FORMATIVE RESEARCH TO DESIGN CAPACITY BUILDING TOOLS AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGY ON RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION BY THE YOUTH IN DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DSA	Digital Security Act 2018
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FNF	Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ID	Identification
IDI	In-depth Interviews
KII	Key Informants Interviews
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PwD	Person with Disability
RTI	Right to Information Act 2009
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
USB	Universal Serial Bus

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is an outcome of a field-based study conducted among the youths of three universities in Bangladesh, to know about their use of digital space for interaction and expressing their views and opinions. The study focuses on analysing the current state of knowledge of the youths, evaluating their engagement modality and intake capacity, feeling of safety, learning attitude and behaviour of the selected university students. Additionally, it is also envisaged to identify the challenges that the youth face while expressing opinion in digital platforms as well as identifying the cultural and localized incompatibilities with the global and universal practices. The research is also designed to capacitate the youths so that they can express their views very safely and most concernedly. Qualitative data collected from different segments of stakeholders and knowledgeable have been triangulated as study findings of this research which investigated the underlying reasons, opinions and unquantifiable viewpoints and explanations concerning digital citizenship and practices of the university students.

While ascertaining the views of the youths in regard to the issues they usually prefer to pass comments freely and comfortably on digital platform where as many as 80% of the respondents from University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi and Daffodil International University mentioned that they feel better in posting comments on personal issues relating to society and culture, e.g., interacting with friends showing concern about increasing rape cases in the country and more recently expressing views on disgusting situation of corona which restricts their free movement. It is evident from the research that online and digital media particularly Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram are very popular among university students. Some students also operate their own YouTube channel and blogs. It ascertains that students share those online and digital platforms as they have become indispensable to them for sharing information; any information starting from exam schedules, personal feelings and romantic relationships to socio-cultural and political issues are shared online.

It was quite evident in the research that there are both internal and external interferences that often stop youth from freely expressing opinion on digital platform. The internal interferences are: family pressure, security concern, relatives or friends' criticism. It repeatedly came out in the discussion that most students are worried about the security of the family members as they fear that any comment going against the feeling of someone might affect the security of their family. Considering this, most of the youth refrain from commenting abruptly online. On the other hand, external interferences are: political harassment, torture, and fear of harassment from law enforcing agencies which usually stop youth to express their opinions freely in the digital platform. It also becomes evident in the research that there are two particular issues that students usually feel uncomfortable to talk about on social platforms: politics and religion. They have the understanding and fear that sharing such issues publicly has repercussions on their personal security and the safety of their family. They fear that security personnel may intercept the discussion or maybe there are others whose political affinity may be affected by such discussion. Although most of the students thought that everybody should have the right to express their opinion freely as they think that freedom of expression is one of the fundamental human rights. Yet the participants from the study universities emphasized on maintaining a safer digital platform because they feel there is a lack of online etiquette and responsibility from many users on the online platform as it may eventually have destructive effect on the society.

It has been apparent from the findings that our participants and related stakeholders have some kind of moderate understanding on digital citizenship and freedom of expression. While seeking suggestions in this regard, they expressed that they feel it beneficial to acquire more knowledge on digital citizenship and freedom of expression; and accordingly, they have provided few suggestions on how to effectively disseminate information on Digital Security Act, Right to Information Act, and other laws enacted by the state. They believe that combined effort from the government and non-government organizations can bring about significant understanding about Digital Security Act and Right to Information Act in Bangladesh. Such suggestions corroborate findings of other studies who argue that it requires a mutual effort of the public and private sector initiatives to have maximum outputs in knowledge dissemination for digital citizenship.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital Citizenship has recently emerged as an important topic for discussion in the modern world due to people's extensive use of information technology that involves the society, politics and government. It has recently become very popular among the younger generation who spend most of their time in using digital technologies and interacting with their peer groups through creating blogs, using YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and other new social media platforms. While conceptualizing the digital citizenship, we often emphasize on socially constructed practices and norms of behaviours to facilitate individual consciousness with responsible attitude in protecting socio-political environment of the digital society. We know it very well that many of our youth are quite capable in handling the technology; nevertheless, they are very much unaware about the healthy use of the digital networks for which these are often misused by creating normative conflicts within the society.

We have evidence in Bangladesh where many promising students in the country who come from rural areas to the cities for higher education or for any other purposes suddenly become confused with the new mode of content and use of the digital network. They unknowingly become involved into unlawful digital activities and deviate from responsible use of it. In the name of expressing themselves, they often create animosities in the society unknowingly or unintentionally, and ignore the respectfulness or showing intolerance to other religiosity, beliefs, views, norms and practices, which often incites ethno-social disharmony among the members of the society. The existence and spread of hate-speech is due to ethnocentric behaviour of the youth who often judge other's cultural beliefs and values to be immoral or unacceptable. It therefore becomes an immediate necessity to provide them useful information about understanding the national and international etiquettes and legality of the use of certain digital technology, which will make them more aware of responsibility and help them to become a proper digital citizen. They require support, assistance, and social empowerment so that they behave most rationally while expressing their views and without hurting others.

In the meantime, Bangladesh government enacted Digital Security Act in October 2018; many people, particularly the youth, are unaware of its contents, objectives and effective use. The youth must enjoy freedom of speech but it must be within the prescribed and accepted norms and values of the society and the state. Recently, there are innumerable explorations focusing on digital citizenship obtaining quantified information relating to attitudes and behaviour of various groups of people in the society (Kara, 2018). Some deploys mixed method triangulating quantitative and qualitative data conducted among the university students to know about their thoughts and practices (e.g., Emejulu and McGregor, 2016; Gazi, 2016; Hollandswarth, Dowdy, and Donovan, 2011). Moreover, Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Rights to Information Act 2009 and Digital Security Act of 2018 are reviewed as essential secondary literature.

This research is thus designed to capacitate the younger generations especially the students and youth so that they can express their views safely and most concernedly. Accordingly, the research has specifically generated data from three universities of Bangladesh, namely University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi and Daffodil International University with an intention to know more about the thoughts and practices, behaviour and attitudes of the students concerning their digital citizenship and freedom of expression, and to assist them in the form of capacity building and information sharing by developing a module for future planning and implementation.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The overall aim of this assignment is to conduct a formative research to design capacity building tools and campaign strategy on responsible digital citizenship for freedom of expression by the youth in digital media. In order to better understand how the youths use digital space for interaction and express their thoughts and opinions, this study focuses on analysing the current state of knowledge of the youths, evaluate their engagement modality and intake capacity, feeling of safety, learning attitude and behaviour of the selected university students. In addition to that, it is also envisaged to identify the challenges that the youth face in expressing their opinion in the digital media and platforms as well as identify the cultural and localized incompatibilities with the global and universal practices.

Precisely, this study has been designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To draw insights (e.g. freely, easily, comfortably, without fear, without external inference, and with the feeling of safety) about free expression of thoughts by youths in the digital platform on various issues (e.g. community, social, cultural, economic, political, legal etc.).
- To identify factors that empower (e.g. placing issues, opinion, ideas with valid information and reasonable arguments, verify and seek information from valid sources) youth while they interact with digital media to make positive change in the society.
- To understand the behaviour and attitude (e.g. openness, respect and tolerance to other beliefs, views, norms and practices) of youth when they use digital sphere for interaction.
- To comprehend knowledge amongst the youth on digital citizenship (e.g. respect, educate, protect) and awareness on the Digital Security Act and the Right to Information Act.

With these above objectives in mind, the product of this formative research is expected to design and specify:

- A toolkit (handbook and audio-visual content) for the youth to enhance their knowledge and awareness on the use of digital space for freedom of expression complying the relevant existing laws in the country;
- An e-Learning platform to connect the youth with the knowledge on digital citizenship for freedom of expression;
- A module for learning sessions and peer learning sessions for capacity building; and
- A traditional and social media campaign strategy to create awareness among wider audience to guide the youth on responsible use of internet.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

3.1 METHODS OF THE STUDY

Keeping in mind the objectives of this study, it is considered that qualitative research would best suit to understand knowledge, behaviour and practices of the youths; and as such, qualitative techniques of collecting data have been adopted for this research. With that priority, two public universities namely, University of Dhaka and University of Rajshahi have been purposively selected for this research. In addition to these two public universities, one private university namely, Daffodil International University has been selected for this research. All these universities, however, are well recognized for having their proficiencies on information and communication technologies and simultaneously they have strong digital connectivity with their students residing at the urban and rural settings in different regions of the country.

The qualitative data collected from these different segments have been triangulated for the findings of this research as well as to investigate the underlying reasons, opinions and unquantifiable viewpoints and explanations concerning digital citizenship and practices of the university students. Besides collecting primary data, secondary sources of information were also used based on policy review exercise, review of existing rules and regulations and other similar researches to have a thorough and holistic understanding of digital citizenship for freedom of expression by the youth in digital media.

The study begins with a quick review of literature related to the project issues. We have evaluated various documents relevant to the discipline as well as certain background study documents, which include renowned professional journal-articles and reports suitable to the topic. Programs sponsored by European Union (EU), Ministry of Information and Technology, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Social welfare have also been consulted. We reviewed project reports and evaluation reports made available by FNF & Dnet as well as non-FNF & Dnet reports with available comparable data.

3.2 STUDY LOCALE

As indicated, the study locale for this research is chosen by selecting two public universities namely, University of Dhaka from the capital city and University of Rajshahi from northern part of the country. Additionally, a private university namely Daffodil International University from Dhaka has also been included as the study locale. All data for this research are collected from these three public and private institutions of Bangladesh, and all respondents are coming from these three intuitions. Apart from these, we have additionally interviewed experts from multifarious professional groups to ascertain their views and opinions.

3.3 STUDY RESPONDENTS

Based on the objectives and rationale of the study, respondents have been chosen most justifiably and purposively by discussing with key project personnel. Since the universities are closed at the time of the research because of Covid situation, students were contacted personally and the first contacted student was used as a key person to find other students who are interested to take part in this study. It may be noted here that due to COVID- 19 pandemic situation in the country, most of the in-depth interviews (IDI), Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been done through online connectivity with some audio recordings and other logistics. Wherever possible, we conducted interviews and FGDs face-to-face also. To have more clarity and specifications in the interviews, we have also used telephonic conversations in some cases.

A total of 9 FGDs were conducted among the students in 3 selected universities i.e. 3 FGDs from each of the universities. Besides students, 3 FGDs were also conducted among the faculty members of these 3 universities. A total of 30 In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with 10 students from each of the universities. While selecting respondents for IDIs and FGDs, additional effort were given so that substantial women representation as well as respondents from indigenous minority groups, Person with Disabilities (PwD) and students and faculty members across the faculties can be included. In order to have a better understanding of the issues at hand, 8 KIIs were conducted with different knowledgeable experts in this field such as digital platform experts, media personnel, policy makers and regulatory authorities such as: lawyer, bloggers, and academics with youth engagement. Table 1 illustrate the details of the study respondents:

	METHODS & TOOLS	RESPONDENTS	SELECTION CRITERIA
Qualitative Study	Focus Group Discussions with students ≈ **9**	Students **(3 FGDs x 3 universities = 9 FGDs)**	9 FGDs were conducted in 3 selected universities. Participants were included in each FGD keeping in mind substantial women representation as well as respondents from indigenous minority groups, and PwD. **Male** participants = 22 **Female** participants = 19 **Minority** participants = 4 **Persons with Disability** = 3
	Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with faculty members ≈ **3**	Faculty Members **(1 FGD x 3 universities = 3 FGDs)**	3 FGDs was conducted with the Faculty members from 3 universities keeping in mind representation from across disciplines. **Male** participants = 21 **Female** participants = 4
	In-depth Interviews with students ≈ **30**	Students **(10 IDIs x 3 universities = 30 IDIs)**	30 IDIs were conducted with 10 students from 3 universities. Students were selected keeping in mind women representation as well as respondents from minority groups, PwD. **Male** participants = 15 **Female** participants = 11 **Minority** participants = 3 **Persons with Disability** = 1
	Key Informant Interviews ≈ **8**	Different knowledgeable experts in this fields	Digital platform experts = 2 (**Male**) Media personnel = 1 (**Female**) Policy & regulatory authorities = 1 (**Male**) Lawyer = 1 (**Male**) Blogger = 1 (**Male**) Academics with Youth Engagement 2 (**1 Male, 1 Female**)

Table 1: Data sources and Procedures

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

A pre-designed guideline has been used for qualitative data collection activities. Before actually using the FGD and IDI guidelines in the field, they are pretested to check errors and any sort of redundancy in questions. Qualitative approach has its broadened framework to carry out key informant interviews, focus group discussions to collect strategic information. Data collection tools also included semi-structured interviews in Bangla, entailing both close-ended and open-ended questions addressing each issue and requirement intended under this assignment and objectives. Given the Covid-19 situation, zoom has been used as an online platform to conduct FGDs, IDIs and KIIs. However, some FGDs and IDIs were conducted face-to-face given the availability of the students and faculty members at University of Rajshahi and Daffodil International University.

In cases where permissions were obtained, the interviews had been audio-taped. Otherwise, where permissions were not obtained, extensive interview notes were taken by the research assistants, which were later on organized thematically. All the downloaded and collected data were stored in encrypted form in the researchers' computers, and only Dnet and the core research team have access to the data. Data is shared with Dnet in encrypted form through email, drop box and USB-drive. Research team preserves all the original codes for data preparation, transcription and other documents.

3.5 DATA PROCESSING, ANALYSIS AND PRESERVATION

The collected qualitative data, which were audio-taped, were first transcribed and subsequently have been translated in English, thematically organized according to the objectives of the study and then analysed. Considering the huge volume of qualitative data from the FGDs, IDIs and KIIs, sorting them according to the objectives was a gigantic task. Qualified research assistants with background in social sciences had been employed for taking notes and sorting the data thematically. Once the data were organized, content analysis was the main mode of data analysis. The core research team members met several times with the data set and performed the main analysis of the report.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study highest ethical principles such as, respect for persons and communities, justice, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and avoiding any kind of fabrication had been strictly followed. Informed consents had been taken from each of the respondents prior to their participation as respondents. The informed consent process included explanation of the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits, content and time required for the interview, confidentiality and privacy of the data. The interview only took place upon receiving the verbal consent of the respondents. None of the respondents were coerced to take part in this study. Being veteran researchers, the study team had adequate human subject protection training.

The research team ensured that research participants would not be subjected to any kind of harm in any way. The interviews were audio-recorded only upon receiving consent of the respondents. In some cases, where respondents did not agree to be recorded, extensive note-taking was followed. Given the nature of this study such as digital citizenship, digital security, freedom of expression, some respondents initially did not feel comfortable to discuss on these matters and, upon assuring their confidentiality and safety, they became comfortable to share their opinions.

Few Key Informants who were in the government regulatory authorities initially gave their consent to be interviewed and later changed their mind not to be interviewed. We had to be flexible to such field conditions and changed the course of action accordingly by incorporating other respondents upon their agreement. Having understood the sensitive nature of this study, our study team maintained highest level of privacy and confidentiality during data collection and the protection of data.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND THEMATIC PRESENTATION

4.1 INSIGHTS ON FREE EXPRESSION OF THOUGHTS BY THE YOUTHS IN THE DIGITAL PLATFORM

While ascertaining the views of the youth as to which issues they prefer to express freely and comfortably on digital platform, as many as 80% of the respondents from University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi and Daffodil International University mentioned that they usually feel better in posting personal issues relating to society and culture, e.g. interacting with friends showing concern about increasing rape cases in the country and more recently expressing views on depressing situation of health crisis corona which restricted their free movement. They clearly mentioned that they do not post any controversial issues as they are instructed by their families not to do so. While asking about on what issues the respondents do not feel comfortable in posting comments online, one student of law from Daffodil International University mentioned that she does not feel good in posting comments on any political issues due to security matters. She shared with the researcher saying that:

> *"If I ever post anything against the government or share my opinion on them openly, I might be accused in charge of anti-national activity".*

There are other respondents who agreed that any comments that go against the norm of the society must be avoided. When further asked what do they mean by the norm of the society, they said that anything which is not acceptable by the society is the violation of the norm for example, hate-speech, cyber bullying, religious comments that hurt others etc. One female student from Daffodil International University mentioned that:

> *"The reason for which she feels hesitant in posting any controversial issue because whenever there is something offensive is found, even though it is done in a constructive way, it goes viral in social media and the person faces the consequences in the hands of authority and public."*

Summary of the issues that most respondents feel comfortable or uncomfortable to share are mentioned in the table below:

FEEL COMFORTABLE	AVOID AND FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE
(i) Personal Issues like interacting, chatting and sharing with the friends. (ii) Concern over increase rate of crimes such as: rapes. (iii) Expressing discontent on pandemic. (iv) Talking about university classes and lessons. (v) National events like Bengali New Year (Pahela Boisakh) and others. (vi) Performing art, culture and music etc.	(i) Political Issues. (ii) Religious issues. (iii) Insulting anyone with any insulting comment. (iv) Often afraid of talking anything about societal degradation which may require reformation for betterment of the society. (v) Any sensitive issue which might hurt someone. (vi) Any subversive topic to the nation.

Table 2: Issues respondents feel comfortable and uncomfortable while posting comments online

4.2 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES ON RESPONDENTS DISCOURAGING THEM FROM FREE EXPRESSIONS
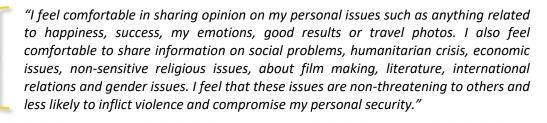
In the research it was found that there are two type of interferences that often stop the youth from freely expressing their opinion on digital platform. They are internal and external interferences. Some of the internal interferences found are: family pressure, concern and security, relatives or friend circle's criticism. In the discussion most students expressed that they are worried about the security of their family members as they fear that any comment on critical issues passed online might affect the status and security of the family. Family members may be harassed or affected negatively. Thus, considering the safety of their family members, most of the youths refrain from commenting such opinions online. The external interferences are: political harassment, torture, and sometimes fear of harassment from the law enforcing agencies. As a commentator in the digital world, safety is very crucial as they fear that they might have to face serious consequences upon violating social norms and etiquettes of the digital world. Political harassment in the form of bullying or physical assault is also possible if the digital comments go against the political ideology of the opponent. Some respondents also said that law enforcement agencies also harass in case of any political comments that go against the ruling party. Thus, fear of being harassed, tortured or physically assaulted appear as significant factors that stop youths from freely expressing their opinion in the digital world.

INTERNAL PRESSURES	EXTERNAL PRESSURES
(i) Family pressure. (ii) Self-concern and awareness. (iii) Criticism from relatives, kin-members and friends. (iv) Pressure from teachers and educational institutions.	(i) Political harassment. (ii) Torture by law enforcing agencies. (iii) Online bullying. (iv) Fear of Digital Security Act, 2018 (v) Public scorn

Table 3: Internal and external pressures users face while posting controversial issues online

From the in-depth and focus group discussion, it became quite clear that online and digital media particularly Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram are very popular among the university students. Some students also have their own YouTube channel and blog pages.

However, from the discussion it was found out that there has been a diversified opinion on what could be or could not be shared online. Most of the students feel that it requires a sensible mind-set on what could be shared online. Their personal safety and security are the utmost priorities for them. When asked about the topics that they feel comfortable to share online, a number of topics and issues were listed by them. However, they believe that most of these topics must be non-controversial or should not pose any particular threat to their personal safety. One of the students of University of Rajshahi stated:

> *"I feel comfortable in sharing opinion on my personal issues such as anything related to happiness, success, my emotions, good results or travel photos. I also feel comfortable to share information on social problems, humanitarian crisis, economic issues, non-sensitive religious issues, about film making, literature, international relations and gender issues. I feel that these issues are non-threatening to others and less likely to inflict violence and compromise my personal security."*

From the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the following list of activities came out that the students feel comfortable to share:

Figure 1: Issues that students feel comfortable to share

It also found in the discussion that politics and religion are two particular issues that students do not feel comfortable to talk about on social platforms. They have concern that sharing such issues publicly has consequences on their personal and their family's safety. They also have worries that security personnel may intercept the discussion or maybe there are others whose political affinity may be affected by the political discussion. It was found that students who live in university dormitories or halls are particularly careful in sharing their political views online since they fear that the repercussions would be bad if their political identity or view is exposed to the political cadres in the university halls. They may be expelled from the hall residences if they are identified with different opinion from the ruling political parties.

Religion is also another issue that most students take extra caution while expressing an opinion about. They believe that religious fundamentalism may ignite serious violence in the community. Since there are different religious communities living harmoniously in Bangladesh, any comment that goes against certain religious views may cause communal violence that could damage social stability of the country. People became fearful in writing on the digital platform because of the recent killing of some prominent bloggers. Moreover, many young people could not accept patrolling of police in the book fair, as well as allegations against some books and authors based on the fact that they harmed religious sentiments. One student from University of Dhaka remarked:

> *"There is lack of tolerance in the society. If someone says anything that is not acceptable to others, then it might create hatred, bullying and hate-speech. I believe that religion is one of the topics that is highly susceptible to creating problems both online and offline."*

On the question of freedom of expression, most students feel that they should have the right to share their opinions. However, all of them agreed that freedom does not mean that the opinion will hurt someone. As one of the students expressed that freedom of expression actually means freedom of

expression without hurting anyone. Another student opined that there should not be any freedom of expression that negatively affects someone else.

Besides politics and religion, most of the students said that they avoid discussing intimate personal and family matters online. It is believed that online is not the place to share very personal matters. It may be shared in a very close friends group but not in the public space. One student from University of Dhaka commented:

> *"Writing about family and personal issues is a big no for me because it may give misconception about my family and me, which may further create insecurity for us. Writing about politics is also a big no because it may create conflict because the opinion will either align with a certain political ideology or go against it."*
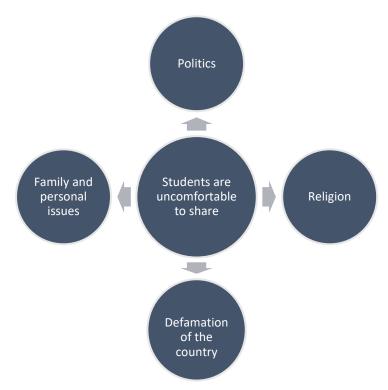
Figure 2: Issues that students do not feel comfortable to share online

On the question of any strategies that youth follows to overcome negative consequences, many of them said that government should come forward to take proactive steps to ensure protection of citizens. Freedom of expression must be ensured in a democratic country by government agencies. One respondent from University of Dhaka suggested that Government should go for innovating proper strategies to find solutions to such problems. Another student from the same university mentioned that tolerance and respecting others' opinions are particularly important to ensure freedom of expression.

Creating awareness among the users about values of respecting others' opinion is very important. Most of the respondents opined that many people are quite ignorant about democratic values for which they often develop become intolerant seeing any comment on politics and religiosity. Therefore, besides government to take a proactive role, students who participated in the FGDs at three study universities however, admitted unanimously that teachers, families and peers can also play significant roles in nurturing a habit of acceptance. At the family level, children can be taught how to appreciate others' opinions. Educational institutes should also emphasize on effective use of social media and teach proper etiquettes of using digital platforms.

One respondent from University of Rajshahi was asked to suggest what initiatives could be taken to assist internet users to express themselves freely. She mentioned that:

"It can only be improved, if everyone is allowed to speak freely without having any embargo from the Administration".

One key informant said that:

"It shall be the open declaration from the government, that the state is in favour of freedom of expression in line with the fundamental rights stated in the constitution. State machineries should act and behave accordingly."

Another blogger who is active online suggested that:

"Internet users must learn to respect other users. The facial expression is invisible as almost the majority of the communication is text based on the internet. Hence they think that they can get away by saying anything. I believe that perhaps lessons on netiquette can also help in eradicating hate speech and cyberbullying that is strongly prevalent on the Internet nowadays."

4.3 FACTORS THAT HINDER PLACING ARGUMENT/OPINIONS ONLINE

One of the important questions in the discussion was to understand the factors that prevent students from sharing their opinions online. It came out repeatedly from the discussion that personal safety and security are the utmost important issue to them. Defamation of the family is also considered to be another crucial factor. Most of the students were worried that they will be harassed by law enforcement agencies if they post their critical opinions online. They also feel unsecure about political forces who might take revenge if something is posted that goes against their political ideology. The fear of the political party-liner workers is particularly evident among the students who live in university dormitories. They mentioned that if they say anything against the ruling political party their stay in the dormitories would be jeopardized. For this reason they do not want to share any opinion on political matters.

Cyber bullying is believed to be another consequence if someone posts anything that goes against someone's interest. Many respondents in the in-depth interviews believed that cyber bullying has become a major factor that prevents freedom of expression online. One of the respondents said that she deactivated her Facebook account because of being cyberbullied:

> *"I wrote something about current surge of rape on my Facebook wall. I was heavily criticized because of this as if I did something really wrong. I blocked them and reported their profiles. I felt so bullied that I decided to deactivate my account. I only use messenger now to communicate with my close friends only."*

4.4 PROCESSES OF VERIFYING INFORMATION

On the question of what students do when they first see a news online, whether they verify the information or take it for granted, and all respondent said that they first read the headline of the news and if the headline appears interesting to them, they click on the link to read further into the news. Any news that do not interest them are not explored further. Most of the students said that they verify the information before sharing it to others. They verify the news from other credible sources. If the same information appears in another credible source, they consider this as authentic. Google appears to the most cited source of verifying information. They immediately search the news in Google and try to find out the authenticity of the information. Some others mentioned that they check news from trusted sources such as electronic version of Prothom Alo or the Daily Star or from recognized groups, organization or persons who are trusted to them. If they have any confusion regarding the validity of the information they talk to their friends to check its authenticity. One student from University of Rajshahi observed:

> *"I verify the validity of the information. I check various sources and read books if there is any. It happened to me once that I shared a post without understanding. One of my friend commented that if I didn't understand the matter why did I shared it. I checked it later and found it was fabricated. I immediately removed the post."*

The following diagram illustrates the process through which students verify sources of information:
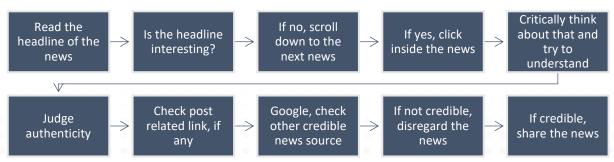

Figure 3: Processes of verifying information

Most of the students are found to be aware of the consequences of sharing fake or fabricated news. One student from Daffodil International University shared his personal narrative of the consequences he had to face due to sharing information without verifying the source:

> *"I believe that not all online information is accurate. Before sharing any information online with others, I try to verify its authenticity. I had to face a serious consequence of not verifying the information online. The incident happened on 13 January 2016, when I came to know a news from Facebook that after the budget of the food department of my Upazila (sub-units of districts) was decided, an official of the Upazila misappropriated the fund. After seeing the information, I wrote the news in a local magazine without verifying the truth. The Upazila UNO did not find any truth after verifying the incident. I was taken under police custody for 18 hours on the accusation of spreading this misinformation. Since then, I never share any information without verifying the authenticity of the news."*

Misinformation is believed to be another dangerous matter on digital platform. Many respondents mentioned that there are so many rumours and fake news prevailing online that sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate which one is right and which one is wrong. It is mentioned that YouTube and Facebook as well as a lot of websites carry information that is false. It is a belief among many young people that a lot of people cannot differentiate between what information is real and what information is fake. One of the key informants mentioned that during Covid-19, a large number of false information was circulating on the Internet which even resulted into deaths. The only way to fight such misinformation is that people need to be taught about misinformation and ways to verify information found online.

4.5 UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE OF THE YOUTH WHILE USING DIGITAL PLATFORMS

While conducting FGDs and IDIs it came out very clearly that most of the youths thought that everybody should have the right to express their opinion freely. They also think that freedom of expression is one of the fundamental human rights that is mentioned in the constitution of Bangladesh. However, expressing opinions should have to be logical. Opinions should not be harmful and disgraceful to the people. These opinions also should respect the usual practice, norms and values of the society. One student from University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"We should have the right to express our opinions and views freely online. But, we must be aware of expressing our opinions considering personal, social, cultural, economic, familial, political and religious issues."*

Some students opined that freedom of expression does not mean to harm and disregard other's opinion. They thought, criticizing on any issue is also a part of freedom of expression. However, such criticism should be constructive. Sometimes, students face risks (e.g., harassment, teasing, bullying, threat etc.) for expressing themselves online. Government and law enforcement agencies should take appropriate actions to create congenial atmosphere so that comments can be freely passed on online and social media.

FGD among university teachers reveal that freedom of expression is closely associated with responsibility. Students should be responsible in expressing their opinions - they should consider others' rights, dignity and security. Freedom of expression should also be understood within the context of racism and religion so that any opinion should not be attacking others' religious beliefs and practices. It is argued that although freedom of expression is the fundamental and constitutional right of every individual of a nation, but opinion must be logical and remain within the practice, norms and values of the society. Most of the youths believe that common and general issues of the country such as development achievements, gender, sports etc. can be discussed online but political and religious

issues require specific cautions since they are sensitive and may provoke hate speech and cyber bullying.

4.6 VIEWS ON ACCEPTING OTHER'S OPINION

It came out of the discussion that majority of the youth is respectful to others during expressing their own opinion. They believe that showing respect to other's opinion increases self-tolerance in a sense that it increases mutual respect and acceptability of other's opinion. If people write something logical on social media and have mutual respect for other users, the youth will also show respectful attitude towards other users of digital platforms. It is believed that any disrespectful behaviour and attitude in social media would result into cyber bullying and personal attack. One of the students of University of Dhaka said that, he can only respect others; if they respect him, then it is a mutual exchange.

Sometimes, students do not show respectful behaviour to other users. The youth thought that digital platform is open for all and every user is not well educated or lacks proper etiquettes. Therefore, some users are not sensible enough on digital sphere. Sometimes, they pass conflicting or disgraceful comments. In that case, most of the students said that they report the ID to the authority of digital platform.

The digital platform is an open place, where users can write anything. Some posts criticize political, social, economic, and cultural issues in a constructive manner and few students raise unnecessary argument with the posts or pass comments. In this circumstance, most of the students do not involve in further arguments to avoid engaging in dirty or attacking comments. A female student of University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"I usually show respect to others' opinions. However, I avoid unnecessary arguments with friends online on different social and cultural issues. Previously, I sometimes, engaged in argument with posting comments on some issues. I had bad experience then. I received dirty comments, teasing and threats, which made me feel unsafe. I immediately block or report the ID for avoiding any further consequences."*

4.7 REACTIONS ON DIFFERENT VIEWS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Most of the youth informed that they act respectfully towards other's opinion and show respect and honour to them who equally practice this. However, these actions and reactions depend on the issues expressed online. For example, students usually skip sensitive issues e.g., religious and politics. If someone writes offensive comments on these sensitive issues, most students report those and inform the digital platform authority that the post goes against their terms and conditions. Students also block and unfollow the users who share offensive messages on sensitive issues. They sometimes remove tag from the sensitive issues once they are tagged by other users.

As mentioned earlier that students consider religious and political issues as most sensitive. According to them, religious issues are more sensitive than political. Therefore, in most of the cases, they do not argue with others seeing offensive messages on religious issue in digital media. One of the FGD participant of University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"Most of the times, I don't argue seeing different views on political and religious issues, and avoid them consciously. I fear to comment on religious issues, as based on my argument and comment, the fundamentalist group can threat me and can even kill me."*

The same scenario is found in case of political issue, where students feel unsafe and fear passing comments in digital sphere. It is predominantly believed that if youths raise voice against the ruling

party, the supporter can attack any time. Therefore, youths do not express their views and opinion on political issues. One of the students of University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"Many students feel unsafe to share views on political and religious issues. Minority students are more vulnerable than others are in this regard. If any minority students pass any comment on the issues, general audience see it differently and attack them with harsh language and threats as well."*

However, some students try to provide references and raise counter argument on religious issues within the norms and values. If the topic is unknown or unclear to them, they go for further reading and gather knowledge in this regard. Sometimes, many young people are unable to come out from their conventional views while commenting online. For example, few months ago, many people made negative comments on the issue of a girl smoking in an open space in Rajshahi city. Very few people made constructive comments on this. Since women smoking publicly is still not acceptable in our cultural practices, many people negatively commented on the news and engaged in controversial debates. However, whatever the youths post and comment online, first they consider the topic and think logically. If the post seems nonsensical and does not have logic and truth, they will not be accepted by others, as most people make judgments and search the validity of the posts. Some students show reluctant behaviour to pass comments online due to not having appropriate knowledge on the consequences of being engaged in controversial issues. Many of them unknowingly fall into the trap and become victims of consequences.

Teachers, on the other hand, act differently than students in digital platform. When the teachers get any news or post on any critical social issues (social, cultural, political, or religious) they judge its authenticity through cross-checking the news sources. Teachers also think about the consequences of the post and consider the situation. If they feel safe then they raise their voice.

Students opined that many youths sometimes overreact to others' posts. They do not know how to behave with others' views. They sometimes talk disrespectfully. Therefore, many students felt that orientation is needed to show them how to behave online, respectfully, and primary learning should be started from within the family. Both the teachers and students said that the state and law-enforcement agencies are not working well to provide security of the users. If the government ensures security, maybe everyone will express their opinion and views freely. It is also added that the state is not yet fully capable of ensuring security for all online users, as one of the teachers of University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"I think it is better to avoid any posts - whether it is accepted or not. Because our state has not reached that stage yet to give our full safety. If I am harmed, the state will not take any responsibility for me and my family as well."*

4.8 KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE YOUTH ON DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Digital citizenship is about confident and positive engagement with digital technologies. Digital citizenship includes appropriate online etiquette, literacy in how digital technologies work and how to use them, an understanding of ethics and related law, knowing how to stay safe online. In short, it involves using digital technologies effectively and not misusing them to harm others.

According to the FGD and IDI data of participants, we tried to understand their perception about digital citizenship. It was found that all of the participants have basic understanding of digital citizenship. According to them, digital citizenship means when a person has the knowledge and skills to effectively use digital technologies to communicate with others, participate in society and create and consume digital content in social media. The understanding about digital citizenship of some of the respondents from Daffodil International University, University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi and key informant are as follows:
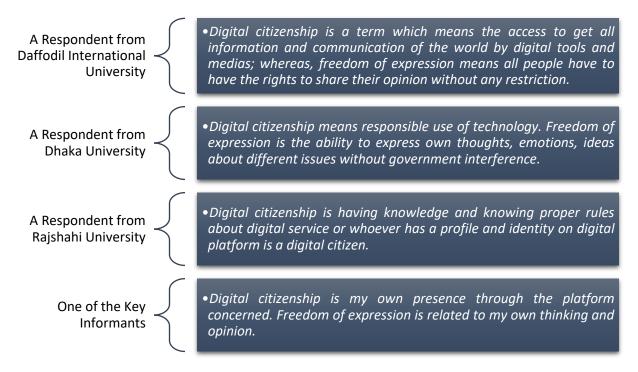
A Respondent from Daffodil International University	•*Digital citizenship is a term which means the access to get all information and communication of the world by digital tools and medias; whereas, freedom of expression means all people have to have the rights to share their opinion without any restriction.*
A Respondent from Dhaka University	•*Digital citizenship means responsible use of technology. Freedom of expression is the ability to express own thoughts, emotions, ideas about different issues without government interference.*
A Respondent from Rajshahi University	•*Digital citizenship is having knowledge and knowing proper rules about digital service or whoever has a profile and identity on digital platform is a digital citizen.*
One of the Key Informants	•*Digital citizenship is my own presence through the platform concerned. Freedom of expression is related to my own thinking and opinion.*

Figure 4: What the students think about digital citizenship

It came out of the discussion that most participants believe that digital citizenship is essential to achieve and understand digital literacy, as well as ensuring cyber bullying prevention, online safety, digital responsibility and digital health and wellness. When asked about their understanding of freedom of expression, most of the students said that it enables people to express their opinion, thoughts and ideas without any fear and censorship from the state and law enforcement agencies. They believe that freedom of expression is one of the essential foundations of a democratic society.

Our participant from FGD and IDI, had moderate understanding about digital citizenship. Although the majority are familiar with the concept of digital citizenship, they do not have complete understanding of the concept. Kara in his study in the context of Turkey also has similar findings that university students have moderate understanding about digital citizenship (Kara, 2018). When asked to describe the concept, many of them said that they have to further study this matter. On the other hand, most students have reasonable understanding about freedom of expression. Since most of them are active online and share their opinion on several issues in social media, they are conscious about their right to express themselves. Besides, after the introduction of Digital Security Act on 2018 and the writings about this in the mainstream newspaper, few university goers are aware of their rights. Below are some of the opinions of respondents from universities regarding freedom of expression:

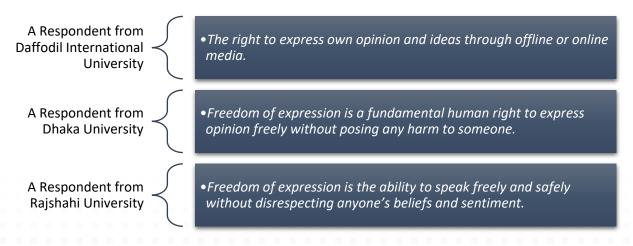| A Respondent from Daffodil International University	•*The right to express own opinion and ideas through offline or online media.*
A Respondent from Dhaka University	•*Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right to express opinion freely without posing any harm to someone.*
A Respondent from Rajshahi University	•*Freedom of expression is the ability to speak freely and safely without disrespecting anyone's beliefs and sentiment.*

Figure 5: Understanding about freedom of expression

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When asked if everyone should have the right to express their opinion in the digital space, almost all participants said that it is the fundamental right of the citizens in a democratic society. However, they all agreed that freedom of expression does not necessarily mean that everyone has the right to say anything they want without any consideration. There must be a sensible use of online platform. Appropriate etiquette and awareness on cultural sensitivity are required before writing something online or passing comments on a news. One of the respondents of Daffodil International University said that:

> *"I strongly support people's right to express their opinion and ideas even if it is arguable and controversial. Because proper dialog among people is required for expressing ideas and opinions, which will also let us know other's views on specific issues and enable us to shape up our views."*

4.9 UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

Majority of the FGD and IDI participants interviewed have basic knowledge about the Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA). According to each of the participants from Daffodil International University, University of Dhaka and University of Rajshahi, the responses are:

A Respondent from Daffodil International University	• *What I understand by digital security act is that it is a law passed by the government which regulates how to use social media.*
A Respondent from Dhaka University	• *Although we know about the Digital Security Act, but there remains a lot of scepticism about its practical application. There is a big difference between the law and the practice of law.*
A Respondent from Rajshahi University	• *I only know about the digital security act which ensures citizen's safety and security on digital platform. I have to study further to know more about this.*

Figure 6: Understanding about Digital Security Act 2018

According to the FGD and IDI data, majority of the participants are deeply unaware of certain sections of the Digital Security Act and the penalty for violation. When we asked them about *section 29, 31 or 32* of the Act, they were unaware of the details. Furthermore, they were unaware of the maximum jail sentence or the amount of fine mentioned in it. One participant from University of Dhaka mentioned,

> *"Digital Security Act was enacted to prevent cyber bullying but it is being used to curb our freedom of expression. It has an inverse relation with the Right to Information Act".*

This responded did however mention that he is unaware of the details in the law.

All of the participants raised concern about their freedom of expression while talking about Digital Security Act 2018. They feel they may get prosecuted if they criticize the policies of the government. They consider the Digital Security Act as a major obstruction to their freedom of thought and conscience. Moreover, they believe that Digital Security Act merely helped in preventing cyber bullying and ensuring digital security. While discussing about the act it came out repeatedly that most students understand it acts as a mechanism of punishment for misusing digital space. However, they

are very much unaware of the fact that there are also duties and responsibilities associated with this act on how to effectively use digital space.

It has been quite evident in the FGD and IDI discussions that most of the youths in the selected universities do not have sufficient knowledge on the Digital Security Act. Most of them have superficial understanding about this. Some of them said it is an Act while others mentioned that it is a law, which reflects that they have confusions in understanding the difference between law and act. Some of them are confused between Digital Security Act and ICT Act. Many have heard about these acts without further detailed understanding about these. What most of the respondents said was that these acts are used by the law enforcement agencies to suppress or control use of digital media. It has been very clear in this study that there are many confusions prevailing around these laws and there is still a lot to do for furthering knowledge on these acts so that the youth make themselves aware of the practical implications of these acts and their own attitude on social media.

4.10 UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

In 2008, the caretaker government during the state of emergency in Bangladesh passed the Right to Information Ordinance. An elected government subsequently ratified the 2008 ordinance and the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) came into force on 1 July 2009. The main objective of the Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government. The Act is a big step towards making citizens informed about the activities of the Government. Findings of the FGD and IDI data suggest that none of the participants know details about the legislation. But as a citizen of the state, they are aware of their right to information for accountability and transparency. According to a student of University of Dhaka:

> *"As far as I know, the Right to Information Act was enacted in 2009 to ensure right to information and digital security for every citizen of the country. But I am not fully aware of the details of it".*

The participants do not know important areas of the RTI covered in different sections and sub-sections. When asked about their understanding about RTI almost all of the students replied that they just heard about it but do not know much detail about this. Many students are unaware of the fact that Digital Security Act and Right to Information Act may complement each other in a sense that RTI can be used to seek digital information from appropriate authorities. Therefore, this study suggests that there is still room for large scale activities to promote both Digital Security Act and Right to Information Act in the context of Bangladesh.

4.11 WAYS TO CREATING A SAFER DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR EVERYONE

Most of the participants on the FGD and IDI emphasized about maintaining a safer digital platform because they feel there is a lack of online etiquette and responsibility from many users on the online platform. They feel that the reason behind this is due to the accessibility and affordability of smartphones and internet packages to users of different social backgrounds. Some of these users do not understand privacy and the content they are sharing on social media platforms. One of the participants mentioned for example,

> *"When a person shares a religious sensitive issue on social media, it may harm a specific religious group by inciting hatred towards them. In many cases it can be seen that from a single social media post, violence and chaos erupted".*

Hence, they feel the lack of understanding of responsible use of technology can have destructive effect in the society.

Moreover, most of the IDI participants feel that everyone should come forward with proper mutual respect while interacting with each other in the online platform. According to some respondents, acceptance of others' opinions can play an important role in maintaining a safe digital world. Additionally, proper knowledge on how to keep personal information safe by choosing stronger privacy options is necessary. Some respondents highlighted that it is important not to share passcodes of social media with even close friends and not to share sensitive information to the public on social media. For example, about the ownership on digital platform, one of the respondents mentioned that sharing a poem or quote from the internet and claiming it to be yours can be problematic. He said that it creates great confusion among the people and the rightful owner may have his/her credit being taken away. He further added that as the information shared on the internet is of open source, it is often hard to find the authenticity on social media. Besides, trustworthiness on digital platform is very important to some of the participants. According to them, the people they interact with on social media may sometimes use a fake identity to cause harm. Therefore, avoiding communication with unknown people can keep them safe online.

According to the participants, proper understanding of a responsible and safe digital platform can be developed through education. The participants feel that such understanding may develop among the students by several workshops and seminars in their respective institutions. According to a student from Daffodil International University:

> *"Education can improve our conscience on how to properly interact and maintain a safer digital world."*

Besides, they emphasized that seminars and workshops from the government agencies and NGOs can have immense benefit on informing people on maintaining safer digital interactions.

While commenting on digital citizenship of the youths, many teachers from the universities felt that different tools are needed to reach them in regard to providing them with knowledge on cyber network, and accordingly they suggest that it can be popularly done through social media advertisement, cartoon or animation, visualization, storytelling and representation in a funny way. Being professional, an overwhelming majority of the teachers very genuinely is in favour of textbooks and lectures who feel that the students may consider learning about digital citizenship through educational institutions and being the part of peer group interaction. Side by side with the text books and lectures, many teachers are in favour of recommending social medias like, (a) Facebook, (b) Instagram, (c) Twitter, (d) LinkedIn, (e) WhatsApp or any other communication methods which can play significant role to disseminate necessary information and knowledge among the youths, especially the students. An overwhelming majority of the teachers however, felt that they are capable of orienting the students on proper use of digital platforms and for that reason, these issues should be included in their curriculum which might allow the students to have a proper learning about digital citizenship.

On the other hand, experts of online platforms expressed that digital issues have now become very crucial because of the reason that many people in the cyber world are often using it indiscriminately and making the total situation problematic. For that reason, it has been suggested that we should formulate policies in such a way so that the human rights are protected and also at the same time, the stakeholders also use them most judiciously. We asked our respondents to suggest the most profound ways of acquiring and generating knowledge on freedom of expression, digital citizenship, and relevant laws enacted by the state. Most of the experts suggested that innovative programs based on age grouping are to be introduced. To exemplify this, one respondent mentioned that for teenagers, online games and quizzes could a good way to teach them. On the other hand, informative videos and online debates may be another alternative way to attract the young university students in regard to digital citizenship. One teacher from Mass Communication at University of Rajshahi suggested us for introducing NGO sponsored neighbourhood-based centres which may teach the younger generation the manners in digital technology providing them with learning about internet etiquette and netiquette. In continuation, she further added that, such lessons on netiquette can play useful role in

eliminating hate speech and cyber bullying. To support her views, such initiative can further be popularized through the state initiatives. In this context, we asked one renowned media personnel seeking her suggestions in improving the behaviour of the internet users. Her reply was to convince them through social mobilization and to generate open discussion with them so that they understand their status; which according to her could be done through media and writings.

In this contest, one sensible prominent blogger of the country more specifically reminded us exemplifying that animation and cartoons are regularly made for children in foreign countries with huge amount of money spent on them. Bangladesh still seems not to be interested in making cartoons, animation, cinemas for our young generation; but undoubtedly, these are the potential digital platforms to motivate our youth on proper digital use. She also added that progressive education should be incorporated in the lessons especially among the madrasahs in the country. A lawyer from Dhaka also held the same view saying that secular education is very essential for our nation. To relate the modalities in acquiring knowledge, a few experts suggested including digital awareness issues in the cinemas and music as they often may have positive effect on human mind inspiring people to be safe and respectful.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INITIATIVES TO TAKE

It has been quite evident from the findings of this study that our participants from the FGD and IDI had moderate understanding on digital citizenship and freedom of expression. When asked about their opinion about the initiatives they feel is beneficial to them to acquire more knowledge on digital citizenship and freedom of expression, they mentioned few suggestions on how to effectively disseminate information on Digital Security Act, Right to Information Act, and other information related to digital citizenship and freedom of expression. They believe that combined effort from the government and non-government organizations can bring about significant understanding about Digital Security Act and Right to Information Act in Bangladesh. Such suggestions corroborate findings of Ribble, Bailey & Ross who argue that it requires a mutual effort of the public and private initiatives to have maximum outputs in knowledge dissemination for digital citizenship (Ribble, Bailey & Ross, 2004). In our study most of the participants clearly mentioned that they do not have deeper legislative understanding of the acts. Besides, many are even unaware of the activities mentioned in those acts that can lead to a legal punishment. Therefore, their preference on how to disseminate information about those acts are revealed in the table below:

Family and peer groups	Family and peer groups can play a vital role in awareness of DSA/RTI. Family should be the primary institution to teach children about how to appreciate others' opinions and proper etiquette of behaving with others.
Educational institutions	Education institutions like schools, colleges, and universities can be key spaces to teach about DSA/RTI. Since social media is highly popular among the university youth, how to better and effectively use these platforms could be part of academic curriculum. National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) can take initiative on how to incorporate proper attitude and behaviour of using social media among the students.
Internet and social media	Since most of the participants are very active on the internet and social media; it can be a vital instrument to reach everyone. Security acts can be clearly explained and illustrated in both Bangla and English language and stored online so that they can be easily accessible.
Seminars and workshops	Many students also suggested that seminars and workshops can be helpful in disseminating knowledge about DSA/RTI.
Campaign/ peer group discussion	Several campaigns conducted by the government and NGOs can have beneficial effect to increase awareness about DSA/RTI.
Informative hand-out distribution	It is also suggested that distribution of brochure, booklet, pamphlet in educational institutions, public institutions and religious institutions can greatly disseminate knowledge and create awareness about DSA/RTI.
Influence of law enforcement agency	Law enforcement agencies can also conduct public campaigns, distribute posters to explain the details of DSA/RTI to the general public.

 Table 4: Preferred mode of awareness creation

5.2 PREFERRED MODALITIES AND PLATFORMS TO DISSEMINATE KNOWLEDGE

From the findings of this study few preferred modalities have been suggested to acquire knowledge on digital citizenship, freedom of expression, Digital Security Act 2018 and Right to Information Act 2009, which are summarized below:

Booklets, brochures textbook and text messages.	Majority of the participants preferred reading materials in the printed form because they say the level of convenience is unmatched when reading a book, rather than electronic medium.
Cartoons with narrative, comics, articles with visualization and online modalities.	Some participants prefer online cartoons with a narrative, comic books and reading materials such as articles or blogs on electronic media.
Short animated films, videos.	Some participants preferred short films or videos to learn more.
Storytelling, banner and poster.	Few students suggested storytelling, poster and banners to reach the target group.

Table 5: Preferred mode of information dissemination

On the question of preferred platforms, findings of the study suggests that digital modalities and online platforms will be mostly effective in disseminating knowledge among the youth, followed by interactive and informative sources. The following table demonstrates suggestions as evident in the IDI and FGDs:

Digital learning materials	Documentary, short films, movies, animation videos, cartoon and national television/radio broadcast.
Online Platforms	Social media, websites, online news portals, ministry websites and government portals.
Interactive initiatives	Seminars, workshops, classroom discussion, international exchange initiatives, campaign, awareness courses offered by the universities.
Informative hand-out distribution	Distributing pamphlet, brochure, booklet, textbooks, bulletins to raise awareness by government agencies and NGOs.

Table 6: Preferred sources of information

5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE OF THE YOUTH IN ONLINE INTERACTION

Findings of the study suggested a few ways to improve behaviour and attitude of the youth, such as:

- **Tolerance/Acceptance:** Tolerance and acceptance must be present. It can be at the individual, community and state levels. Appreciation of others' opinions is likely to be unattainable unless tolerance and respect are promoted. One of the FGD participants from University of Rajshahi said:

> *"I am a Muslim. I go for prayer every evening. When Muslims go for prayer in the evening Hindu people give ulu. Being a Muslim, we don't have any right to prevent Hindus from giving ulu. If we protest, this will hurt and disrespect their religious feelings and freedom. Therefore, religious tolerance should be preached, without hurting anyone's religious feelings."*

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Another teacher from University of Rajshahi said that:

> *"A person can be an atheist, who may have different ideologies and opinions, and it is not a crime. These knowledge need to be spread among the people"*

- **Role of educational institutions:** It has been suggested that schools, colleges and universities can play a vital role in improving the attitude and behaviour of youths during sharing and commenting online. Textbooks and curriculum should highlight components of digital citizenship education and appropriate etiquette.

- **Moral education:** This is considered to be very vital, which should start from an early age. In this regard, family is the primary institution. And this is the first and foremost priority. Parents can play a leading role in promoting a strong morality of the children in the family.

- **Religious institutions:** Mosques, madrasas, mandirs and other religious institutions can also play a vital role to control offensive online behaviour of youths. Religious leaders can help promote strong moral base of the youths.

- **Building awareness:** For improving behaviour and attitude, university youths think that awareness creation is very important which can be done in many ways including but not limited to booklet distribution, seminars and workshops, social media and internet engagement.

- **Role of law enforcement agencies:** Law enforcement agencies can play an important role in controlling cyberbullying, hate speech and violent extremism. Some students mentioned that government should implement existing laws strictly through law enforcement agencies and the provision for punishment should be fairly and objectively be implemented. However, the laws and regulations should not be unfairly used to suppress and control voices of the citizens. One of the student from University of Rajshahi suggests that initiatives could be taken to support people to express themselves freely. She mentioned that:

> *"The situation can only be improved, if everyone is allowed to speak freely without having any embargo from the administration".*

However, most of the respondents from the selected universities are of the opinion that creating awareness will assist everyone in learning about the internet etiquette, which is now popularly known as *netiquette.* Families, peers and educational institutions can play a significant role in moulding the behaviour of the internet users and help them in developing awareness. Apart from this, seminars and symposium could be organized to further enhance awareness on social media to ensure cyber security by increasing tolerance in behaviour.

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