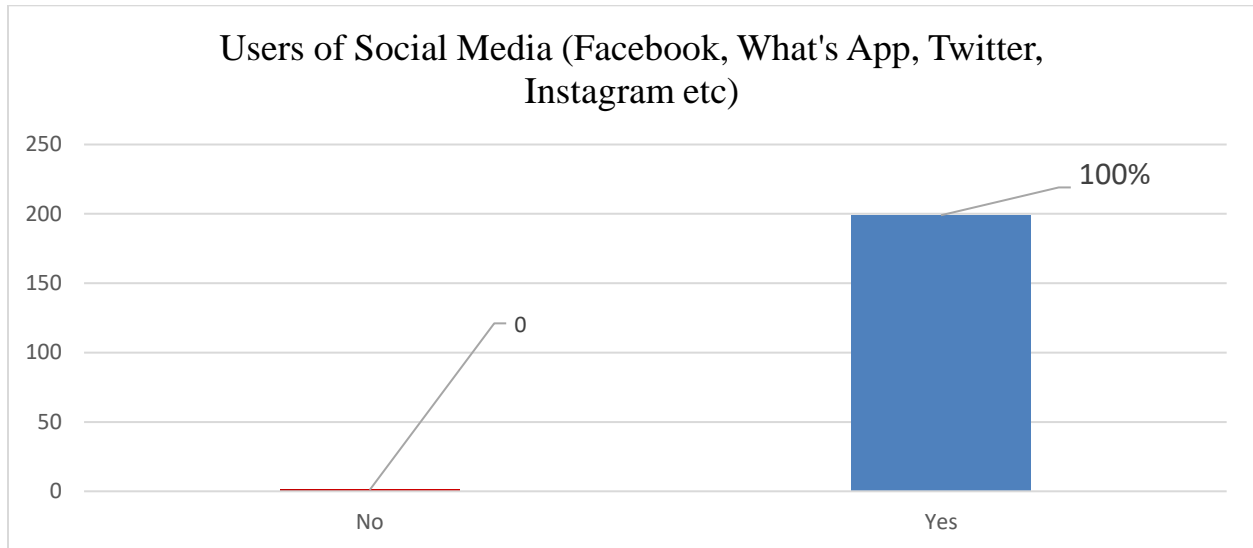
Freedom of speech is considered a multi-faceted right. Responsible digital citizenship can ensure this right more efficiently. But it seems somewhat ironic that the Internet was heralded in the beginning as the domain of unlimited freedom and free speech without government interference (Barlow, 1996). Hence, people grew a tendency of reluctance to abide by the rules of using digital media. People don't want to realize the consequences of their opinion or perspectives which may bring catastrophe to society by agitating mass people. Therefore, responsible digital citizenship is a must to keep harmony in society. In this regard, youngsters can bear the torch for digital media users.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

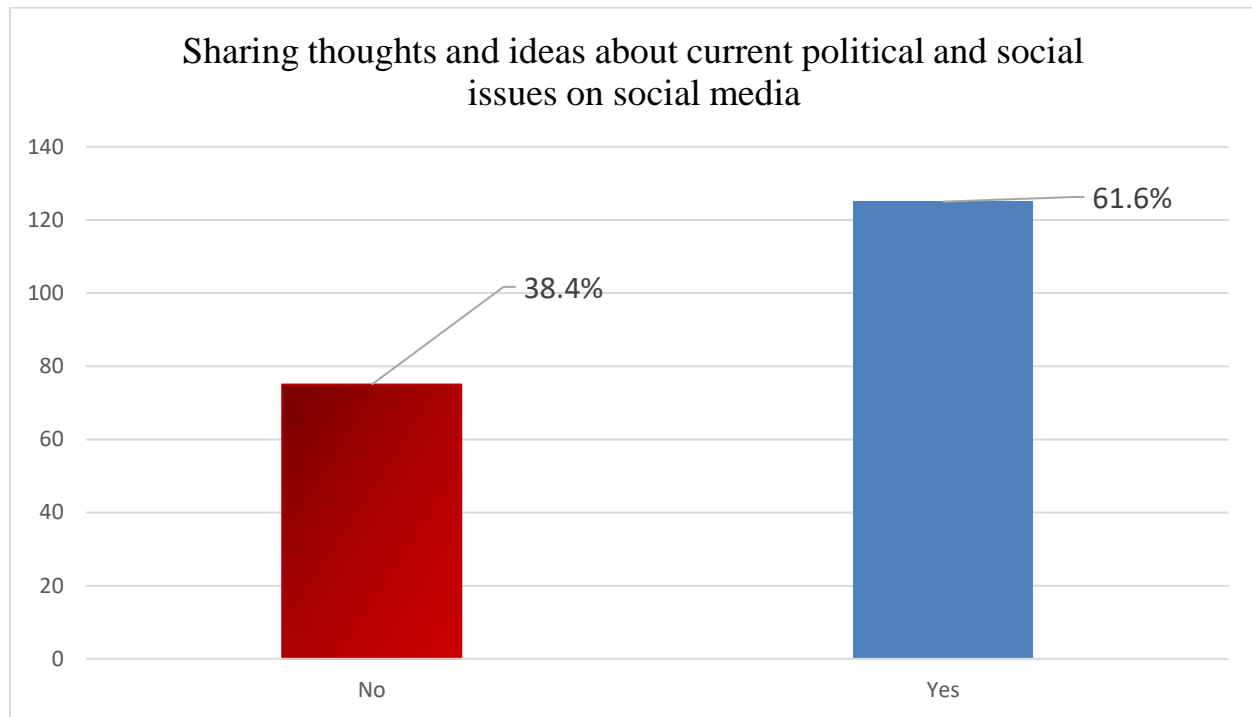
There are several possible approaches to conduct scientific research. Well-organized research follows specific procedures. Among those procedures, following well-established methods help to direct research on the right path. This study followed both quantitative research and qualitative research methods. To gather quantitative data, this research surveyed 200 young citizens of Bangladesh. This survey helped to gather youths' perceptions of the Digital security act, 2018. According to Fowler (2009), "Surveys are designed to produce statistics about a target population" (p. 11). A "survey" is a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities to construct quantitative descriptions of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members (Groves et al., 2009, p. 2). Wimmer and Dominick (1983) say, "Survey research, including online surveys, requires careful planning and execution, and the research must take into account a wide variety of decisions and problems" (p. 185). In this study, in-depth interviews were also taken with three renowned media specialists to analyze qualitative data and explore perspectives, actions, and recommendations. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to conduct interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). The interviewees were selected based on their expertise in media studies. Purposive sampling was followed to conduct interviews. The interviewees talked about the Digital Security Act 2018, its application in Bangladesh, necessary modifications, and digital media literacy for citizens. These interviews helped to draw thematic analysis based on the facts that came out from the interviewees.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

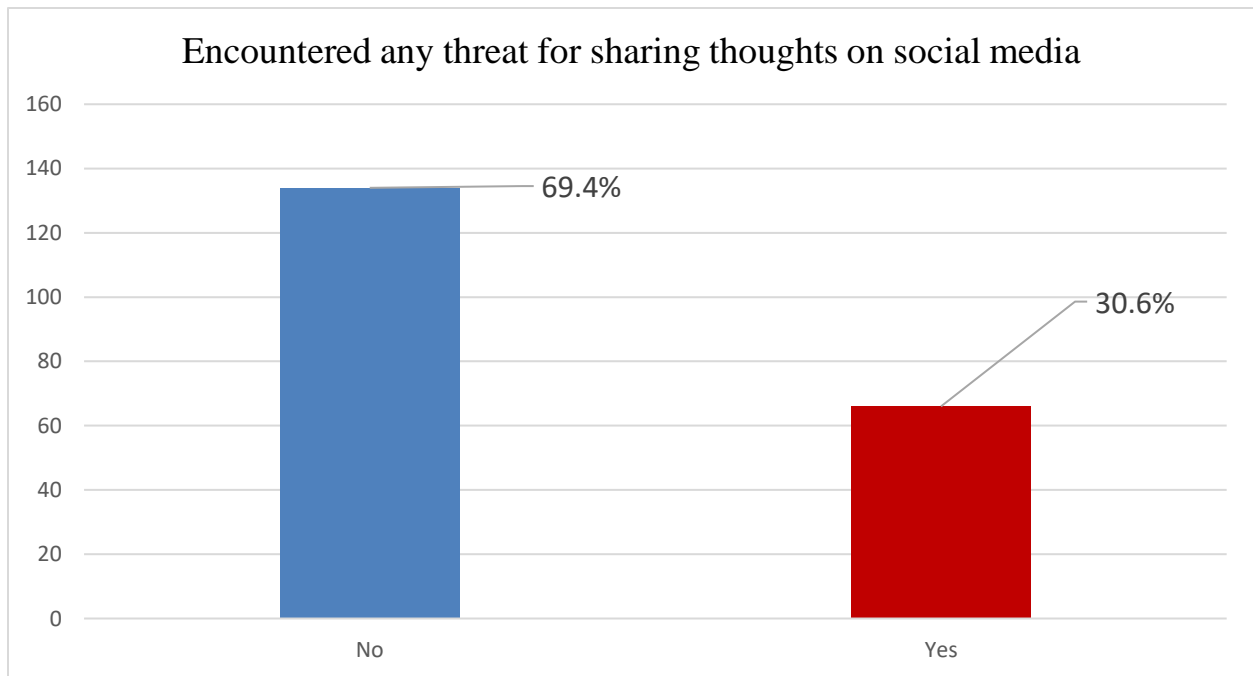
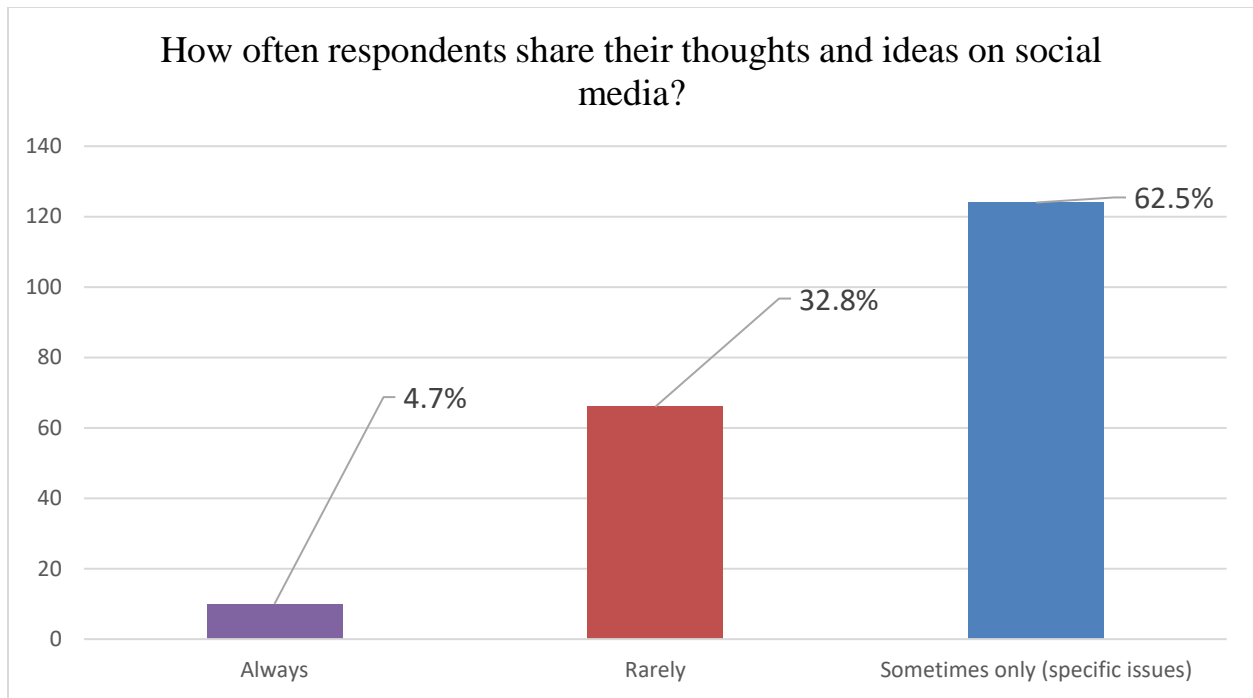
Researchers have collected 200 survey responses from the students of tertiary levels of public and private universities in Bangladesh. The respondents are aged from 20 years to 28 years around. 100% of the respondents use social media like Facebook, What's App, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

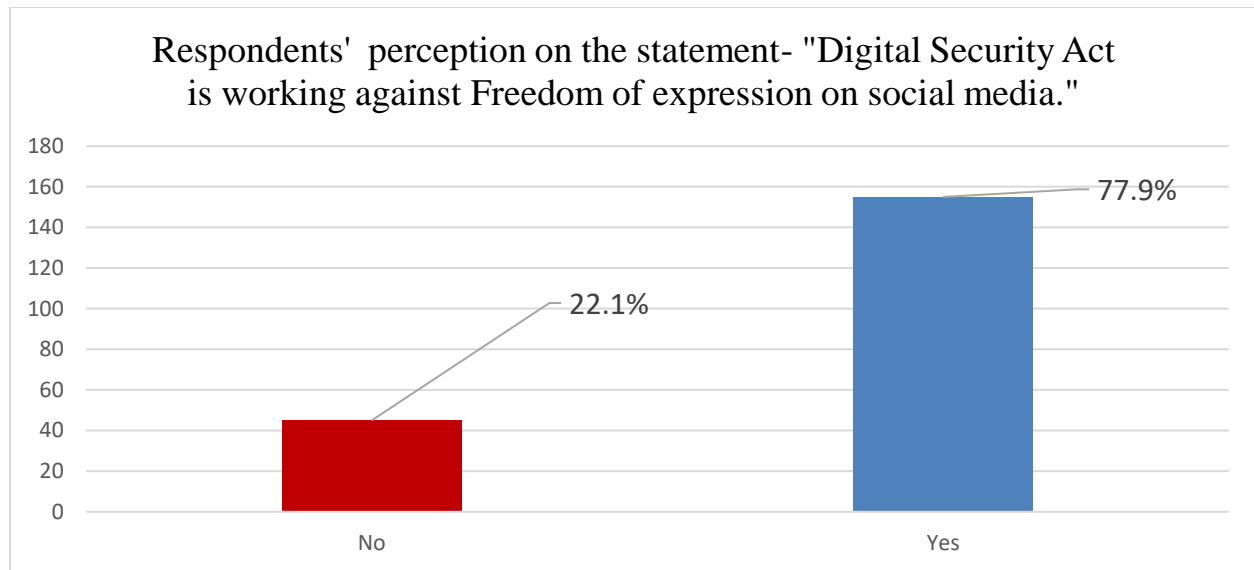


Respondents were asked about their activeness in social media and most of the respondents, almost 35% were found who use social media for more than two hours and less than 4 hours, 32.1% for more than four hours, 19.3% for less than two hours and 14.2% found who use social media for less than one hour. So, it can be stated that most of the respondents of the study are heavy social media users.

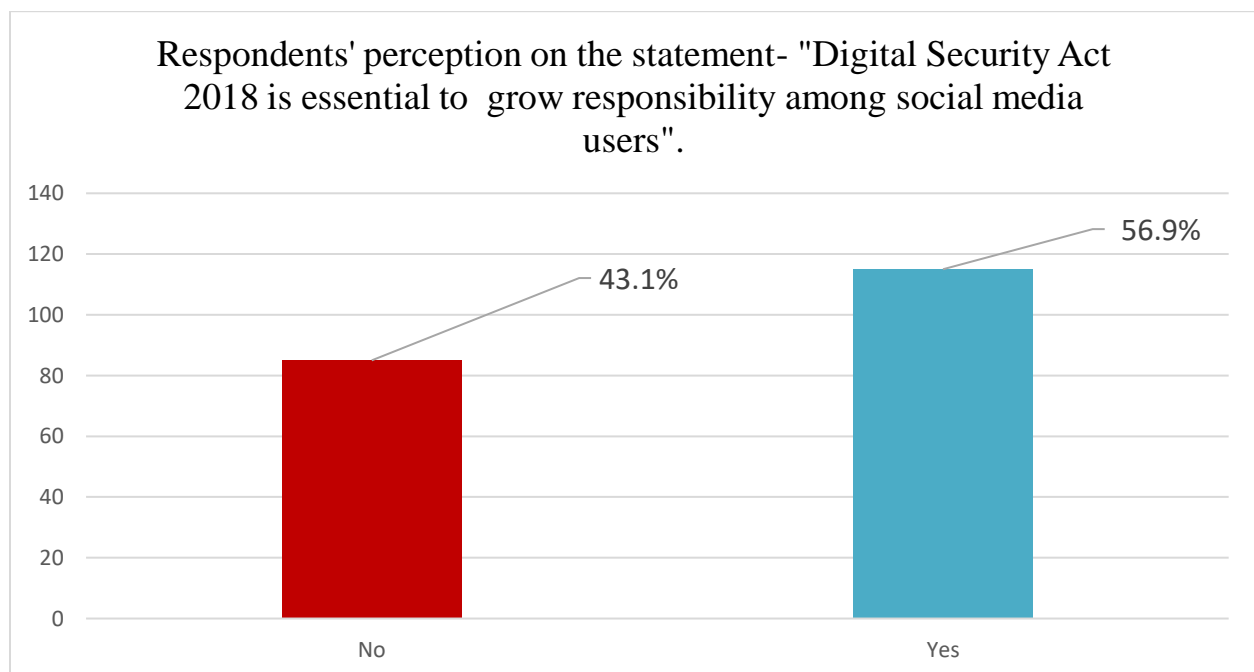


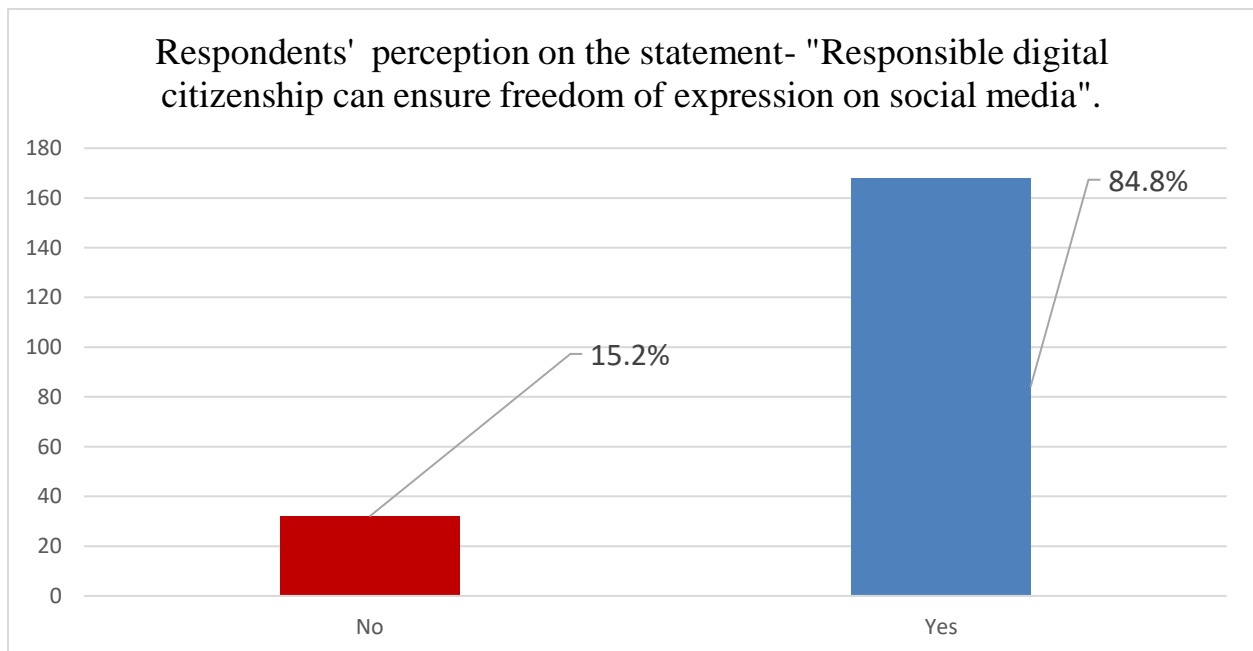
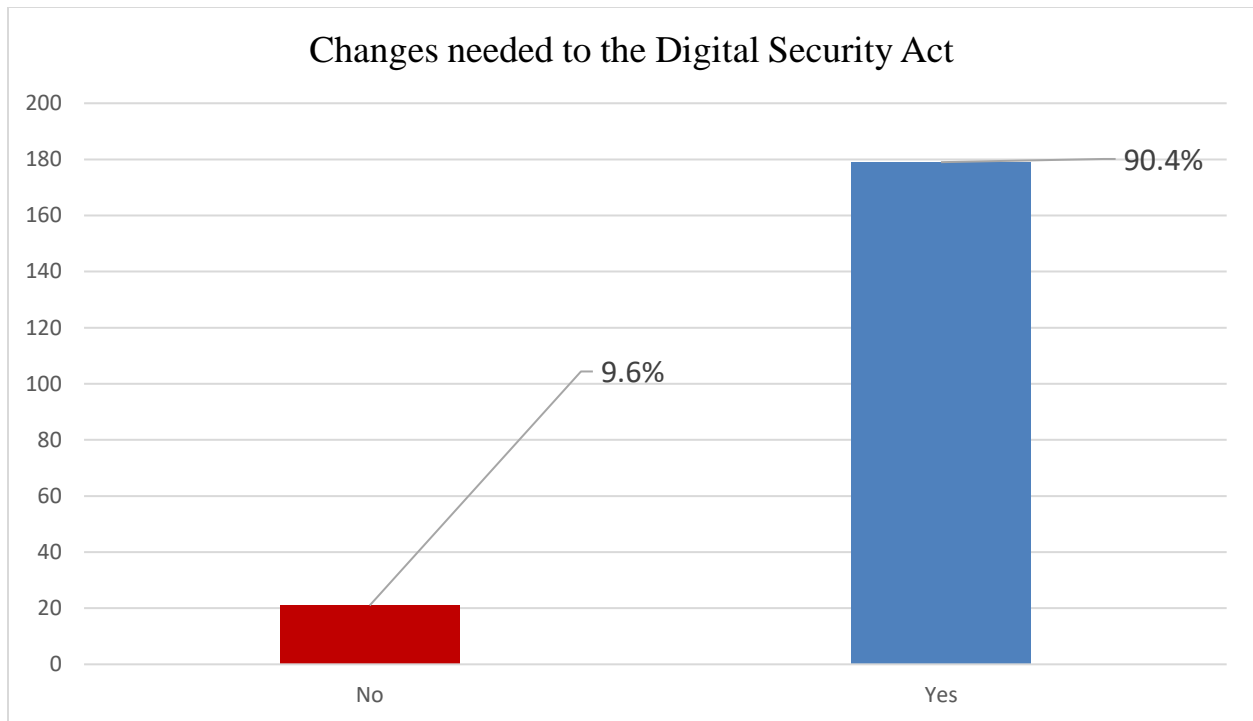
The next question of the survey to the respondents was to know whether the young people share their thoughts and ideas regarding current political or social issues on social media. It's a matter of hope that almost 62% of the respondents opined that, they share their thoughts on social media. But chart 4 is depicting that sharing thoughts on social media by the youth is not a frequent practice. Only 4.7% responded that they share their opinion always, 32.8% rarely express themselves on current issues and 62.5% of respondents share their thoughts on social media sometimes and only on some specific issues. 30.6% of them have encountered threats in case of sharing their thoughts on social media.

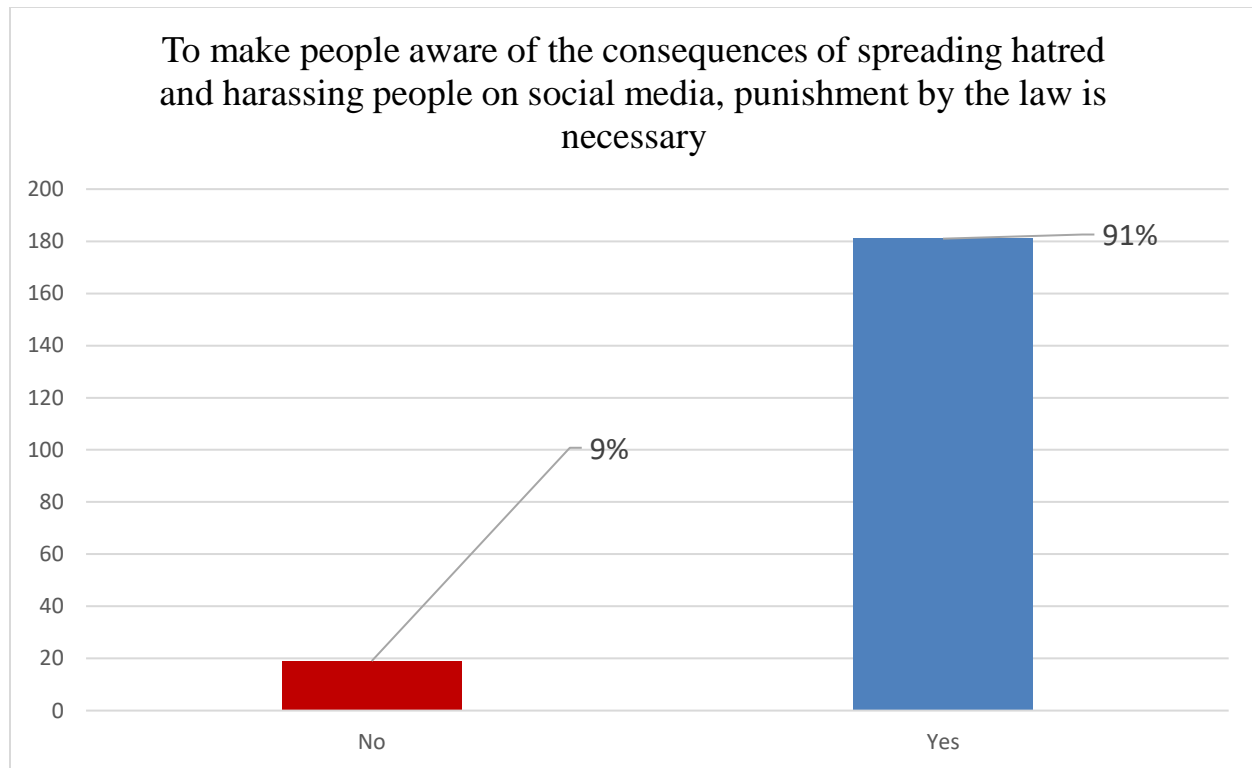




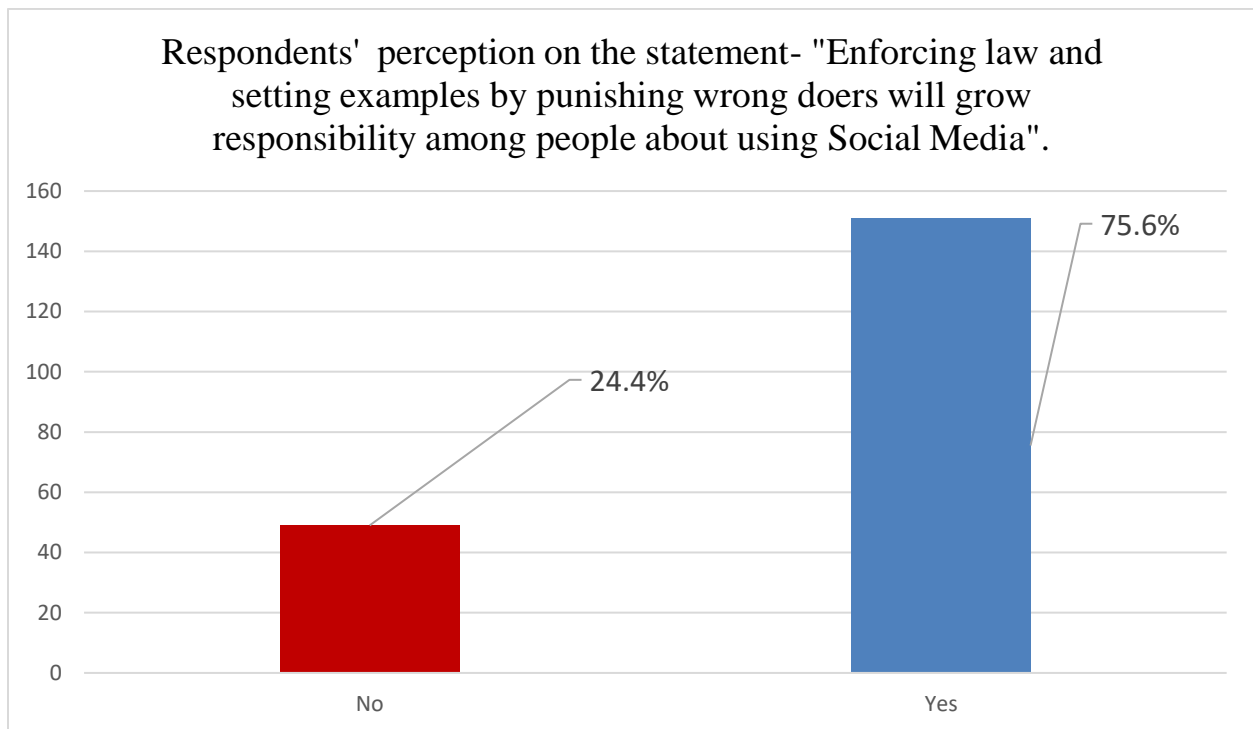
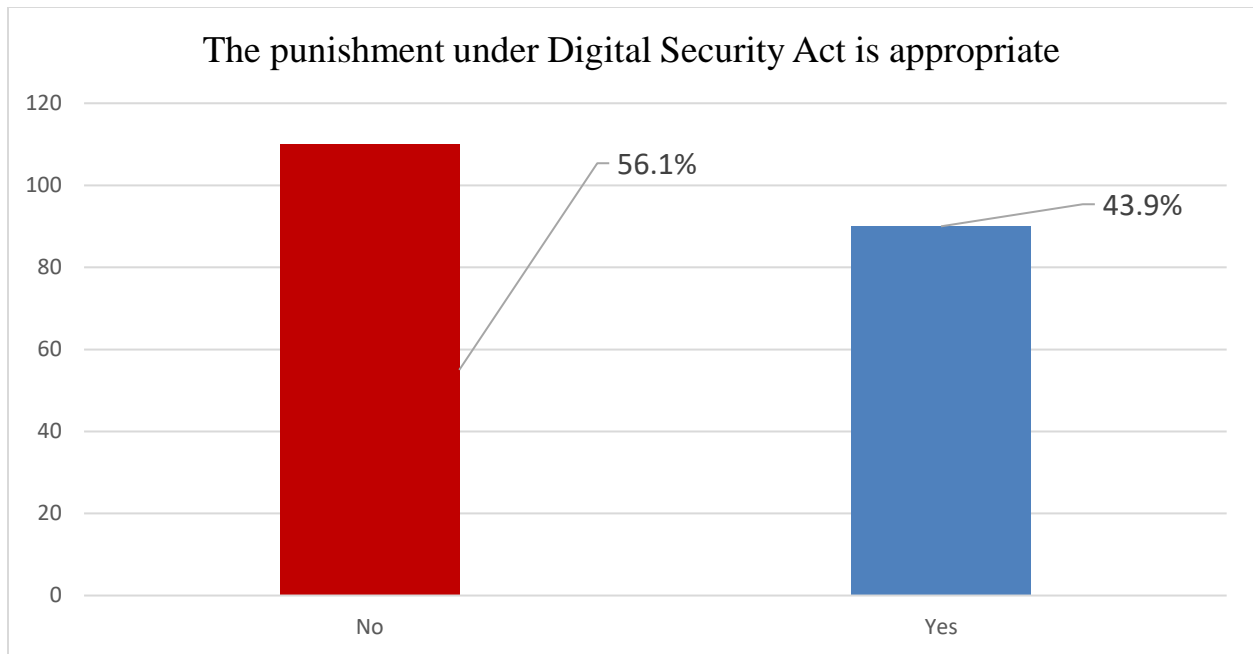
However, the next question of this survey asked the respondents whether they think Digital Security Act 2018 is against freedom of expression on social media. 78% of answers were 'Yes'! Most of the youth of Bangladesh assume that Digital Security Act is violating their freedom of expression which is ensured by the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. 57% of the respondents agreed with the statement that this act can grow responsibility among social media users. Notably, 43.1% of respondents also think it is not effective to grow responsibility among the users. And as per the next graph, more than 90% of the respondents demand notable modification in this act.

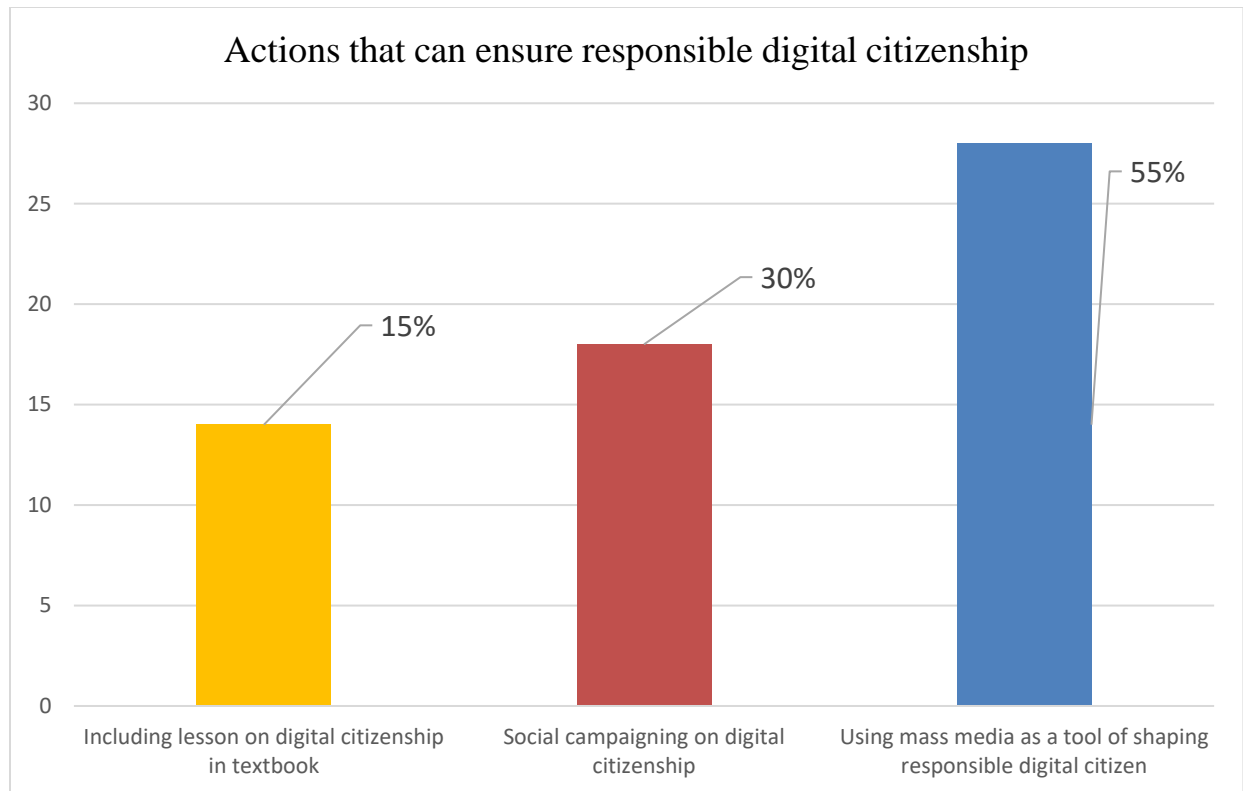






Respondents were asked whether responsible digital citizenship can ensure freedom of expression on social media. Almost 85% of youngsters opined that they agreed with this notion. 91% of the total respondents evaluate punishment as a tool to minimize harassment, spreading hatred, and so on, while 9% think in an alternative way. They don't find punishment as a necessary action to make the user aware of their behavior pattern. The next question of this survey received a binary answer, almost half of the respondents found the punishment under the Digital Security Act appropriate, and half of them found it inappropriate. At the same time, 75.6% of respondents were depicting that enforcing the law and setting an example by this can grow responsibility among social media users while 24.4% don't think so.





Respondents were asked about their opinion regarding probable action to ensure digital citizenship. 15% of the total responses were including a lesson on digital citizenship in the textbook, 30% responded to arrange social campaigning on digital citizenship and 55% of the respondents found using mass media as a tool for shaping responsible digital citizens as an effective measure.

In-depth Interview Analysis

Researchers interviewed three academicians and experts regarding media and mass communication to reach the goal of the current study. The in-depth interviewee panel includes Dr. Golam Rahman, Editor, The Daily Ajker Patrika, who served the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka as a professor and is also the former Chief Information Commissioner, The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh; Professor Robaet Ferdous, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka and a Social Activist; Professor dr. Sheikh Mohammad Shafiul Islam, Chairperson at the Department of Journalism and Media Communication, Green University of Bangladesh. The interviewees shared their thoughts, suggestions, and opinions on the Digital Security Act, of

2018. Summary findings from the interviews are categorized into six distinct points as discussed below:

'Digital Security Act, 2018' is necessary but the controversy regarding this should be fixed

All the respondents agreed on the necessity of such an act as the Digital Security Act 2018 to ensure the proper usage of digital space. As a nation, Bangladesh was not ready for the changes that happened to technological advancement. People were not conscious of technological adoption as well. In that circumstance, an act could work as a guideline for the users for a flourished exercise on the digital platform. That is, an act was momentous then. And it can be said that the Bangladesh government took a befitting initiative declaring Digital Security Act 2018 for ensuring digital responsive citizens. It was expected that the act would ensure effective practices on digital media through which execution of the constitution of Bangladesh will be taken place which ensures freedom of speech for all of its population. But the result came dissatisfactory. In the year 2006, while Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act) was constructed, people didn't accept it as the act was against human rights. Including article no. 57 total five articles from that act were abolished and then Digital Security Act 2018 was subcontracted. But still, this act is not over the controversy.

Distinct Modification is needed in the act

Though the interviewees opined that the Digital Security Act, 2018 is a good initiative by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to ensure the users' security in digital space, all the interviewees expressed their concerns on the execution policy of this act. As this act overestimates the power practice of police, it is criticized massively by media practitioners, academicians, and general people. It is suspected that this act stifles people's voices of unclear statements and clauses. Clarification of the terms is the most demanding change expected by the critics. Experts are concerned about some specific points of this act which are mentioned here: multiple cases can be filed against a person from different regions of the country; police are authorized as the final determinants to perform a case under the policy of 'Digital Security Act: 2018'; punishment is auto-generated and same for all the accused without any measurement of guilt and so on. Critics are scared of the abovementioned statements that can lead to an unfair practice of the act due to personal aversion. It is observed that youth and journalists claim to be at risk while expressing their opinion on different phenomena in society. Not only the youth and

journalists but Baul (a community engaged in folk song) Shariat Sarker get also arrested under this act being accused of hurting the Muslim's sentiment. So, it is stated that revision is required to stop malpractices and ensure the maximum advantages of the act. Professor Robaet Ferdous suggests abolishing this act rather than improvising or modifying it.

This act is against the constitution of Bangladesh

Interviewees suspect that Digital Security Act 2018 is violating the human rights the constitution of Bangladesh ensures for all the people. As Article 39 of the constitution allows people to think and express themselves freely, freedom of the press is also ensured by this article. But Digital Security Act restricts people to enjoy the freedom of expression. Besides, the Right to Information Act is also curtailed by Digital Security Act, says Dr. Golam Rahman.

Digital Media Literacy should be ensured for the users

All the respondents were asked to suggest some ways to ensure digital responsible citizenship. All of them emphasized the term- Digital media literacy. 'The foremost action is taking initiatives to enhance the digital media literacy among the users', they opined. Special training, seminars, workshops, and campaigning can be placed for the cyber police and the common users. Digital Media Literacy lessons can be included in the textbook to groom up the would-be citizens of digital space. Users can be trained on reasonable restrictions to make them conscious about do's and don'ts. Enhancing conscious users can minimize the misuse of digital platforms. Law can't make people conscious of their wrongdoings, good conscience can. Education can make a definitive change in this regard.

Wholesome political culture has to be ensured

Freedom is nothing but responsibility. Professor Robaet Ferdous suggests making the users free about their activities, responsibility will be handed over to the users then. Users will enjoy freedom with reasonable restrictions, and they will be responsible for their actions. For its execution, a wholesome political culture has to be ensured. As tolerance is the key term of democracy users will be respectful to the other users' opinions and vice versa will be considered an important matter that people will be sensible in expressing their thoughts on cultural and religious facts. The digital security act is massively used as a tool to practice communalism. This sort of misuse should be discouraged immediately, otherwise, this practice will be detrimental to

the whole nation. Professor Sheikh Shafiul Islam pointed out that- Cyber Police should be trained in digital technology as they can investigate the filed cases properly for the right practices of the law. Thus, the way the digital platform can be used for the development of the youth and the country as well.

Promotion and expansion of the act are needed

Many youths of the society are not informed about the Digital Security Act. Recording a law is not much to ensure the expected quality practices by the practitioners. If the law is less introduced to the mass then there might have a reason for delusiveness. This act has to be promotional. Also, it will be a guideline for proper usage. Promotion and Expansion of this act can make a positive change to diminish the malpractices in cyberspace. Before that, a certain modification has to be done to this act.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, it is a matter of fact that digital media have become the most powerful mode of communication all over the world. People can share their ideas and thoughts very swiftly on myriad digital platforms available in front of us. But uncontrolled access to digital platforms can bring severe consequences in society which we already have encountered in recent years. Therefore, it is important to introduce some laws to regulate hazardous digital content available on numerous social media platforms. However, these laws shouldn't be against the freedom of expression on the internet. The doctrine of freedom of expression is generally thought to single out a class of "protected acts" that it holds to be immune from restriction to which other acts are subject (Scanlon, 1972, p. 204). This study helped to light on the certainty that the youth of Bangladesh as well as the media specialists believe, Digital Security Act 2018 needs distinct modifications to work as a legal guide for using the Internet. All of them agreed on the fact that digital media literacy is needed to build responsible digital citizens. Most importantly, wholesome political culture ensured for the mass people can play vital roles to make digital media users ideal digital citizens. Responsible digital citizenship along with viable changes to the current Digital Security Act 2018 of Bangladesh can make the online world more secure for people.

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