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Viral Utterances of Grief and Empathy: A Case Study of Two Major Moments of Social Shock in Bangladesh (2024–25)

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Abstract

In the modern era of accessible digital technology, certain spontaneous utterances of common folks, spoken in moments of distress, moral dilemma, or crisis, reach wide audiences through social media like Facebook and become viral expressions of collective emotion, grievance, or solidarity. This study examines how four viral utterances from two major moments of social shock in Bangladesh, which happened in July 2024 (student uprising regarding a political issue) and in 2025 (the Milestone School aircraft tragedy), became viral and transformed into symbols of social justice, human rights advocacy, and public consciousness. Using discourse analysis, cultural semiotics, and affect theory, the study analyzes how expressions such as “Pani lagbe, pani?”, “Why have you killed my son?” “They are my children too...” and “I knew you would come” became markers of moral courage, solidarity, and public grief. To complement the qualitative analysis, a short questionnaire was distributed among 86 university students to explore how these utterances were interpreted and how users perceive the role of Facebook in transforming private emotions into public symbols. Responses on a 5-point Likert scale reveal that participants overwhelmingly viewed these utterances as expressions of empathy, resistance to inequality, and calls for social justice rather than mere personal cries of distress. The findings demonstrate that viral speech acts in Bangladesh’s digital public sphere can mobilize emotional

communities, amplify marginalized voices, and contribute to broader discourses on human rights and peacebuilding.

Keywords: Social Media Studies, Viral speech, Bangladesh crises, Cultural significance, Social justice discourse, Human rights communication, Digital empathy

Introduction

A few years ago, a dialogue from a Bollywood film, *Chennai Express*, went viral: *"Never underestimate the power of a common man,"* delivered by the popular actor Shahrukh Khan. Similarly, people often circulate famous quotes from global icons such as Nelson Mandela, *"It always seems impossible until it's done"*, or Bill Gates, *"I choose a lazy person to do a hard job because a lazy person will find an easy way to do it."* These figures are hegemonic personalities with millions of followers, and their simple utterances can easily become iconic and inspirational. Yet, an important question remains: what happens to the utterances of ordinary people, many of which carry deep philosophical and emotional weight?

In today's digital age, countless video clips and messages circulate online, often attracting only brief attention. However, some, though small in number, sustain public engagement and gain cultural significance. Particularly in the post-COVID era, issues of social justice and human rights have drawn renewed attention, with social media emerging as a central platform for resistance and expressions of solidarity. When marginalized voices go viral in this space, their rhetorical power, emotional resonance, and symbolic value demand closer critical examination.

The term *virality* refers to the condition of being rapidly spread or popularized through interpersonal communication, particularly via the internet. It describes how messages in diverse formats e.g. text, video, or images, circulate widely across digital networks. According to Victoria, Arjona, and Méndiz (2025), viral communication can be understood as a personal exchange of messages and content through networked technologies, which often function as persuasive communication. Similarly, Nikolinakou and King (2018) emphasize that *"*engagement is key to virality and (messages) that become viral have the ability to create a strong emotional connection with their audiences*"* (p. 715).

Despite the availability of different social networking platforms, this study focuses on Facebook, the most widely used platform in Bangladesh. As on July 2025, around 70.3 million people in the country were active on Facebook, with the largest demographic group aged 18–24 years. Common practices of using Facebook include uploading photos, creating profiles, engaging in online communities, and expressing opinions. Among these

activities, breaking news and updates on political, social, and public issues receive particular attention. During times of unrest or crisis, social media also becomes a vital space for real-time updates and for expressing emotions, solidarity, and protest in ways that are often more vivid than in the physical world. As Akhter (2021) observes:

> Facebook pages and individuals' profiles have assumed very influential roles in many aspects like public issues. Bangladeshi Facebook prosumers have experienced both socially optimistic roles as well as creations of propaganda throughout the virtual space. Hence, in their contemporary perspective, it is an imperative matter to analyze the intertextual nature of memes as a unique form of visual rhetoric which play active roles in constructing forms of participatory rhetoric, especially among the Bangladeshi Facebook prosumers.

In this context, countless news items are shared daily, yet only a few resonate deeply enough to attain symbolic power. This study focuses on statements in four viral video clips or posts from two significant incidents in Bangladesh (the July Revolution of 2024 and the Milestone Tragedy of 2025). These clips, widely viewed and shared, were later recontextually analyzed and resurfaced in various discussions charged with emotional resonance. With time, they became symbols of resistance, challenges to human rights violations, and expressions of sympathy, which directly relate to the pursuit of peace as a whole. The paper explores two objectives: first, how ordinary people's emotional utterances in Bangladesh spread virally via social media and become symbols of empathy and justice; and second, how these utterances are recontextualized online, influencing public sentiments, solidarity, resistance and peace.

1. Theoretical Framework

The literature review will also identify and define key concepts relevant to the research such as discourse analysis, cultural semiotics, and affect theory to examine how ordinary utterances during moments of crisis in Bangladesh gain virality and symbolic significance. Viral speech is conceptualized not merely as a widely circulated content but as a socially and emotionally resonant act that can influence collective perception, values, and action.

1.1. Authenticity and Virality

In the contemporary digital era, ordinary voices can reach global audiences within hours, especially when expressed in emotionally charged situations. Shifman (2014) argues that virality is not random; content spreads most effectively when it combines internal authenticity (resonance with the

values, beliefs, and emotions of individuals or communities) with external authenticity (which refers to credibility and verifiable truth). Content driven by internal authenticity taps into shared feelings, collective experiences, or a common sense of truth within a group, making it highly relatable and emotionally powerful. Such content motivates people to share it as a way of affirming their identity and expressing solidarity. External authenticity, on the other hand, ensures reliability and trust by grounding the content in factual accuracy. According to Shifman, the convergence of both forms of authenticity creates particularly compelling content, enabling memes, posts, or utterances to spread rapidly across digital networks. These principles are especially relevant for understanding how spontaneous utterances emerging from two recent real-life situations in Bangladesh have captured widespread attention.

1.2. Discourse and Power

Michel Foucault (1972) argues that discourse is not just about language or conversations but a system of thought, knowledge, and power that represents and enforces social order. Foucault's ideas suggest that collective emotions aren't spontaneous or innate. As discourses are never neutral, they shape what is considered “true”. Foucault emphasized that discourses are historically specific, tied to particular times and contexts. This historicity suggests that truths or knowledge are subject to change based on prevailing discourses, highlighting the importance of context in understanding any form of knowledge. When a particular discourse dominates, it can create a powerful, shared emotional landscape.

1.3. Semiotics and Myth

Viral discourse may turn into contextual symbols. Roland Barthes (1972), in his work on semiology, explained how signs and symbols gain meaning in public consciousness through a two-tiered system of denotation and connotation, which ultimately leads to the formation of myth. The Two Orders of Signification Barthes built on Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) foundational idea that a sign is made up of a signifier (the form or image) and a signified (the concept it represents). He then added two layers to this process: i) Denotation (First Order): This is the literal, explicit meaning of a sign. It is the most basic, direct link between the signifier and signified. ii) Connotation (Second Order): This is the culturally and ideologically loaded meaning that a sign acquires beyond its literal definition. This layer of meaning is not inherent to the object itself; it is a meaning we've collectively assigned to it through cultural repetition.

Barthes also argued that myth is a second-order semiological system where the connotative meaning becomes so deeply ingrained in public consciousness that it appears to be natural and universal, rather than a social construct. Though this process of "naturalization" is crucial.

However, through the power of mass media and public discourse, this connotation becomes a myth and people accept it without questioning its underlying cultural and political origins.

Barthes argued that by analyzing and deconstructing these myths, we can reveal the hidden ideologies and power structures that shape our collective understanding of the world.

1.4. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

To critically evaluate viral utterances, this study employs Norman Fairclough's (1992) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. According to Fairclough, "discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation" (p 35). He views discourse not just as language use but as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations. Fairclough states that "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle; discourse is the power which is to be seized"(p 110). This view positions language as a central site of power struggles, rather than just a passive reflection of them. Fairclough's three-dimensional model suggests that discursive events should be analyzed at three interconnected levels:

i) Text (Description): This dimension focuses on the linguistic features of the text itself. It involves a close reading of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and rhetorical devices. The goal is to identify specific language choices that carry ideological weight, such as the use of passive voice to obscure responsibility or certain lexical choices to frame an event.

ii) Discursive Practice (Interpretation): This dimension examines the processes of text production and consumption. It asks how a text is created and how it is interpreted by its audience. This includes analyzing the genres and discourses a text draws upon and how they are combined, as well as the intertextuality, the way texts reference or relate to other texts.

iii) Social Practice (Explanation): This is the broadest level, connecting the text and its production/consumption to wider social, political, and cultural structures. It seeks to explain how the discursive event contributes to social change or social reproduction. Fairclough argues that discourse is not merely a reflection of society; it is a constituent part of it.

This framework allows us to see viral utterances not only as reflections of contemporary crises but also as active sites of struggle where power is contested and redefined.

However, in discussing the relationship between discourse, emotion, and social life, Margaret Wetherell (2013) argues that emotion is not a raw, pre-social force. Instead, it is always entangled with what people are doing together. A collective sense of outrage can mobilize the resources of a digital public, but it is not the spontaneous expression of emotions. It is built through a series of "affective practices" like sharing emotionally charged stories, using specific language and emojis, and repeating certain phrases that reinforce a shared feeling. Affective practices link individuals to society. Wetherell is thus a bridge between discourse analysis and emotion analysis, showing how the two are not separate but mutually constitutive in the formation of digital publics.

1.5. Affective Practice

Margaret Wetherell (2013) extends discourse analysis into the realm of emotion through the concept of affective practice. She argues that emotions are not raw or pre-social forces but are socially and discursively organized. Feelings of outrage, grief, or solidarity are constructed through repeated practices such as sharing stories, using emotionally charged language, or deploying symbolic gestures (like hashtags or emojis). In this sense, emotions link the individual to the collective, showing how micro-level interactions (e.g., one person's post) build into macro-level phenomena (e.g., a nationwide movement).

1.6. Affective Publics

Building on this, introduces the concept of affective publics to describe digitally networked groups organized around shared emotions rather than rational deliberation. These publics are characterized by:

i) Emotion over Reason: Papacharissi (2015) argued that online spaces, particularly social media platforms like Twitter, are not primarily forums for reasoned debate. Instead, they are where people express and connect through shared feelings like outrage, hope, or solidarity. The collective emotion generated by a hashtag, for instance, becomes the primary organizing principle.

ii) Fluidity and Fragmentation: Unlike the stable, institutionalized public of the past, affective publics are fluid and transient. They emerge and dissolve rapidly around specific events or hashtags. This makes them highly dynamic and capable of mobilizing people quickly, but also fragile and easily fragmented.

iii) Connective, Not Collective Action: Papacharissi distinguishes between connective action (individuals sharing personalized expressions of support) and collective action (coordinated, organized protest). Digital publics excel at the former, allowing individuals to feel a sense of connection and participation without necessarily being part of a unified, durable organization. This aligns with Tufekci's more critical view on the limits of digital activism.

iv) The personal as Political: In affective publics, the boundaries between the private and public spheres blur. Personal feelings, stories, and experiences become political statements. A shared expression of grief or anger, for example, can become a political force that mobilizes a digital public.

Papacharissi's framework emphasizes how affective expression, when amplified through digital networks, transforms ordinary voices into powerful symbols of collective identity and resistance.

While affective publics show how emotions circulate and connect people in digital spaces, digital activism examines whether these emotional connections can be transformed into sustained political action.

1.7. Digital Activism

Manuel Castells (2012), in his work on the "network society," argues that the internet and digital communication technologies have fundamentally reshaped the operating system of social movements by granting them a new form of power. He believes that digital networks enable movements to be decentralized, autonomous, and globally interconnected in ways that were previously impossible. Unlike Castells, Zeynep Tufekci (2017), a techno-sociologist, argues that while digital activism, particularly through social media makes it easier than ever to organize protests and raise awareness of human rights issues, this same ease creates significant challenges for movements to achieve long-term, meaningful political change. As Tufekci (2017) points out, social media contributes significantly to building connected capacity. Drawing on a metaphor "from Twitter and Tear Gas", Tufekci (2017) comments that digitally native movements often lack this crucial organizational depth. Castells (2012) emphasizes that digital networks allow horizontal, decentralized mobilization, giving ordinary people unprecedented power to amplify their voices. However, Tufekci (2017) cautions that this same connectivity often lacks the organizational structure needed for long-term impact, making viral activism both powerful and fragile. However, Castells (2014) later emphasizes the hybrid nature of activism, insisting that online and offline activism should not be viewed as separate. He argues that digital networks facilitate real-world, physical occupations of public space, as

movements shift fluidly between the "space of flows" (cyberspace) and the "space of places" (the streets), creating a powerful, hybrid form of protest.

The hybrid model is particularly evident in Bangladesh, where digital activism has not remained confined to cyberspace but has been coordinated with in-person student movements. The interplay between viral online communication and physical mobilization in the streets contributed to political transformation, including the uprooting of a ruling government. Thus, the Bangladeshi context demonstrates that viral utterances and digital networks can move beyond symbolic power to generate material political change when embedded within hybrid forms of activism.

2. Methodology

This mixed-method study employed a qualitative case-study approach to analyze four selected utterances from two recent incidents in Bangladesh: the July 2014 political unrest and the August 2025 Milestone School aircraft crash. Each incident contributed two cases, selected purposively based on their widespread visibility and symbolic significance on social media platforms, primarily Facebook. These utterances were chosen because they convey themes of love**,** empathy**,** solidarity**,** and affection, underpinned by expectations of balance**,** equity**,** and peace.

Data were collected from publicly accessible sources, including comment threads, video clips, and news reports documenting the circulation and engagement metrics of these utterances. Most of the contents were written in English. But where the contents were written in Bangla, they were translated into English for analyses. Translated was carried by the researcher and cross-checked by a bilingual research assistant using back-translation approach to ensure accuracy while preserving originality of the meaning.

The analytical framework combined discourse analysis, cultural semiotics, and affect and emotion analysis. Each utterance was traced across Facebook posts, shares, and comment threads to map its trajectory and patterns of public engagement. Instances where the utterances were reused in discussions, protest signage, or media coverage were also examined to analyze their symbolic recontextualization. The qualitative data were coded thematically around categories such as resistance, moral reflection, human rights awareness, and empathy, guided by the theoretical framework.

To complement the qualitative findings, a survey questionnaire was conducted among 86 university students aged 20–26, a group considered particularly relevant because of their active engagement in the July 2024 movement and their significant participation in social media discussions during the periods when the incidents occurred. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants. The survey aimed to triangulate the qualitative analysis by examining students' perceptions, emotional responses,

and engagement with the viral utterances. The questionnaire was administered in English, and respondents were drawn from 57 higher education institutions across the country, with a roughly balanced gender distribution. Data were collected between July 2024 and September 2025. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the quantitative findings.

The survey design acknowledged certain limitations, including potential sampling bias due to the snowball technique, the restriction to a specific age group, and self-reporting issues. Nevertheless, the survey provided valuable contextual insights, linking students' perspectives to the observed circulation and engagement patterns of the viral utterancestages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to analyze the quantitative data.

3. Ethical Consideration

Only publicly available data were used, and no personal identifiers were recorded. The individuals who shared the posts are not disclosed. The study adheres to ethical standards for research on social media content, ensuring respect for privacy and sensitivity towards victims.

Case Studies

The following four viral utterances circulated widely among Facebook users in Bangladesh and originated from two recent incidents that captured intense public attention.

Case 1 – "If you couldn't give him a job, then don't, but why did you kill my son?" (pronounced in Bangla as *"tui more chawak chakri no dibu, no dey, kintu marlu kene"*) was part of the lamentation of Abu Sayeed's mother. Abu Sayeed, a student of Rangpur University, was martyred during the July 2024 revolution at his own campus. At that time, students were protesting to abolish the quota system maintained by the Government Civil Service Commission, which disproportionately facilitated the families of the 1971 freedom fighters. The agitation created growing tension between the government and the student community, and in the absence of any sustainable resolution, the government deployed police and army forces to suppress the protest.

In a moment that changed the course of the movement, Abu Sayeed deliberately stepped forward, standing in front of the armed forces with his hands spread wide and invited bullets upon himself. He was shot dead. His sacrifice transformed the direction of the protest, ultimately forcing the government to resign. When Abu Sayeed's body was carried back to his home, his mother's cry was recorded and broadcast by news media channels. Her grief-stricken utterance was soon picked up on social media, widely shared and viewed, and quickly became a rallying cry of emotional resistance on

human rights grounds. On facebook ealls posts and posters appeared, combining Abu Sayeed's image with his mother's words, while graffiti carrying the same message spread across cities. Abu Sayeed emerged as a symbol of protest far beyond his campus and community. People from other countries also appropriated his image and words; most recently during a movement in Indonesia a poster resembling that of Abu Sayeed was used.
In essence, Abu Sayeed's mother's utterance was not simply a personal cry of loss, but a political demand for accountability. Her words rejected the value of a government job when weighed against the life of her son, insisting that no employment or privilege could justify such a brutal killing.

Case 2 – "Does anybody need water?" (Pronounced in Bangla as *"Pani lagbe, pani?"*) was another significant incident during the July 2024 revolution.

On July 30, 2024, when students blocked the road at Uttara, Dhaka, Mir Mughdho, a student of the University of Professionals, was seen distributing bottles of drinking water among the protestors, repeatedly calling out, *"Pani lagbe, pani?"* ("Does anybody need water?"). In the midst of this act of solidarity, a bullet struck his head, and he died on the spot. The news of his death spread across social media faster than the bullet itself. Very soon, Mughdho became a symbol of selfless giving, an image of offering water, quenching thirst, and blessing the struggling protesters. His act of kindness, cut short by violence, resonated deeply with the public. Mughdho's photo was transformed into posters, social media posts, memes, and graffiti on city walls. In a striking example of recontextualization, even a drinking water production company used his image and utterance as the logo on their bottles, turning his final words into a lasting emblem of sacrifice and solidarity.

Case 3 - The third utterance comes from a tragic aircraft accident that occurred on August 14, 2025, at Ashulia, Dhaka. On that day, a training aircraft crashed onto a school building of Milestone School while classes were in session. The crash triggered a massive fire, leaving the children terrified and trapped inside. Amid this chaos, Mahreen Chowdhury, a brave and dedicated teacher, stood amid the flame, risking her own life to save her students. Despite the fire consuming her dress, she entered one of the classrooms where several children were trapped. With extraordinary courage, she pushed out at least twenty third-grade students from the blaze, ensuring their safety, even as her own body was engulfed in flames. Later, with 98% of her body burned, she was taken to the hospital in critical condition. At the ICU, when her husband asked her why she had taken such a deadly risk and was about to leave her own children orphans, she replied:

"*They (the schoolchildren) are also my children,how could I leave them and save myself?"*

This utterance soon went viral across grief-stricken social media platforms nationwide. Mahreen was celebrated as an angel who not only enlightened children with knowledge but also protected them at the cost of her own life. Despite all efforts, she tragically passed away on August 15, 2025. Her photograph circulated widely on Facebook pages for days, while educational institutions across Bangladesh displayed her portrait to pay tribute. Mahreen Chowdhury was remembered not only as a teacher but also as the "Mother of Light," a symbol of ultimate sacrifice, empathy, and moral courage.

Case 4 – The fourth utterance also emerged from the Milestone School tragedy on August 14, 2025, and became a powerful symbol of true friendship. Following the incident, a story circulated widely on Facebook walls, often captioned with the line:

"Every time I read this, I am amazed. This is what true friendship looks like!"

According to the post, after the aircraft crash and fire, one surviving student returned to the burning classroom to rescue his injured friend. A firefighter tried to stop him, with a warning: *"There's no use. Your friend will definitely die."* Despite the danger, the student went in and brought his friend out alone. When the firefighter saw the lifeless body, he said: *"I told you, it was pointless. He is dead."* But the student replied:

"No sir, it was truly meaningful. When I reached him, he was still alive. My friend looked at me, smiled, and said his last words: 'I knew you would come."

The story, though heartbreaking, spread rapidly on social media under hashtags like #Milestone #MilestoneCollege #Tragedy, inspiring thousands. For many, this utterance became a timeless testament to loyalty, courage, and the depth of friendship even in the face of death. As the story was re-shared, the phrase *"I knew you would come"* moved beyond its tragic origin. It appeared in posts, status updates, and even memes symbolizing trust, companionship, and solidarity. In this way, the utterance was recontextualized from an intimate moment between two friends into a broader metaphor for collective faith in humanity. It has since functioned as a discursive resource for expressing hope, unity, and moral solidarity in times of crisis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The following table presents four key utterances that circulated widely on social media among Bangladeshi users from July 2024 to September 2025, each of which generated considerable public attention. It is evident that even seemingly common phrases can attract significant engagement during times of political or social turmoil, as evidenced by the variety of views ranging from 1.7k to 71k. Among the cases, *Case 2 ("Does anybody need water?")*

recorded the highest reach (71k views), indicating that symbolic acts of solidarity resonated most strongly with online audiences. In contrast, *Case 4 ("They are also my children…") reached a lower range (1.7k–28k)*, but despite its narrower circulation, it carried deeper moral resonance, reflected in the thematic codes of empathy and peace. The data further shows that utterances rooted in grief and protest (Case 1) drew consistent engagement across a broad spectrum (4.4k–21.9k), suggesting that audiences connected strongly with discourses about injustice and human rights. The expressions of trust and companionship (Case 3) also engaged moderately (2.6k–7.3k), reflecting the affective power of solidarity, though with less virality. Thus, the findings from the quantitative results highlight two important trends: i) emotional weight and symbolic potential directly influenced the scale of circulation and ii) themes of solidarity and collective care tended to receive wider engagement than individual grief or moral reflection ,which reflects Foucult's (1972) arguments about the power of discourse.

Table 1: Quantitative representation of the key utterances

The Utterance	Meaning	Views	Comments in Thread	Recontextualized as	Thematic Code
Case 1 – "If you couldn't give him a job, then don't—but why did you kill my son?" (তুই মর ছাওয়া চাকরি না দিবু, না দে, কিন্তু মারলু কানে?)	Protest expression — highlighting injustice	Each post reached 4.4k to 21.9k views	Focusing empathy, pain, human rights awareness, showing respect	From a personal cry to a collective grievance; from joblessness to social injustice; from individual sorrow to symbolic resistance	Resistance, human rights awareness
Case 2 – "Does anybody need water?" (পানি লাগবে, পানি)	Call for solidarity — offering water as empathy during July revolution at Uttara, Dhaka	Each post reached 3.9k to 71k views	Solidarity, resistance, sympathy	From a simple humanitarian act of sharing water to a metaphor for collective care, solidarity, and resistance	Solidarity, survival, collective resistance
Case 3 – "I knew, you would come" (আমি জানতাম তুমি আসবে)	Trust, solidarity, faith in companionship	Each post reached 2.6k to 7.3k views	Friendship, peace, reassurance	From personal trust to a metaphor of collective solidarity and shared humanity	Solidarity, peace, collective faith
Case 4 – "They are my children too, how could I leave them alone and just walk away" (ওরা ও তো আমার সন্তান, ওদের ছেড়ে আমি আসি কেমনে)	Moral dilemma and empathy beyond blood relation	Each post reached 1.7k to 18k views	Respect, moral reflection, compassion	From maternal cry to universal moral responsibility; from personal loss to symbolic empathy	Moral reflection, empathy, peace

The qualitative analysis treated Facebook comment threads as primary data and employed CDA, affective practice, semiotics, and virality to explore how users construct meaning, mobilize emotions, and articulate political demands.

In **Case 1** Grief, anger, shame, and moral indignation dominate the comment thread, symbolizing immediate emotional registers. Many comments perform ritualized laments *("Ah!, how painful," "heart-wrenching," or "we are ashamed as a nation"*), invoking shared sorrow. This emotional chorus does three things: (a) validates the mother's pain as a public rather than private matter, (b) amplifies the affective intensity of the event, and (c) creates pressure for a moral and political response. Examples from the thread like "*Ah! Heart-rending… may Allah grant him the highest place in heaven. . ." and "We are ashamed as a nation.*" are formulaic invocations (religious consolation and national shame) that both comfort and politicize. In the comments religious phrases appear repeatedly *("May Allah grant him Jannat," "Amin") and function* as both consolation and moral framing. The comments present him as a martyr whose death is of spiritual significance, and invoke divine judgment to justify calls for justice against oppressors. Through this sacralization, the mother's words become more than personal complaints and become part of a moral-religious narrative that delegitimizes the state's actions.

The thread frequently polarizes actors: the family and students are positioned as innocent, righteous victims; the government/police/army are framed as "zalim" (tyrants) or worse than animals. This binary moral language ("*these oppressors are more vile than animals*") intensifies collective moral condemnation and constructs a clear us-vs-them narrative that supports mobilization.

The expression of identification as "*he is one of us"* can be seen as a key affective practice that transforms private sorrows into common grievances that legitimize collective action. The commenters quickly shift into political claims and demand like, "*If quota is not solved, how will we go home?"; "This injustice should be punished"; "This is state cruelty"; "we must take away the tyrant," or "another war to fully liberate the country."*

Mother's lament is used as evidence that structural policies and state violence are intolerable, which is consistent with Zizi Papacharissi's (2015) concept of the personal as political. Further, through repeated sharing and reframing, the mother's utterance gains connotative meanings: it becomes a symbol of state brutality, an emblem of maternal sacrifice for the movement. Barthesian (1972) semiotics would read this as a movement from denotation (a mother's lament) to connotation (symbol of resistance) and ultimately myth (a taken-for-granted narrative about injustice and martyrdom). The online circulation thus creates a cultural memory.

Towards **case-2** the thread responds with intense emotion, tears, reverence, and pride: e.g., "*When I hear 'pani lagbe, pani' my eyes fill with tears," and "People around the world now know Mughdho; everyone prays for him."* This affective reaction amplifies the post's circulation via shares, hashtags, and memorial posts, forming an affective public that can be mobilized symbolically even without formal organization, as Castells (2012) and Papacharissi (2015) note. The phrase *"pani lagbe, pani"* condenses into a signifier whose meanings include altruism, youth sacrifice, and moral indictment of violence. Commenters invoke religious blessings like, "*May Allah grant him Jannat," "May he be given the honor of shahid"*, which turns death spiritually meaningful and elevates Mughdho into a martyr-figure. As Fairclough's (1992) notion of discursive practice illustrates, tribute often shifts into political claims: "*This fascist government must be overthrown . . . its planners are neighboring states*." Others call for formal preservation of the testimony in public memory: "*We must preserve their testimony via documentary, state and private media should broadcast this"; "Mughdho's name will remain on this land as long as Bangladesh exists." The* comments also combine authenticity and credibility reasoning that is consistent with Shifman's (2014) explanation of virality. Internal authenticity (emotional resonance) pairs with external authenticity (the verifiable, widely reported death).

In **Case 3** Responses about Mahreen Chowdhury's heroic sacrifice construct her identity, affective practices at work, and broader social meanings. Mahreen is addressed as a "*martyr," "hero," "guardian," "mother of a nation," "humanitarian," "a bright beacon of humanity," "fluorescent nightingale," "heroic warrior"* and *"savior*." Her sacrifice is framed in terms of national and collective pride *("Our Nation, School, Society will never forget . . ."*). The repeated emphasis on her death as "*not merely the loss of one life but a shining example*" elevates her act into a moral and civic lesson. Posts are infused with emotionally charged language: *salute, tribute, respect, heartbreak, deep respect*.

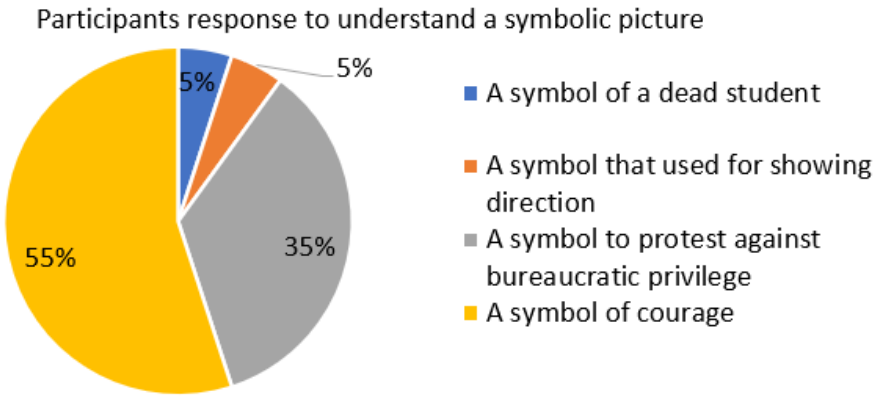
Religious invocations like, *"May Allah grant her Jannat al-Firdous," "Ameen," "Innalillahe wainnailaihe rajiun"*, resonates Wetherell's "affective practices" binding individual grief into a collective digital public. Her act is interpreted as fulfilling the ultimate moral responsibility of a teacher ("*performed duties till her death," "moral responsibility and self-sacrifice").* At the same time, gendered imaginaries of care (e.g. "*saved her students as her children," "guardian," "real mother*") frame her sacrifice as both natural (maternal) and extraordinary (heroic). Further, several comments position her as an ideal for future generations shown in comments like, "will inspire and guide generations to come".

Case 4 bears the message of friendship beyond death**.** The thread around the utterance *"Ami jantam tumi asbe" (I knew you would come)* illustrates how affective publics are not only built around grief or protest but also around ideals of loyalty, sacrifice, and selfless love. There are comments that frame the friendship between the boys as pure, sacred, and eternal, for example, "*This is true friendship*", "*Such friendships remain immortal even after death*." By transforming an interpersonal bond into a moral exemplar, these discursive practices elevate the relationship from its private to its collective nature.

Emotionally-triggered expressions like, *"couldn't hold back my tears", and "Salute to such friendship"* amplify effective intensity. The repetition of key phrases like *"true friendship"* and *"immortal friendship"* condenses into a cultural signifier that embodies altruism, trust, and ultimate sacrifice. Prayers for reunion in Jannah extend the friendship bond as a social and spiritual commitment. Wetherell's (2012) concept of affective practice is reflected here by the enactment of emotions through collective language, blessings, and ritual phrases that bond individuals for a shared moral purpose.

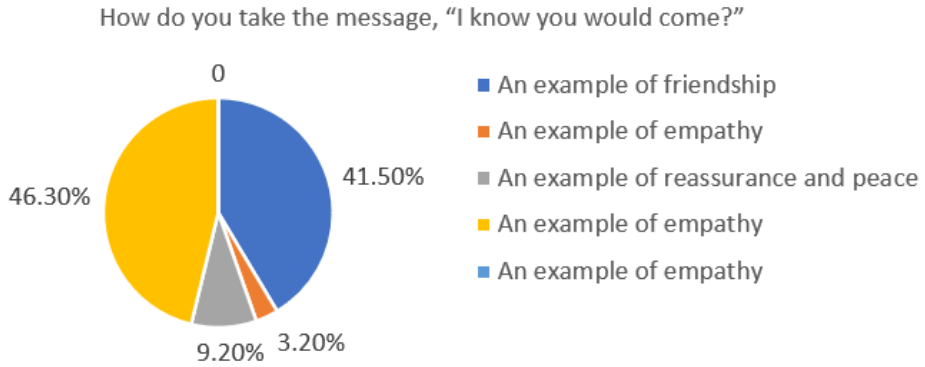
In Shifman's (2014) terms, the authenticity of the scene (verifiable and emotionally resonant) drives virality is expressed in: *"Friendship is the highest religion," and "We must learn the greatness of friendship from these innocent children."* Analysing these comments using the discourse-analytic lens of Fairclough (1992) shifts this personal act of friendship into a broader commentary on human values; a message for the contemporary world and aligned universal ideal beyond its immediate context.

Data from the survey provide insights into how participants interpreted symbolic events and narratives of student protest. In Question 2 (see Appendix), participants were asked how they interpreted a given picture (the picture shows Abu Sayeed). A majority (55%) identified it as *"a symbol of courage"*, while 35% viewed it as *"a symbol to protest against bureaucratic privilege"*.

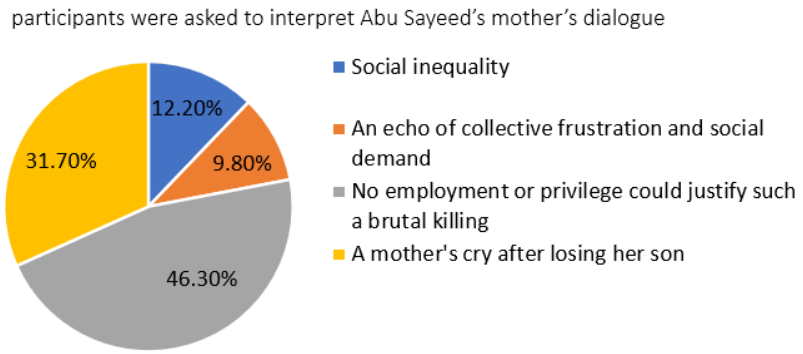


Pie-Chart 1: Participants Response to Understand a Symbolic Picture

Whereas, in case of Question 4, which referenced a story related to the Milestone School incident, participants highlighted the moral dimension of the event. Nearly half (46.3%) regarded it as *"an example of empathy"*, while 41.5% emphasized it as *"an example of friendship"*. These findings suggest that participants interpret viral protest-related utterances and narratives not only as expressions of resistance but also as moral exemplars of empathy, courage, and solidarity. Similarly, in question no. 5, when the participants were asked to interpret Abu Sayeed's mother's dialogue, "Why have you killed my son?" in response about 68.3%respondents supported it either as "*Social inequality*" (12.2%) or "*An echo of collective frustration and social demand*" (9.8%) or "*No employment or privilege could justify such a brutal killing*" (46.3%) other than supporting it as merely "*A mother's cry after her son*" (31.7%).



Pie-Chart 2 : How do you take the message, "I know you would come?"



Pie-Chart 3: participants were asked to interpret Abu Sayeed's mother's dialogue

Question No. 3 invited participants to provide a one-sentence description of the teacher from Milestone School portrayed in the image. The responses reflected strong symbolic recognition: 22% described her as a brave hero, 20% as a martyr and mother, 18% as a savior or protector, 15% as a symbol of compassion and humanity, 13% as an angel and mother of light,

and 12% as a role model and timeless inspiration. These categories highlight how the participants collectively framed her identity through narratives of courage, sacrifice, protection, and moral inspiration, aligning her with both maternal symbolism and heroic archetypes.

Table 2: Response towards a picture of Case-3

Theme	Representative Expressions	% of Responses
Heroism & Bravery	*"Warrior who lived for others", "Hero of humanity", "Heroic fighter", "True heroes wear no capes"*	22%
Maternal & Caregiving Role	*"Mother of martyrs", "Mother figure", "She is a real mother", "The mother in every woman"*	20%
Savior & Protector	*"She is the savior", "Protector", "Saved many students instead of her life"*	18%
Compassion & Humanity	*"Soul with true heart", "A symbol of compassion and courage", "Someone to learn humanity from"*	15%
Spiritual & Sacred Imagery	*"Protective angel", "Halo to symbolize sanctity", "Tree for the children", "Mother Light"*	13%
Role Model & Inspiration	*"Queen", "Wonder woman", "Represents selfless spirit of caregivers", "A mother of million childs"*	12%

Table-3 shows data collected from respondents about participants' perceived role of social media in transforming private emotions into public symbols of resistance, the significance of marginalized voices gaining visibility, and the cultural impact of viral clips in shaping solidarity, empathy, and justice. The analysis of their responses provides insights into how ordinary speech acts are recontextualized in Bangladesh's digital public sphere, contributing to public discourse on justice, human rights, and peace building. The highest mean score was for the statement *"Marginalized voices can gain popularity via social media"* (M = 4.31, SD = 0.75), suggesting that participants strongly believe social media amplifies marginalized perspectives. Similarly, the perception that *"ordinary people's emotional utterances during crises in Bangladesh go viral because they share common values, beliefs, and emotions"* also received strong support (M = 4.28, SD = 0.68). Statements linking viral utterances to collective memory (M = 4.21, SD = 0.75) and solidarity amidst violence (M = 4.24, SD = 0.84) were also highly endorsed, underscoring their symbolic and communal significance. The lowest agreement was observed for the belief that viral statements influence peace building through compassion and empathy (M = 3.88, SD = 0.81), though this still reflects moderate support. Taken together, the findings indicate that respondents perceive viral utterances not merely as expressions of grief but as potent social symbols that mobilize solidarity, construct collective memory, and amplify marginalized voices, even though their role in promoting peace is viewed with slightly less certainty.

Table 3: Participants perceived role of social media

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you agree that through social media a private mourning can become a public symbol of resistance against violence	86	1.00	5.00	4.0814	1.09775
What do think about the statement, "Marginalized voices can gain popularity via social media"	86	3.00	5.00	4.3140	.75555
According to you these ordinary people's emotional utterances during crises in Bangladesh go viral on social media because they share the common values, beliefs, and emotions of Bangladeshi community	86	3.00	5.00	4.2791	.67999
What do think about the statement, " Viral utterances from ordinary people attract my attention more than statements from political leaders."	86	3.00	5.00	4.0465	.68440
These viral utterances influenced how I thought about justice, human rights, or government accountability.	86	3.00	5.00	4.1628	.66616
The student protest clip ("Pani lagbe, pani") reflected solidarity amidst violence	86	2.00	5.00	4.2442	.83927
I believe certain viral clips symbolize larger struggles for justice and equality.	86	2.00	5.00	4.0814	.78538
Viral utterances contribute to building collective memory around crises.	86	2.00	5.00	4.2093	.75329
How much you support that, " these viral statements influence in establishing peace with the practice of compassion, solidarity and empathy"	86	2.00	5.00	3.8837	.81772
Valid N (listwise)	86				

Discussions

These four viral utterances illustrate how emotionally charged speech, often emerging during times of crisis, travels across social media and acquires symbolic meaning beyond its immediate context. These utterances not only document personal pain or moral dilemmas but also demonstrate the processes through which ordinary voices become rallying points of resistance, empathy, and solidarity in Bangladesh's digital public sphere.

As per Michel Foucault's (1972) theory of discourse, any discourse must be understood in the context in which it is delivered. In this study, analysis of case-1 shows, the mother's utterances is not just a mere cry after losing her son, but an effort to challenge the authority of the state. Similarly in case-2 the utterance “Does anybody need water?” is not a simple query, nor is it a call from a street hawker who sells a drinking water bottle in a jam-packed city. Because of its historical context, the discourse became a calling for volunteers, a savor that would provide water to thirsty soldiers.

According to the theory of cultural semiotics, viral utterances are symbols embedded with meaning (Barthes, 1972). A man spreading hands widely to both of his sides traditionally signified the direction of a compass. But Abu Sayeed's incident changed the meaning of similar pictures. It becomes a symbol of fighting injustices without complacency and demanding human rights. When phrases like: “Does anybody need water?” / *“Pani lagbe, pani!”* or “They are also my children" or "Ora *o to amar shontan”* are widely shared, they are recontextualized as signs of resistance, empathy, and moral accountability. They bring us back to the actual incidents to fill our hearts with empathy and love. These utterances thus operate as cultural markers, carrying ethical and political significance beyond their immediate context.

Application of Fairclough’s (1992) CDA Framework to the four viral cases helps to understand the depth of the utterances. At the textual level, each viral utterance carries specific linguistic choices that encode emotion and ideology. In Case 1, the mother’s lament, “If you couldn’t give him a job, then don’t, but why did you kill my son?” uses a contrastive structure (job vs. life), foregrounding the absurdity of valuing bureaucratic privilege over human dignity. Case 2’s “Pani lagbe, pani?” (Does anybody need water?) employs simple, everyday vocabulary, which in context becomes a powerful metaphor for care and solidarity amidst violence. Case 3 “They are also my children” transforms maternal language into a universal claim by extending kinship beyond biological ties. And Case 4’s “I knew you would come” dramatizes loyalty and trust through dialogic interaction where the final words of the dying child turn friendship into a moral truth.

In terms of production and consumption, the utterances were initially by traditional news channels, but their viral circulation occurred through Facebook, where they were reinterpreted, remixed, and repurposed as memes, posters, graffiti, and hash tags. Audiences did not just consume the texts passively; they reframed them into new genres. Abu Sayeed’s mother’s lament was echoed in global contexts (e.g., similar posters in Indonesia), while Mughdha’s words became a corporate logo. The Milestone tragedy discourses referenced established cultural tropes, the “sacrificial teacher” and “true friendship”.

Discourse analyses show how personal speech transforms into collective cultural narratives, allowing audiences to participate in meaning-making through resharing. In addition, on a broader level, these utterances function as discursive struggles for power, justice, and identity. For example, Case 1 challenged the legitimacy of state violence and questioned structural inequalities embedded in the quota system; Case 2 articulated the resistance against state repression by elevating compassion into a symbol of justice; Case 3 disrupted gendered expectations by casting a woman teacher as a heroic protector, highlighting the social value of sacrifice and care; Case 4 reasserted communal values of loyalty and solidarity, countering narratives of despair with a moral exemplar of friendship. Thus, these utterances are not passive reflections of tragedy but active sites of social struggle, shaping the political imaginary and contributing to collective resistance. In Fairclough's (1992) sense, the discourse itself has become "the power which is to be seized" (Fairclough, 1992), embedding human rights, solidarity, and dignity as counter-hegemonic values in Bangladesh's public consciousness.

In addition, Case 1, the lamentation of Abu Sayeed's mother "If you couldn't give him a job, and then don't but why did you kill my son?", epitomizes what Shifman (2014) describes as an 'internal authenticity' that drives virality. Her raw cry, rooted in injustice and grief, was taken collectively as a protest against systemic violence and state repression. The utterance was transformed into posters, graffiti, and memes, showing how private mourning can become a public symbol of resistance. This aligns with Castells' (2012) and Papacharissi (2015) view that digital networks allow voices out of pain to become catalysts for broader movements.

Similarly, Case 2, the tragic story of Mir Mughdha, who uttered "Does anybody need water?" while distributing bottles during the July 2024 protests, gained virality because of what Shifman (2014) terms "external resonance" that entangles universal concerns about survival, solidarity, and neglect. After Mughdha's death, his utterance was recontextualized into brand logos, graffiti, and protest art. It signifies how digital culture transforms acts of compassion into enduring metaphors. Here, memes and digital shares act as what Wiggins and Bowers (2015) call "participatory rhetoric," enabling citizens to perform solidarity online through resharing and remixing.

Case 3, in the words of Mahreen Chowdhury "They are also my children. How could I leave them and save myself?" illustrates the moral dimension of empathy. Her selfless act during the Milestone School aircraft tragedy resonated with Schwartz's (1992, 2012) theory of values, especially "universalism" and "benevolence". Her utterance, shared across platforms and commemorated in educational institutions, elevated her from an individual teacher to a cultural symbol of maternal sacrifice, moral reflection, and peace-building. Case 4, "I knew you would come," uttered in the final moments of

friendship during the same Milestone tragedy, also provides a unique example of expression of solidarity and faith. Its virality reflects what Papacharissi (2015) describes as "affective publics," where collective emotion binds individuals to imagined communities of care. The recontextualization of this utterance into posts, hashtags, and memes demonstrates how private dialogues of loyalty transform into collective affirmations of trust and shared humanity. Taken together, these utterances highlight that virality in Bangladesh's context is not merely about entertainment, but about emotional resonance with collective values. They show how ordinary speech acts function as "organic resistance" (Chouliaraki, 2013), challenging injustice, articulating empathy, and reaffirming solidarity. The intertextual circulation of these utterances as memes, posters, and graffiti points to the creation of symbolic spaces for justice, peace, and healing in a society struggling with violence and instability. Through digital circulation, these utterances transcend their original contexts to become cultural artifacts, embodying the struggle for human dignity, solidarity, and peace.

Implication and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the transformative power of the utterances voiced by marginalized individuals including an ordinary housewife, a schoolteacher, and a school-going child whose emotional words surpass the influence of established political and social leaders. Their speech is deeply rooted in pain, empathy, and solidarity. They demonstrate how marginalized voices can disrupt dominant discourses and reshape the collective imagination. A discourse that begins as a personal cry can evolve into a cultural myth, positioning widely known hegemonic characters as powerless and capable of challenging state authority and inspiring mass movements (Barthes, 1972).

This study also underscores the crucial role of digital platforms where people do not merely share stories for entertainment but use them as vehicles for solidarity, justice, and peacebuilding. Social media provides space for marginalized voices to circulate widely, transforming local grief into global symbols of resistance and care. The viral trajectory of these utterances reveals how affective publics can mobilize around empathy, solidarity, and a demand for justice, even without formal leadership or organization (Wetherell, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015).

More broadly, the cases from Bangladesh resonate with today's world, where wars and conflicts continue to devastate communities. While powerful nations wield missiles and nuclear weapons to dominate others, ordinary voices like a child's expression of trust, a teacher's self-sacrifice, or a mother's demand for justice offer alternative models of courage and humanity. These utterances remind us that peace is not built by force but by empathy, solidarity,

and moral responsibility. For global leaders, the study carries a powerful message: true authority is not measured by military might or political dominance but by the willingness to protect, care, and act selflessly for others.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study sheds light on how ordinary utterances during moments of crisis in Bangladesh gain symbolic power through digital circulation, few limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies primarily on textual and thematic analysis of viral utterances, which, although illuminating, does not fully capture the multimodal dimensions of virality. Images, videos, memes, and hashtags often travel alongside utterances, amplifying their affective impact, and these visual-discursive elements warrant deeper exploration. Second, the analysis is temporally situated in the July 2024 student revolution and the August 2025 Milestone School tragedy. Although these cases are illustrative, they represent a limited scope. Future research could expand to other crises and cultural contexts to examine whether similar patterns of virality, symbolism, and affective mobilization emerge, or whether the dynamics observed here are culturally specific to Bangladesh. Third, this study draws upon secondary data from social media posts, reports, and shared narratives, but they may not capture the voices of marginalized groups with limited digital access. Further ethnographic or participatory approaches could address this gap by including perspectives from diverse stakeholders, particularly those excluded from digital discourse.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire on Survey on Discourse of Peace AND Human Rights

N.B.: This survey will be used for a study purpose. Respondent identity will not be disclosed to public

Email*

Age:

1. Does the statement remind you about anyone?

2. How do you interpret the picture?

A. A symbol of a dead student
B. A symbol that used for showing direction
C. A symbol to protest against bureaucratic privilege
D. A symbol of courage

3. In one sentence describe the lady in the middle of the picture. e.g. she is the mother light...

1. How do you take the message? "মাইলস্টোনে দূর্ঘ*টনার পর বেঁচে যাওয়া একজন ছাত্র তার আহত বন্ধুকে ক্লাসরুম থেকে ফিরিয়ে আনতে গিয়েছিল। ফায়ার ব্রি'গে'ডের অ'ফিসার বা'ধা দিয়ে বললেন, "এর কোনো লাভ নেই! তোমার বন্ধু অবশ্যই মা_রা যাবে"। কিন্তু ছাত্রটি তখনও গিয়ে তার বন্ধুকে একা একা ফিরিয়ে আনল।

   ম্*তদেহ দেখে ফায়ার ব্রি'গে'ডের অফিসার বলে, "আমি তোমাকে বলেছিলাম এর কোন মূ'ল্য নেই। সে মা_রা গেছে"। ছাত্র'টি উত্তর দেয়: 'না স্যার, এটা সত্যিই মূল্যবান ছিল। যখন আমি তার কাছে গেলাম, সে তখনও জী"বিত ছিলো আমার বন্ধু আমাকে দেখে, হাসল এবং তার শেষ কথাটা বলল: "আমি জানতাম তুমি আসবে"।"
   A. An example of empathy
   B. An example of friendship
   C. A message of reassurance and peace
   D. All of the above
   E. none of the above

2. How do you interpret the message?
   "তুই মোর ছাওয়াক চাকরি না দিবু না দে
   কিন্তু মারলু ক্যানে।"
   -- আবু সাঈদের মা
   A. A mother's cry after losing her son
   B. Social inequality
   C. An echo of collective frustration and social demand
   D. No employment or privilege could justify such a brutal killing

3. Do you agree that through social media a private mourning can become a public symbol of resistance against violence
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

7. What do think about the statement, "Marginalized voices can gain popularity via social media"
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

8. According to you these ordinary people's emotional utterances during crises in Bangladesh go viral on social media because they share the common values, beliefs, and emotions of Bangladeshi community
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

9. What do think about the statement, " Viral utterances from ordinary people attract my attention more than statements from political leaders."
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

10. These viral utterances influenced how I thought about justice, human rights, or government accountability.
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

11. The student protest clip ("Pani lagbe, pani") reflected solidarity amidst violence
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Nuetral
   D. Disagree
   E. Strongly Disagree

12. I believe certain viral clips symbolize larger struggles for justice and equality.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Nuetral
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

13. Viral utterances contribute to building collective memory around crises.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Nuetral
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

14. How much you support that, " these viral statements influence in establishing peace with the practice of compassion, solidarity and empathy"
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Nuetral
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

Appendix B: Pictures found in Facebook post, graffiti, etc.

Case 2 – "Does anybody need water?"

Case-3- "They are my children too. How could I leave them alone and just walk away?"


Case-4- “I knew you would come. . . ”
আমার বন্ধু আমাকে দেখে, হাসল
এবং তার শেষ কথাটা বলল: "আমি
জানতাম তুমি আসবে"!
বন্ধুত্ব দিবস
২০২৫
বন্ধুত্ব মানেই পাশে থাকা, সব প্রতিকূলতার ঊর্ধ্বে।