Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media



A Thesis Submitted to the University of Dhaka for the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Amena Khatun

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my late husband, Md. Ahidul Islam, whose constant encouragement to remain patient, work diligently, and strive to be a better human being continues to inspire me. To my present husband, Md. Humaun Kabir, whose unwavering support and sacrifices made this journey possible.

To my sons, Md. Aryan Al Amin and Md. Aariz Al Amin, for their love, understanding, and patience.

To my mother, Rahima Khatun, and Mother-in-Law, Mst Rashida Khatun.

To all those who believed in me when I doubted myself.

To all of you, I am eternally grateful.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work entitled “Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media” has been carried out under the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I have composed this thesis based on my original research findings, along with references to the published literature. This has not been submitted in part or in whole to any other institution for any other degree. I also certify that there is no plagiarized content in this paper.

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This is to certify that AMENA KHATUN carried out his PhD research under my guidelines and supervision, and hence prepared the thesis entitled “Representation of Rohingya People in Social Media.” To the best of my knowledge, the researcher duly acknowledged the other researchers’ materials and sources used in this work. Further, the paper was not submitted to any other universities or institutions for any other degree or diplomas.

It is therefore recommended that the thesis be submitted to the University of Dhaka in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I also certify that there is no plagiarized content in this paper.

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While many have contributed to this work, any errors or shortcomings remain entirely my own responsibility.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Full Form
ACT/RES	- Active and Resilient (Coding Category)
APBN	- Armed Police Battalion
ARSA	- Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
BUR/DEP	- Burden/Dependents (Coding Category)
CCCS	- Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
CIC	- Camp-In-Charge
CN	- Counter-Narratives (Coding Category)
CRC	- Citizens Security Cards
DI	- Differentiated Identities (Coding Category)
DISP	- Displaced/Stateless (Coding Category)
DPDT	- Department of Patents, Designs & Trademarks
FDMN	- Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
GT/IV	- Genocidal Threats/Incitement to Violence (Coding Category)
HRW	- Human Rights Watch
ICJ	- International Court of Justice
IOM	- International Organization for Migration
ISCG	- Inter Sector Coordination Group
MOFA	- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	- National Registration Cards
OCHA	- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RC	- Racist Content (Coding Category)
RI	- Religious Intolerance (Coding Category)

RRRC	- Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
RTA	- Reflexive Thematic Analysis
RYA	- Rohingya Youth Association
SEC	- Security Threats (Coding Category)
SIT	- Social Influence Theory
SPDC	- State Peace and Development Council (Myanmar)
SS/HA	- Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy (Coding Category)
TA	- Thematic Analysis
UN	- United Nations
UNHCR	- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	- United Nations Human Rights Council
VIC	- Victims (Coding Category)
VUL	- Vulnerable (Coding Category)
Xen	- Xenophobic/Anti-Immigrant Sentiment (Coding Category)

ABSTRACT

More than a million Rohingya refugees are currently living in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, making the Rohingya crisis one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies of the twenty-first century (UNHCR, 2025). For decades, the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group from Rakhine State in Myanmar, have faced systematic persecution, statelessness, and the denial of their citizenship rights. The situation escalated in August 2017 when military actions forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee across the border into Bangladesh, resulting in a mass migration (UNHCR, 2021).

Driven by humanitarian sympathy and religious solidarity, the host communities in Bangladesh initially welcomed the Rohingya with exceptional hospitality. However, as the crisis continued without any prospects for repatriation, public perceptions began to change. Empathy and solidarity were increasingly replaced by resentment, xenophobia, and a securitized view of refugees as threats and burdens. Conflicting narratives about Rohingya identity are constantly produced, shared, and discussed in the media, particularly on social media platforms, where the shift in public opinion is clearly evident.

These changing attitudes do not just happen; media portrayal plays a crucial role in shaping the public's understanding of refugee communities. It has a significant impact on how host societies and policymakers see, discuss, and treat displaced populations. In today's digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for shaping refugee identities and influencing public opinion. However, there is still a significant lack of thorough examination regarding how these online platforms represent displaced individuals. This study aims to investigate the public perceptions of the Rohingya people and how they are portrayed on social media.

This qualitative study explores the representation of Rohingya refugees on social media platforms in Bangladesh between August 2017 and May 2023. It examines how various stakeholders perceive this stateless community and investigates how these portrayals shape public perceptions and influence policy responses.

This study uses Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) to analyze the content and themes of 348 social media posts and

over 33,000 user comments. The data was collected from a variety of sources, including mainstream media outlets such as Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV, humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR Bangladesh, government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Rohingya-led platforms, including the Rohingya Youth Association and activist Mr. Aman Ullah.

To identify the peak times for public conversation, data collection focused on seven significant events throughout the crisis. Additionally, to connect digital findings with real-life perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of both online narratives and lived experiences, twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists, local community members, and Rohingya refugees.

The analysis reveals significant variations in representation between platforms and stakeholder groups. Rohingyas were mostly shown in mainstream media as victims of persecution, highlighting their fragility, humanitarian distress, and need for foreign aid. In contrast, government platforms such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increasingly framed the community as an economic burden and a security concern, reflecting Bangladesh's diplomatic stance on temporary protection and repatriation priorities. However, Rohingya-led platforms, such as the Rohingya Youth Association, actively resisted externally imposed victim identities, instead constructing counter-narratives that highlighted agency, resilience, cultural preservation, educational achievement, and community leadership.

Alongside these differing institutional representations, public discourse experienced a significant transformation. Thematic analysis of user comments uncovered a concerning shift in public discourse over time. Initially, following the 2017 exodus, there were expressions of religious solidarity and humanitarian sympathy. However, in the years that followed, the conversation increasingly adopted a xenophobic, burden-focused, and security-oriented framing. This change was especially evident during contentious policy moments, such as the Bhasan Char relocation initiative.

The study found a clear gap between online humanitarian narratives and local communities' perceptions. Most interviewed members of host communities expressed deep concerns about economic strain, environmental degradation, and the ongoing issue of prolonged displacement, despite the prevalence of extensive online compassion campaigns.

Terms like "Rohingya," "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals), "refugee," and "citizens of Rakhine" have been used strategically by various actors to promote conflicting political agendas related to rights, belonging, and policy legitimacy. This has made identity construction a highly contested area. Rather than providing neutral descriptions, the deliberate choice of identity labels by different stakeholders reflects institutional goals and underlying power dynamics. Particularly, counter-narratives from Rohingya-led platforms demonstrate that refugees can effectively challenge negative portrayals and engage audiences by emphasizing their dignity, agency, and self-determination when they control their own representation.

This research contributes to refugee studies, digital discourse analysis, and humanitarian communication by demonstrating that social media representations actively construct, rather than neutrally reflect, refugee identities. These constructed meanings serve specific institutional agendas and carry profound implications for integration outcomes, host-refugee relations, humanitarian communication strategies, and policy development in contemporary displacement crises. The findings highlight the urgent need for more inclusive representational practices that amplify refugee voices and address the structural conditions underlying both digital hostility and material deprivation.

Keywords: Rohingya representation, social media discourse, qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, refugee crisis, digital identity construction, Bangladesh, humanitarian communication, counter-narratives.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study: The Rohingya Crisis and Social Media Representation

1.1.1 Brief Overview

The Rohingya crisis stands as one of the gravest humanitarian and political failures of the modern era, serving as a critical case study of statelessness, forced migration, and systematic human rights violations (Faisal, 2020; Islam & Khatun, 2024). This crisis centers on the persecution and displacement of the Rohingya people, a distinct ethnic minority, predominantly Muslim, who have lived in Myanmar's Rakhine State for centuries (Islam & Khatun, 2024). The crisis is characterized by decades of systemic oppression, statelessness, and forced displacement, resulting in profound humanitarian and socio-political challenges for both the Rohingya people and host countries alike (Faisal, 2020; Sohel, 2017).

The Rohingya population has faced continuous human rights violations under Myanmar's military rule since 1962. The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has exercised extensive control over all aspects of life, including religious freedom and practices, systematically persecuting the Rohingya and other religious minorities (Mehar et al., 2019). This systematic oppression has been further exacerbated by rising Buddhist nationalism and deliberate propaganda campaigns that portray Rohingyas as "illegal Bengalis," "terrorists," or "illegal economic migrants" from colonial times (Tareque, 2021; Khatun, 2024). Such negative propaganda and public manipulation have enabled Myanmar's military government to operate its persecution while gaining the majority of the Burmese support for brutal attacks against the Rohingya community.

The severity of this persecution is internationally recognized, with the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018) outlining the situation as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." The 1982 Myanmar Citizenship Act formally excluded the Rohingya from citizenship, denying them this fundamental right for over six generations and rendering them one of the world's largest stateless populations (Ullah, 2011; Parnini et al., 2013; Prodip, 2017; Shohel, 2022; Rahman, 2022).

This persecution has resulted in successive waves of displacement, with the most significant exodus occurring in August 2017 when violence in Rakhine State drove over 742,000 people to seek refuge in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2021; Kipgen, 2013; Bhuiyan, 2021). Currently, over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees are living in thirty-four camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district under cramped conditions with compromised basic human rights (Islam et al., 2021). Significant populations also reside in Malaysia (168,400), India (93,100), and Thailand (84,000) (UNHCR, 2024).

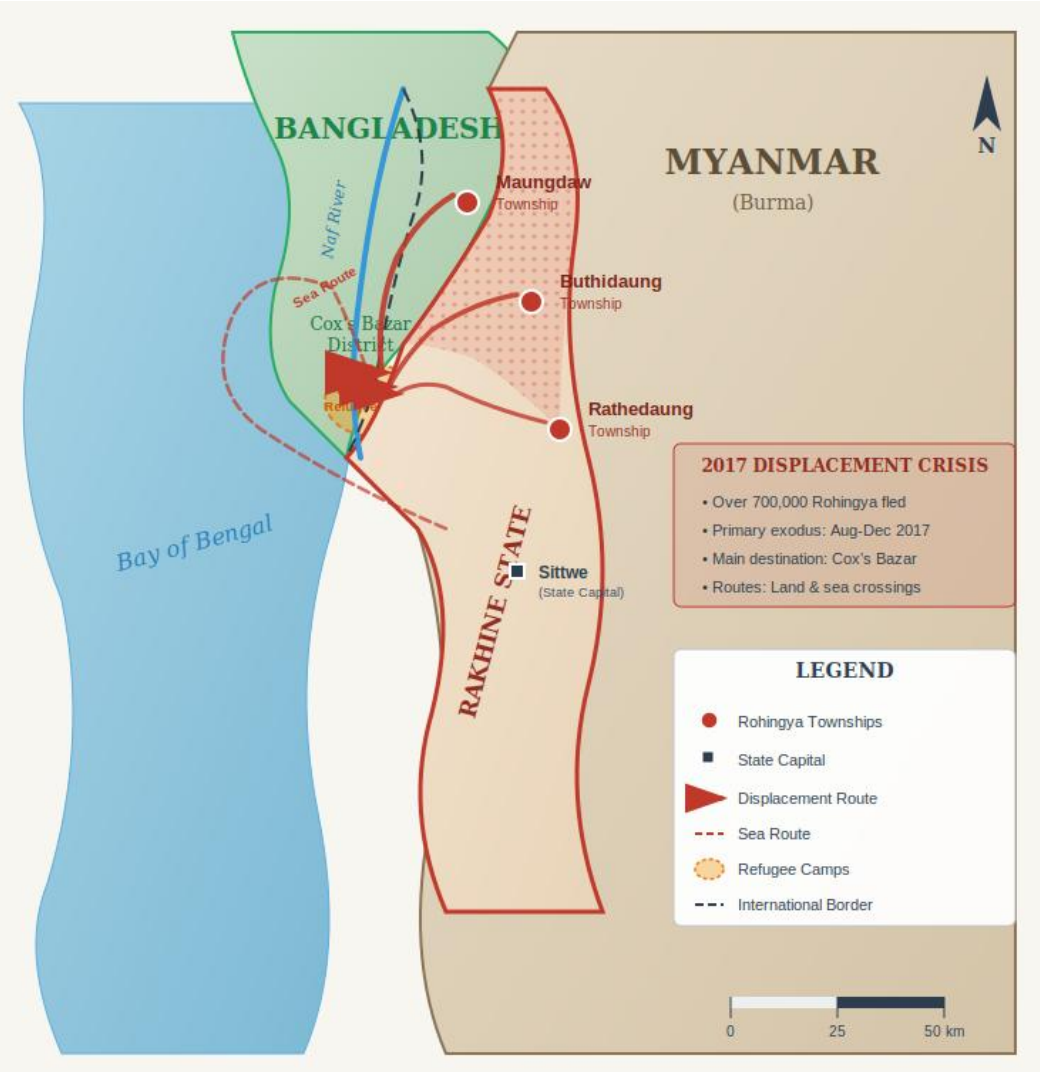


Figure 1.1: Map of Rakhine State, Myanmar, and Rohingya Displacement Routes (2017).
Source: Based on UNHCR and OCHA displacement data. Geographic boundaries are illustrative.

The role of media representation has been crucial in shaping public perception of the Rohingya crisis. While mainstream and social media have contributed to negative propaganda and misconceptions about Rohingya identity, ethnicity, and alleged involvement in illegal

activities, they have also played a role in documenting human rights violations (Brooten, Ashraf, & Akinro, 2015). In Bangladesh, media portrayals often characterize Rohingyas as "a burden," "consumers of humanitarian aid," and "problem creators", and are involved in criminal activities (Noor, Islam, & Forid, 2011), highlighting the complex challenges of representation and public perception in host countries.

This crisis occurs within a broader global refugee emergency context, where UNHCR reports refugee numbers are four times higher than a decade ago, making the Rohingya situation one of the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges (Myat, 2018). Contemporary forced migration studies emphasize how global processes of displacement interconnect with local contexts, creating complex humanitarian emergencies that require a multifaceted understanding (Crépeau et al., 2006). The entrenched nature of persecution and the absence of meaningful protection or solutions continue to worsen the situation.

1.1.2 Research Importance

Understanding how social media represents the Rohingya is crucial for several interconnected reasons. Digital platforms have become primary battlegrounds where refugee identities are constructed, contested, and solidified through competing narratives. Research on Syrian refugee discourse demonstrates how Facebook serves as a site where three distinct identity frameworks emerge: refugees as security threats, as vulnerable civilians deserving protection, and as conditional subjects worthy of assistance only under specific circumstances (Author, Year). This pattern of identity contestation directly influences public attitudes and policy responses in host countries, as social media sentiment both reflects and shapes broader opinion formation processes (Tessmer, 2019). Second, with over 100 million forcibly displaced people globally, the mechanisms through which refugee representation shapes host community acceptance or rejection have significant implications for integration outcomes and social cohesion (UNHCR, 2023). Third, the Rohingya case represents a critical test of how marginalized communities can resist dominant narratives through counter-hegemonic discourse in digital spaces, providing insights applicable to other displaced populations worldwide. Finally, systematic analysis of multi-stakeholder perspectives in social media discourse remains underdeveloped in refugee studies, making this research methodologically significant for advancing digital discourse analysis in humanitarian contexts.

1.1.3 Who Are the Rohingya? Etymology and Identity

The Rohingya are an Indo-Aryan ethnic group, part of a pastoralist people who migrated from Central Asia to South Asia in the 2nd century B.C. (International Christian Concern, 2021). Contrary to common misconceptions, the Rohingya community is quite diverse. While the vast majority follow a blend of Sunni Islam and Sufism, a small percentage practices Hinduism, and an even smaller part follows Christianity. The creation of a homogeneous image of this community blurs the existing diversity of the ethnic group, not only among Rohingya Muslims but also among other communities, Hindus and Christians, who do not speak the same language or have the same physical appearance (Nursyazwani & Freeman, 2020).

The Rohingya are not ethnically homogeneous due to their diversity in race, ethnicity, and cultural attributes. Due to the influence of Sufis and merchants, other ethnic groups, such as the Mughals, Turks, Persians, Central Asians, Pathans, and Bengalis, entered the Rohingya area and intermarried with the Rohingya over time (Habibullah, 1995).

Etymology and Historical Identity

The term "Rohingya" has multiple proposed etymologies that reflect the complex historical and cultural layers of this community's identity. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, President of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, argues that the term derives from "Rohai" or "Roshangee," which were later modified to "Rohingya," denoting Muslim people inhabiting ancient Arakan (Yunus, 1994). Dr. Aye Chan suggests that the term denotes the distinguishing ethnic and religious identity of Muslims in Rakhine State, with the name gaining prominence in the 1950s and becoming part of public debate since then (Chan, 2005).

Historical evidence indicates that the term was pronounced "Rwangya" and may derive from "Rakhanga" or "Roshanga," with documentation suggesting that it predates the British colonial occupation of Arakan. Notably, in 1799, historian Francis Buchanan Hamilton noted that the name was popular in Royal Burma (Hussain, 2018). Other scholars propose that "Rohingya" evolved from "Mrohang," the former capital of Arakan. At the same time, the Chittagonian dialect pronunciation of "Rakhine" as "Rohong" or "Rohang" led to the inhabitants being referred to as "Rohingya" (Razzaq & Haque, 1995).

Contemporary Identity and Characteristics

The Rohingya constitute an ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious minority group primarily concentrated in the Northwestern Arakan State of Myanmar, officially renamed Rakhine State in 1989. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2008), approximately 800,000 Rohingya Muslims inhabit this region, where they exist as a minority within a predominantly Buddhist population (Qazi, 2024).

Their South Asian descent distinguishes the Rohingya and maintains strong linguistic and religious connections with the Chittagonian Bengali communities of Bangladesh. As devout Sunni Muslims, they represent a stark religious and cultural contrast to Myanmar's Buddhist majority population, who are predominantly of East Asian descent. This ethnic and religious differentiation has become a central factor in their marginalization, with many ethnic groups in Rakhine State and the Myanmar government characterizing the Rohingya as "illegal Bengali migrants" rather than legitimate inhabitants of their ancestral lands (Qazi, 2024).

Within Myanmar's ethnoreligious politics, Rakhine Buddhists maintain that the Rohingya are Bengali-speaking immigrants who should return to Bangladesh. However, politically active segments of the Rohingya community seek recognition of their distinct ethnic identity and assert themselves as an indigenous community with historical ties to the region. Some Rohingya political movements have escalated these demands to include calls for regional autonomy or secession from Myanmar through the creation of an independent Rohingya state (Gosh, 2016, pp. 119-121).

1.1.4 Historical and Political Context

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Foundations

The origin of the Rohingya crisis can be traced back to Myanmar's complex colonial and post-colonial history in Rakhine State. Historical evidence suggests that the Rohingya people have been inhabitants of the Arakan region since the 8th century, with Islam reaching Arakan before 788 A.D. (Ahmed & Niloy, 2022; Sohel, 2017). During the Maruk-U (Mrohaung) kingdom period between the 15th and 18th centuries, the Rohingya were recognized as part of the independent Arakan kingdom. Muslim traders had established themselves in the region by the 8th century, and the relationship between the Arakan kingdom and neighboring Bengal became particularly close when King Narmeikhla sought Bengali military assistance against

Burmese invasions in the 1400s, thereby increasing Muslim influence at the court (Human Rights Watch, 2000).

The colonial experience fundamentally altered Myanmar's social fabric and created lasting inter-communal tensions. British colonial policies generated significant Buddhist anxiety about the preservation of religious traditions and cultural identity, with Burmese Buddhists interpreting political and social changes between 1890 and 1920 as signs that the Buddha's *sāsana* (teachings) was deteriorating (Turner, 2017). This fear of religious decline drove organized efforts to preserve Buddhist teachings, but more significantly, it established religious preservation as a framework for resisting colonial authority and defining communal boundaries. Administrative decisions that favored non-Burmese populations in government and commerce created resentment among the Buddhist majority toward minority communities, particularly targeting the Indian minority population through deliberate divide-and-rule policies (Leong, 2022). The British created a volatile environment where nationalism took on a racialized tone, with Bamar nationalists, unable to attack the British directly, constructing a national identity centered around their ethnicity and religion to exclude both colonial rulers and their perceived co-colonialist allies (Leong, 2022). This colonial-era foundation of exclusionary nationalism resulted in inter-ethnic violence that has continued since independence, creating what has been described as "the world's longest civil war" and establishing lasting patterns of discrimination that persist in contemporary Myanmar. These colonial-era grievances became foundational to later ethnic and religious conflicts, with wartime experiences during World War II further deepening divisions as different communities aligned with opposing forces.

Early Recognition and Integration (1948-1962)

The trajectory of Rohingya persecution represents a dramatic reversal from their initial recognition in independent Myanmar. The first Prime Minister of independent Burma, U Nu (1948-1958), recognized the Rohingya as a distinct race of the nation, stating that "the people living in Maungdaw and Buthidaung regions are our nationals, our brethren. They are called Rohingyas. They are one of the same statuses of nationality with Kachin, Kyah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, and they are one of the ethnic races of Burma" (Haque, 2017).

During this period, the Rohingya were represented in Parliament and government institutions, a radio station broadcast programs in the Rohingya dialect, and the 1961 census indicated that the Mayu district was 75 percent Rohingya (Bari, 2018). This early recognition demonstrates that Rohingya exclusion was not inevitable but rather the result of specific political decisions and policy changes.

The initial post-independence constitutional framework attempted to balance ethnic diversity with national unity. General Aung San's Panglong Agreement of 1947 envisioned federal arrangements that would provide ethnic minorities with autonomy while maintaining national cohesion. However, his assassination prevented the realization of this inclusive vision, and subsequent citizenship legislation created legal frameworks that would later facilitate systematic exclusion. The 1947 Constitution and 1948 Citizenship Act established citizenship criteria based on residence and ethnic recognition that many Rohingya could, in theory, meet, but implementation gaps and documentation requirements created practical barriers (Hung, 2021; Yegar, 1972).

1.1.5 The Military Coup and Systematic Discrimination (1962-1982)

The situation dramatically deteriorated following the military coup of 1962, when the Burma Socialist Programme Party began systematically dismantling Rohingya social and political institutions. The military junta closed Rohingya social and cultural organizations, ended Rohingya language broadcasts, and seized many private Rohingya businesses. This period marked the beginning of "Burmanization," a process designed to impose Burman Buddhist identity as the national norm while marginalizing ethnic and religious minorities (Bari, 2018).

The post-1962 military government implemented a comprehensive strategy of ethnic assimilation that particularly targeted Muslim minorities. This involved not only institutional changes but also the systematic revocation of previously held documentation. Citizens who possessed valid National Registration Cards had their documents confiscated, forcing them into bureaucratic processes designed to be impossible to complete. The deliberate creation of documentation gaps provided legal justification for later characterizing these populations as foreign immigrants rather than legitimate citizens (Smith, 1991; Lewin, 2012).

1.1.6 The 1982 Citizenship Law: Legal Exclusion

The most significant legal instrument of Rohingya exclusion came with the promulgation of the 1982 Citizenship Law, which effectively rendered the Rohingya stateless by excluding them from Myanmar's recognized ethnic groups, despite their centuries-long presence in the region. This discriminatory citizenship framework has become so systematically exclusionary that contemporary legal scholars argue Myanmar's application of its citizenship laws constitutes the crime of apartheid, with these discriminatory processes being central to ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya (Lee, 2019). The law's exclusionary impact extends beyond historical marginalization, as Myanmar's government continues to insist upon Rohingya participation in these discriminatory citizenship processes as a precondition for refugee repatriation, demonstrating how the 1982 law remains an active instrument of persecution rather than a mere historical artifact (Lee, 2019). This legal architecture transformed a historical population into a stateless community through bureaucratic mechanisms, creating virtually insurmountable barriers to naturalized citizenship, requiring documentary evidence that had been systematically confiscated or destroyed (Lewa, 2009).

1.1.7 Cycles of Violence and Displacement

The legal framework enabled systematic cycles of violence corresponding to political changes. Operation Nagamin (Dragon King) in 1978 forced approximately 220,000 Muslim refugees to flee to Bangladesh over three months, ostensibly to verify "nationality" but actually targeting Rohingya through inflammatory media characterizations of "armed bands of Bengals," "wild Muslim extremists," and "rampaging Bengali mobs" (Grundy-Warr & Wong, 1997, as cited in D'Silva, 2021).

Subsequent military operations followed similar patterns of legal justification masking ethnic targeting. The early 1990s Operation Pyi Thaya employed land documentation requirements to facilitate displacement, while the introduction of restrictive identity documents in 1993 created comprehensive systems of movement control and social segregation. These measures extended beyond documentation to encompass marriage regulations, reproductive restrictions, and economic limitations, collectively constituting a system of comprehensive social control (International Crisis Group, 2014; Wade, 2019).

The 2012 communal violence marked a significant escalation, resulting in over 200 deaths and displacing approximately 150,000 people, predominantly Rohingya. This violence coincided with democratic transition processes that paradoxically intensified rather than reduced persecution. The 2014 national census explicitly excluded Rohingya identity, while legislative measures targeting religious minorities created additional legal frameworks for discrimination. These developments culminated in the 2017 military operations that displaced over 700,000 people, representing the logical endpoint of decades of systematic marginalization (Shamsuddoha, 2019; Kironska, 2021).

1.2 The 2017 Crisis and Global Response

The Rohingya humanitarian crisis reached its most devastating point on August 25, 2017, when violent confrontations erupted between Rohingya insurgents and Myanmar security forces in northern Rakhine State. This triggering event unleashed an unprecedented wave of systematic violence that international observers would characterize as among the most severe human rights violations of the 21st century.

The Myanmar security forces' response was swift and brutal, involving mass violence, extrajudicial killings, and systematic rape campaigns targeting Rohingya civilians. The 2017 violence, characterized by mass executions, widespread sexual assault, and systematic brutality, saw over 700,000 Rohingya flee to Bangladesh (Shohel, 2023). Entire Rohingya villages were systematically burned to the ground, creating scenes of devastation that shocked the international community.

The scale and organized nature of these atrocities led the United Nations to formally describe the military's actions as "ethnic cleansing" and "crimes against humanity." The United Nations Human Rights Council (2018) described the situation as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," while the UN characterized the Rohingya as the most persecuted and one of the largest stateless populations globally.

This systematic persecution created one of the world's most severe displacement crises, with the UNHCR recording 671,000 Rohingya among the 68.8 million forcibly displaced persons globally in 2017 alone. The immediate result was a massive exodus, with over 688,000 Rohingya fleeing across the border to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in what became one of the largest and fastest refugee movements in recent history (Myat, 2018).

1.3 Current Displacement Situation and International Response

1.3.1 Cox's Bazar Refugee Camps

Bangladesh currently hosts more than 1.3 million Rohingya refugees in 34 temporary camps in Cox's Bazar district, living in overcrowded conditions with compromised basic human rights (Uddin, 2024). Most are settled in and around the Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps, located about 100 km south of Chittagong along the Bay of Bengal, making them among the world's largest refugee settlements (Britannica, 2017; Bashar, 2022).

Living conditions are dire: camps are at or beyond capacity, with only 10.7 square meters of usable area per person (Banerjee, 2020). "Mental health is poor, proper hygiene conditions are lacking, malnutrition is endemic, and physical/sexual abuse is high" (Milton et al., 2017). Poor planning of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities has contaminated drinking water sources and agricultural land, creating significant health risks. At the same time, rapid camp expansion has caused environmental degradation in Cox's Bazar, one of Bangladesh's most vulnerable and impoverished regions (Banerjee, 2020).

This crisis represents centuries of systematic persecution culminating in Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law that rendered 800,000 Rohingyas stateless, creating "one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world" spanning over twenty years (Milton et al., 2017).

Despite extensive media coverage, these representations fail to capture refugees' actual lived experiences and perspectives. What remains missing from media narratives is what the Rohingya people themselves want: dignified repatriation with citizenship rights, UN peacekeeping protection, and complete human rights restoration. Instead, the media focuses on policy debates while ignoring that "what the Rohingya people articulate their aspiration in the name of resettlement is completely missing in the entire planning and action to redress the Rohingya crisis" (Uddin, 2024).

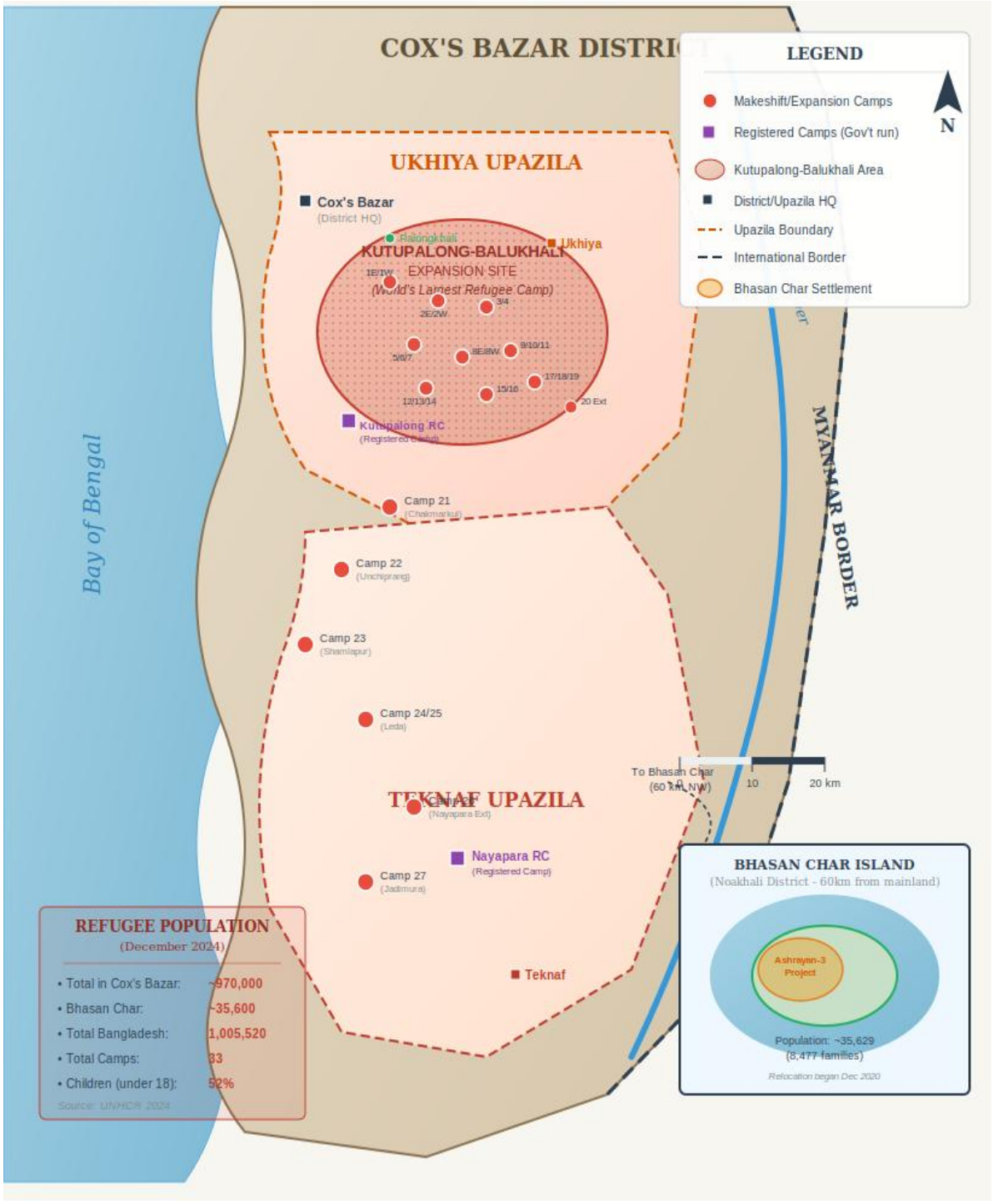


Figure 1.2: Map of Cox's Bazar District and Rohingya Refugee Camps. The map shows the 33 camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas, including Kutupalong-Balukhali (the world's largest refugee camp), Nayapara, and the Bhasan Char relocation site. Source: Based on UNHCR Bangladesh, IOM NPM, and ISCG data.

1.3.2 Bhasan Char Relocation

The Bangladesh government in December 2020 officially started the relocation of hundreds of Rohingya refugees from Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char, a low-lying, remote, and cyclone-prone island located in the Bay of Bengal (Nguyen & Lewis, 2022). The island, with an area of 36 square kilometers and formed nearly three decades ago, is two hours by boat from mainland Bangladesh and is vulnerable to cyclones and floods due to heavy ocean waves (Hossain, 2020a, 2020b; The Guardian, 2020; Kawser, 2021).

By 2021, the government had moved nearly 20,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, with plans to relocate 81,000 more by 2022 to fulfill a quota of 100,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Nguyen & Lewis, 2022).

1.3.3 Regional Displacement Pattern

Beyond Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees have sought refuge in other neighboring countries, including Malaysia (168,400), India (93,100), Thailand (84,000), and other countries across the region (UNHCR, 2024). Before the 2017 influx, Bangladesh was already hosting between 300,000 and 500,000 mostly undocumented Rohingya refugees who had fled previous waves of persecution in Myanmar (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

1.3.4 International Response

The response of the international community to the Rohingya crisis has been multifaceted, involving diplomatic pressure, humanitarian assistance, and legal proceedings. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) case initiated by The Gambia in 2019 accused Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya people, representing a significant step toward accountability (International Court of Justice, 2020). The relief effort has mobilized 172 humanitarian agencies across ten operational sectors, including food distribution, healthcare, education, and housing (Chowdhury et al., 2022).

Lewis (2021) notes that the humanitarian response involved diverse forms of citizen aid and everyday humanitarianism, with local Bangladeshi communities demonstrating remarkable generosity through spontaneous person-to-person helping alongside formal organizational responses. However, despite international pressure and humanitarian interventions, the situation remains largely unresolved, with attempts at voluntary repatriation unsuccessful due

to unsafe conditions in Myanmar and a lack of citizenship guarantees for returning Rohingya (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

1.4 The Role of Media and Digital Representation

1.4.1 Media's Role in Shaping Perceptions

Media representation has played a crucial role in shaping global public perception and policy responses to the Rohingya crisis. The mainstream and social media have played a considerable role in shaping perceptions of the Rohingya issue, their identity, ancestors, and role in Myanmar, often contributing to their marginalization through negative portrayals (Brooten, Ashraf, & Akinro, 2015). Due to negative propaganda and circulation through various media channels, the Rohingya people have been victims of torture, persecution, and human rights violations, demonstrating the real-world consequences of media representation.

In Myanmar, state media and social media platforms have consistently misrepresented the Rohingya, often framing them as animals, terrorists, or Bengali invaders (Reuters, 2018). The Military started the mass propaganda campaign against the Rohingya by state-run media depicting the Rohingya as 'Islamicists' and 'Bengali invaders', which helped to make anti-Rohingya public opinion in the country. Additionally, influential Buddhist monks and high officials from the army were engaged in spreading hateful, exclusionary images and commentaries on social media representing Islam as a threat to Buddhism, 'traditional values', and national security (Kironska & Peng, 2021).

1.4.2 Negative Portrayals in Host Countries

In Bangladesh, despite being a host country providing refuge, the media frequently portrays Rohingya people in derogatory terms such as 'a burden', 'eaters of humanitarian aid', and 'problem creators' (Noor, Islam, & Forid, 2011). The deeper concerns about debates regarding their identity, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, politics, culture, and alleged involvement in drug peddling and terrorism have been broadly represented differently by mainstream and social media platforms, often perpetuating negative stereotypes and misconceptions.

Bangladesh currently hosts more than 1.3 million Rohingya refugees in 34 temporary camps in Cox's Bazar district, living in overcrowded conditions with compromised fundamental human rights (Uddin, 2024).

Despite extensive media coverage, these representations fail to capture the refugees' actual lived experiences and perspectives. What remains missing from media narratives is what the Rohingya people themselves want: dignified repatriation with citizenship rights, UN peacekeeping protection, and complete human rights restoration. Instead, the media focuses on policy debates while ignoring that "what the Rohingya people articulate their aspiration in the name of resettlement is completely missing in the entire planning and action to redress the Rohingya crisis" (Uddin, 2024).

1.5 Research Gap and Study Rationale

Despite extensive documentation of the Rohingya crisis in political science and international relations literature, significant gaps exist in understanding its digital representation. Limited research has examined how multiple stakeholder perspectives interact within social media environments, particularly during peak periods of crisis coverage. Previous studies have analyzed traditional media framing or isolated social media content, but a comprehensive analysis that incorporates refugee self-representation, host community responses, and institutional narratives is absent. Additionally, the social-psychological dimensions of attitude formation through digital discourse have received insufficient attention, as has systematic comparison across different platform contexts managed by diverse organizational actors.

Research reveals significant gaps between how Rohingyas are portrayed in the media and their actual expectations and experiences. The Rohingya are among the most persecuted communities worldwide, with immense humanitarian suffering and substantial uncertainty about returning to everyday life. This reality has attracted global and national media attention, with social media actively reflecting the crisis’s manifold dimensions since it began. However, limited research has critically analyzed how the Rohingya people are represented or portrayed on social media platforms.

Studies demonstrate fundamental disconnects between media representation and refugee realities. Almost every single Rohingya wants to return to Myanmar once it is safe and they have houses and rights, yet there is little media attention about this repatriation process (Islam & Haque, 2024). Mainstream media often depict Rohingyas as stateless, hopeless, sorrowful, desperate, and aggressive, while interviews with Rohingya families reveal they are optimistic

and have strong hope for their future (Ma et al., 2018). This representational gap carries significant implications for public understanding and policy responses.

A significant knowledge gap exists regarding social media's role in disseminating information about Rohingya issues, constructing their images, and producing meaning from their realities. Research on social media and Rohingya issues remains considerably limited in number, with existing studies touching only the surface of the community's problems. Deeper concerns about debates over their ethnicity, identity, citizenship, religion, politics, culture, and alleged involvement in unlawful activities have been largely overlooked, resulting in incomplete portrayals of the community (Brooten, Ashraf, & Akinro, 2015).

Current research limitations include inadequate analysis of public discourse dynamics within social media comment sections; a lack of comparative examination of narratives across platforms managed by different organizational types; the absence of Rohingya perspectives in academic inquiry into their media portrayal; and insufficient attention to local community and media professional viewpoints. These gaps limit understanding of how digital discourse influences public perceptions, policy responses, and the experiences of refugee communities in host countries.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring how social media portrays the Rohingya people and how their expectations are represented in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Using appropriate methodological tools, the research seeks to understand how the Rohingya community is represented on digital platforms across multiple stakeholder perspectives, particularly examining the intersection of social media, humanitarian crises, and minority representation. The study aims to address the limitations of prior research and expand knowledge in this area by providing the first comprehensive triangulated analysis of Rohingya representation across stakeholder perspectives on social media in Bangladesh.

Understanding how social media represents the Rohingya is crucial because authentic portrayal of a community through media outlets helps produce reliable knowledge that shapes audience perceptions and facilitates decision-making (Nursyazwani & Freeman, 2020). The government and people of Bangladesh, along with global communities, are actively involved in resolving the Rohingya crisis. This research will contribute to perceptions that inform policy formulation, advocacy planning for humanitarian assistance, and political decisions aimed at addressing the Rohingya's prolonged uncertainties.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design that combines content and thematic analyses to examine Rohingya representation on social media in Bangladesh. Data was systematically collected from five Facebook pages and three YouTube channels representing mainstream media, humanitarian organizations, government bodies, and Rohingya activist groups, spanning seven critical events from 2017 to 2023. The analysis included 309 Facebook posts, 39 YouTube videos, and over 46,703 user comments and reactions, providing comprehensive coverage of peak discourse periods.

To complement the social media analysis, I conducted 22 in-depth interviews with local community members from Ukhiya, Rohingya refugees, activists, and journalists covering the crisis. This dual approach captures both institutional narratives and grassroots perspectives, enabling a holistic understanding of how the Rohingya crisis is framed and discussed across digital platforms, while incorporating multiple stakeholder voices that are often absent from existing research.

1.7 Problem Statement

This study addresses critical gaps in understanding how the Rohingya are represented in Bangladesh's social media discourse, who controls these representations, and the consequences of different narrative constructions. The central problem is the absence of a systematic analysis of how power dynamics, stakeholder positioning, and platform affordances shape digital representations of stateless populations.

Current research limitations include: inadequate analysis of public discourse dynamics within social media comment sections; the absence of a comparative examination of narratives across platforms managed by different organizational types; the absence of Rohingya perspectives in academic inquiry into their media portrayal; and insufficient attention to local community and media professional viewpoints. These gaps limit understanding of how digital discourse influences public perceptions, policy responses, and the experiences of refugee communities in host countries.

1.8 Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How are Rohingya refugees portrayed on social media in Bangladesh, and what are the public perceptions toward them?

Sub-Questions:

1. How do mainstream media outlets, host government accounts, humanitarian organizations, and Rohingya-led pages differ in their portrayals of Rohingya refugees on social media in Bangladesh?
2. How do different stakeholders identify Rohingyas on social media, and what political or social meanings do these identity labels carry?
3. What are the dominant patterns in public responses to social media content about the Rohingyas in Bangladesh?
4. How do host community members, journalists, and Rohingyas perceive Rohingya refugees and their representation on social media in Bangladesh?
5. How have social media portrayals of Rohingya refugees and public responses toward them evolved in Bangladesh from 2017 to 2023?

1.9 Primary Objective

To examine the portrayal of Rohingya refugees on social media in Bangladesh and to understand public perceptions toward them.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine how mainstream media, the host government, humanitarian organisations, and Rohingya-led pages portray Rohingya refugees on social media in Bangladesh
2. To investigate the use of identity labels by different stakeholders and analyse their political and social implications.
3. To analyse the dominant patterns in public responses and user engagement with social media content about the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

4. To explore the perceptions of host community members, journalists, and Rohingyas regarding Rohingya refugees and their social media representation.
5. To track the temporal evolution of social media portrayals of Rohingya refugees and public responses toward them from 2017 to 2023.

1.10 Scope and Delimitations

Temporal Scope

The study analyzes social media content from August 2017 to May 2023, focusing on seven critical events representing peak periods of public attention. Data collection employed 15-day windows (7 days before and after each event) to capture discourse dynamics during heightened interest periods.

Table 1.1: Crisis Events and Analysis Periods for Rohingya-Related Social Media posts

Crisis Event	Analysis Period	Duration
Rohingya Exodus	Aug 25 - Sept 8, 2017	15 days
2nd Anniversary	Aug 18 - Sept 1, 2019	15 days
ICJ Case Filing	Nov 4 - Nov 18, 2019	15 days
Bhasan Char Relocation	Nov 27 - Dec 11, 2020	15 days
Cox's Bazar Fire	Mar 15 - Mar 29, 2021	15 days
Leader Mohibullah's Death	Sept 22 - Oct 6, 2021	15 days
Repatriation Discussions	Apr 28 - May 12, 2023	15 days

Platform and Geographic Scope

The study focuses on Facebook and YouTube as primary platforms, selected for their dominance in Bangladesh's digital landscape and their capacity to support diverse content formats. The geographic scope centers on Bangladesh as the primary host country, with particular attention to Cox's Bazar District, where most refugees reside.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Analysis incorporates five distinct stakeholder groups: Bangladeshi government entities, Rohingya community members and activists, international humanitarian organizations, mainstream media outlets, and local Bangladeshi communities in affected areas.

Analytical Boundaries

The study examines representational and discursive dimensions rather than measuring direct causal impacts on policy outcomes or refugee integration. Content analysis encompasses English, Bengali, and Burmese, with non-English materials translated for comparative analysis, while acknowledging potential limitations in cultural nuance.

1.11 Operational Definitions

Representation: The practice of using language, images, and symbols to construct meaning about people, events, or issues within specific cultural and social contexts, following Stuart Hall's theoretical framework.

Social Media Discourse: Collective conversations, interactions, and content creation occurring across digital platforms, encompassing both formal organizational communication and user-generated responses.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Distinct viewpoints held by different groups with varying relationships to the Rohingya crisis, including institutional actors, affected communities, and media professionals.

Peak Periods: Timeframes of heightened public attention to Rohingya-related issues, identified through significant crisis events or policy developments that generate increased social media activity.

Digital Narratives: Structured explanatory frameworks about the Rohingya crisis that emerge through social media content and interactions, shaping audience understanding and attitude formation.

1.12 Significance of the Study

Critical Research Importance: This research addresses a fundamental gap in understanding the intersection of power, representation, and digital discourse in contemporary refugee crises. As social media platforms increasingly serve as primary arenas for public opinion formation about displaced populations, the mechanisms through which refugee identities are constructed and contested have become central to integration outcomes, policy legitimacy, and social cohesion in host societies. The Rohingya case is among the most digitally

documented refugee crises in history, making it an ideal context for examining how different stakeholders deploy representational strategies to advance competing political projects.

1.12.1 Why This Topic Demands Academic Attention:

The urgency of this research stems from four critical considerations. First, theoretical necessity: existing refugee studies have inadequately theorized the role of digital platforms in identity construction, particularly how power dynamics shape whose voices are amplified or silenced in online discourse. Second, methodological innovation: this study's multi-stakeholder approach challenges traditional top-down analytical frameworks by incorporating refugee self-representation alongside institutional and community perspectives, advancing more inclusive research methodologies. Third, practical relevance: as refugee populations reach unprecedented levels globally, understanding how digital representations influence host community attitudes directly affects the success of integration programs, humanitarian responses, and policy interventions. Fourth, social justice implications: by centering marginalized voices and examining counter-narratives, this research contributes to more equitable discourse about displacement while challenging dominant frameworks that exclude refugee agency.

1.12.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study employs Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) to examine the construction of Rohingya identity on Bangladesh's social media. Hall's constructionist approach reveals how meaning is actively constructed through language and power relations, enabling analysis of how different stakeholders create competing narratives about Rohingya identity. Kelman's theory explains how these representations influence public attitudes through compliance, identification, and internalization processes. Together, these frameworks provide tools for understanding both how representations of the Rohingya are strategically constructed across digital platforms and how audiences process these meanings, ultimately shaping public discourse and policy responses. This research advances understanding across Media and Communication Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Refugee Studies by examining refugee representation through multiple stakeholder lenses in digital environments. Integration of Stuart Hall's representation theory with Kelman's social influence framework provides a comprehensive

analysis of the mechanisms of meaning construction and attitude formation regarding displaced populations.

1.12.3 Methodological Innovations

The study advances digital discourse analysis by incorporating refugee voices alongside institutional and community perspectives, challenging traditional top-down analytical approaches. The multi-stakeholder methodology demonstrates that comprehensive representation analysis requires examining discourse from diverse social positions and power relationships.

1.12.4 Practical Applications

Findings can inform humanitarian communication strategies, community dialogue initiatives addressing host-refugee tensions, media literacy programs promoting critical consumption of refugee-related content, and policy development considering public discourse dynamics. Understanding varied stakeholder perceptions can support more effective integration programs and advocacy efforts.

1.12.5 Social Impact

By centering multiple voices, including Rohingya self-representation, this research challenges dominant narratives that exclude refugee agency. Results contribute to more balanced, ethical discourse about displacement while supporting inclusive approaches to refugee-host community relations.

1.13 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter establishes the research context by examining the arrival of nearly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since 2017 as both a humanitarian emergency and a profound socio-digital phenomenon. The chapter outlines how digital platforms have become central arenas for constructing, contesting, and solidifying perceptions of the Rohingya. It presents the research problem, objectives, and significance. It introduces a theoretical framework that integrates Stuart Hall's representation theory with Herbert Kelman's social influence theory to examine how refugee identities are constructed in contemporary digital spaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Review: The chapter conducts a comprehensive review of existing literature on refugee representation, securitization theory, and digital media discourse analysis. It examines contemporary studies on burden-sharing, dependency narratives, and media framing of refugee populations, positioning this research within broader debates about refugee representation and digital discourse analysis. Recent applications of Hall's theory to refugee studies include Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's (2017) analysis of European refugee representation and Ma et al.'s (2018) study of Rohingya portrayals in Chinese media. The chapter identifies gaps in the current literature on the specific role of social media in shaping Rohingya identity and public perception in Bangladesh, thereby establishing the need for this study's integrated theoretical approach.

Chapter 3: A History of Rohingya Displacement, Rohingya Ethnicity, and Contested Identity in Myanmar and Bangladesh

The chapter examines the contested history and identity of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, tracing the etymology of "Rohingya" from terms like "Rohang" or "Roang" (referring to historic Arakan) and exploring competing narratives about their origins. While Rohingya historians and supporters argue they have inhabited Rakhine State for centuries, with roots tracing back to Arab traders in the 8th-9th centuries and a significant presence during the Mrauk-U Dynasty (15th-18th centuries), the Myanmar government and Buddhist majority contend they are illegal Bengali immigrants who arrived during British colonial rule after 1824. This dispute over indigenous status culminated in the 1982 Citizenship Law, which excluded Rohingyas from Myanmar's 135 recognized ethnic groups and classified them as "residential foreigners," stripping them of citizenship rights and subjecting them to severe restrictions on movement, marriage, and reproduction. The chapter documents how systematic discrimination, including the confiscation of identity documents, exclusion from the 2014 census, and repeated violent persecution by Buddhist radicals and security forces, forced successive waves of Rohingya displacement from 1978 to 2017, resulting in approximately 1.3 million Rohingyas currently living as stateless refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar camps.

Chapter 4: Thermotical Framework

Theoretical Foundation: This chapter establishes the theoretical framework by integrating two complementary theories. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) provides the analytical lens for understanding how meaning is constructed rather than reflected through language, signs, and images. Hall's constructionist approach demonstrates that representation operates through shared cultural codes and is deeply connected to power relations, determining "who gets to speak, who is silenced, and how identities are framed." The theory's four core concepts, language and power, shared cultural codes, constructionist meaning-making, and identity formation, are particularly relevant for analyzing how Rohingya identity is constructed across different digital platforms.

Social Influence Framework: Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) complements Hall's framework by explaining how audiences internalize constructed representations through three processes: compliance (surface-level acceptance due to social pressure), identification (adoption of views to maintain group relationships), and internalization (genuine belief integration into personal value systems). This theory is essential for understanding how social media representations translate into public attitudes and behaviors toward the Rohingya community.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach: This chapter outlines a primarily qualitative research design with quantitative elements used to examine digital representations of the Rohingya in Bangladesh. Following Brennen (2021), the study adopts a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth, interpretative understanding of social media discourse, complemented by quantitative analysis of user reactions and engagement metrics.

Data Sources and Sampling: The methodology employs a dual sampling strategy that focuses on social media content and human subjects. Data was collected from eight social media platforms: five Facebook pages (Prothom Alo with 19M followers, UNHCR Bangladesh with 4.6M followers, Aman Ullah with 13K followers, RYA with 18K followers, and MOFA with 54K followers) and three YouTube channels (Shomoy TV with 17M subscribers, UNHCR Bangladesh with 195K subscribers, and RRRC with 11K subscribers). The sampling frame covers seven critical events from 2017-2023, with 15-day windows around each event: Rohingya Exodus (Aug 2017), 2nd Anniversary (Aug 2019), ICJ Case

(Nov 2019), Bhashan Char Relocation (Dec 2020), Cox's Bazar Fire (Mar 2021), Muhibullah's Killing (Sep 2021), and Repatriation Process (May 2023).

Sample Size and Data Collection: A total of 348 social media posts were systematically collected (309 from Facebook and 39 from YouTube), yielding 46,703 comments; the analysis focused on 33,918 primary comments. Human subjects comprised 22 participants recruited through purposive and Snowball sampling: 10 local community members from Ukhiya, 10 Rohingya individuals, and two journalists. Data collection involved 15 days of fieldwork in Kutupalong refugee camps with official RRRC permission.

Analytical Methods: The study employed a combination of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Content analysis systematically examined patterns of manifest content, engagement metrics, and user reactions. In contrast, thematic analysis followed six phases: data familiarization, systematic code generation, theme development, theme review, definition refinement, and analysis integration. The researcher conducted manual coding, and two assistants used sentence-by-sentence analysis to capture both explicit and implicit meanings.

Coding Framework: Two comprehensive codebooks were developed for systematic analysis. For online content/posts, seven primary identity frames were identified: Victims (VIC) - portraying Rohingyas as sufferers of persecution; Vulnerable (VUL) - representing them as weak and aid-dependent; Security Threats (SEC) - identifying them as dangerous to Bangladesh; Burden/Dependents (BUR/DEP) - framing them as resource drains; Displaced/Stateless (DISP) - emphasizing refugee status; Active & Resilient (ACT/RES) - depicting agency and survival; and Differentiated Identities (DI) - examining politically loaded labels like "Rohingya" versus "FDMN" (Saldaña, 2021; Schreier, 2012).

For user comments, fourteen codes captured response patterns including Racist Content (RC), Xenophobic/Anti-Immigrant sentiment (Xen), Religious Intolerance (RI), Genocidal Threats/Incitement (GT/IV), Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy (SS/HA), and Counter-Narratives (CN) challenging hate speech (Banaji & Bhat, 2022; Aldamen, 2023; Rashid & Al-Zaman, 2023). Cross-cutting dimensions included tone (positive/negative/neutral), source platform, and target actors to deepen analytical understanding (Krippendorff, 2018; Mayring, 2014).

Ethical Considerations and Limitations: The chapter addresses ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity when working with vulnerable populations. Official authorization was obtained from RRRC for access to the camp. Limitations include potential sampling bias, subjective interpretation in manual coding, translation challenges across languages and cultures, and context-specific findings that may limit generalizability to other refugee populations.

Chapter 6: Rohingyas as Victims of Persecution and Vulnerable Populations

Chapter Six examines how Rohingyas are portrayed as victims of persecution and vulnerable populations across social media platforms in Bangladesh. Drawing on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory, the chapter analyzes 348 social media posts from six sources and interviews with 22 stakeholders to examine how different institutions construct Rohingya identity through Facebook and YouTube.

Key Findings

The analysis reveals significant variation in the representation of persecution across platforms. Mainstream media placed the greatest emphasis (Prothom Alo: 40.56%; Shomoy TV: 29.73%), whereas Rohingya-led organizations placed the least (RYA: 3.23%), reflecting deliberate resistance to victim framing and an assertion of agency. Regarding vulnerability representation, MOFA placed the highest emphasis (60%) on attracting international support, whereas Rohingya-led sources placed the lowest emphasis (Aman Ullah: 6.06%; RYA: 6.45%).

Critical Disconnect

The chapter reveals a critical gap between digital representations and local perceptions. While social media frames Rohingyas as victims deserving protection, 95% of local host community members now want Rohingyas to leave, citing economic strain, environmental degradation, and security concerns. Kelman's theory explains this disconnect: social media generates compliance-level sympathy but cannot override material grievances from direct experience.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that victimhood representation is strategically constructed according to institutional agendas rather than being a neutral reflection of reality. Adequate refugee protection requires addressing the structural factors that create competition between populations, rather than merely generating sympathy through victim narratives.

Chapter 7: Beyond Hospitality: Rohingyas as Security Threats, Burdens, and Dependents

Chapter Seven examines how Rohingya refugees have been transformed from humanitarian subjects to security threats in Bangladesh's social media discourse. Following the 2017 influx of over 700,000 Rohingyas who were initially welcomed with hospitality, public perception has shifted dramatically toward viewing them as sources of criminality, economic competition, and national security risks. Using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Kelman's Social Influence Theory, the chapter analyzes 348 social media posts and 33,918 comments across six platforms, supplemented by 22 stakeholder interviews.

Key Findings

The analysis reveals a clear divergence in the framing of security threats across platforms. Mainstream media exhibited the highest levels of securitization (Shomoy TV: 13.51%; Prothom Alo: 9.09%), whereas MOFA demonstrated 20% security framing despite a small sample size. Significantly, Rohingya-led pages (Aman Ullah: 0%; RYA: 0%) and UNHCR (0%) showed a complete absence of security threat narratives, highlighting the politicized nature of threat construction.

Social media user sentiment shifted dramatically over time. Humanitarian support dropped from 34.51% in 2017 to 17.15% in 2023, while xenophobic content surged from 15.42% to peaks of 42.97% during the Bhasan Char relocation. The Cox's Bazar fire temporarily restored empathy (26.02% support), demonstrating that securitization is contestable during acute humanitarian crises.

Counter-Narratives

Rohingya voices actively challenge securitization by highlighting that only a small minority (approximately 1-2%) are involved in criminal activities, emphasizing structural factors such as denied work rights and restricted mobility that push youth toward illicit activities, and exposing scapegoating mechanisms that shift blame onto the entire community.

Conclusion

The chapter concludes that securitization is a constructed choice rather than an inevitability. Refugee identities are actively produced through discourse rather than reflected in the media. A sustainable solution requires Desecuritization—moving the Rohingya issue from security back into politics and human rights, recognizing that the Rohingya are not the source of insecurity but its most prominent victims**.**

Chapter 8: Beyond Hospitality: Rohingya as a Social Burden and Dependence in Bangladesh

Chapter Eight examines how Rohingya refugees have been framed as economic burdens and dependent populations in Bangladesh's social media discourse. While initial responses to the 2017 influx were characterized by hospitality and religious solidarity, public discourse has transformed to portray Rohingyas as sources of economic strain, environmental degradation, and chronic dependency. Using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Kelman's Social Influence Theory, the chapter analyzes 348 social media posts and 33,918 comments across six platforms, supplemented by 22 stakeholder interviews.

Key Findings on Burden Framing

The analysis reveals stark disparities in the representation of burden across platforms. MOFA showed the highest burden framing (60%), strategically emphasizing strain to advocate for international burden-sharing. Prothom Alo demonstrated significant burden framing (19.58%), documenting economic displacement, environmental destruction, and administrative strain. In contrast, UNHCR, Aman Ullah, and RYA showed a complete absence (0%) of burden framing, reflecting humanitarian and community-led communication strategies that avoid stigmatizing narratives.

Social Media User Responses

Nearly one in four comments (23.46%) framed the Rohingyas as burdens. Xenophobic sentiment peaked during the Bhasan Char relocation (42.97%) and the second anniversary (35.21%), reflecting anxieties about resource allocation and permanence. The Cox's Bazar fire temporarily suppressed hostility (15.25%), demonstrating that acute humanitarian crises can reactivate empathy.

Dependency Representation

MOFA (20%) and UNHCR (14.06%) exhibited the highest levels of dependency framing, reflecting diplomatic and fundraising strategies. Rohingya-led platforms exhibited the lowest representation of dependency (RYA: 3.23%; Aman Ullah: 4.55%), thereby deliberately countering passive-victim stereotypes.

Counter-Narratives

Rohingya voices challenge the burden-and-dependency framing by emphasizing that dependency arises from structural constraints (denied work rights, restricted mobility) rather than inherent characteristics. They argue that only a small minority engage in problematic activities and that many prefer self-reliance to dependence on perpetual aid.

Conclusion

The chapter concludes that burden and dependency are strategically constructed narratives serving institutional interests, states highlighting costs, aid agencies mobilizing funds, while Rohingya voices seeking to assert agency are systematically marginalized. Effective solutions require addressing structural barriers to self-sufficiency rather than relying solely on containment policy.

Chapter 9: Agents of Change and Resilience: The Proactive Spirit of the Rohingya Community

Chapter Nine challenges dominant narratives that frame refugees as passive victims or security threats by examining how the Rohingya demonstrate remarkable agency, proactivity, and resilience. Drawing on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Kelman's Social Influence Theory, the chapter analyzes 348 social media posts across six platforms and 22 in-depth interviews to examine how digital media portrays Rohingya agency and community-building efforts.

Key Findings on Proactive Representation

The analysis reveals significant variation in positive portrayals across platforms. Shomoy TV had the highest share of proactive/resilient content (54.05%), while Prothom Alo had only 12.59% despite having the most posts. Rohingya-led platforms (RYA: 22.58%) and

humanitarian organizations (UNHCR: 21.88%) showed moderate positive framing, while activist Aman Ullah's platform showed the lowest level of positive framing (7.58%), reflecting a strategic focus on documenting injustices rather than achievements.

Social Media User Responses

Community-led platforms achieved remarkably high support rates: RYA at 98.93% and Aman Ullah at 87.50%, demonstrating that when Rohingya control their own representation, recognition of agency becomes dominant. Mainstream media platforms showed lower support rates (Prothom Alo: 22.94%; Shomoy TV: 13.72%), reflecting more contested discourse. The overall support rate of 23.60% indicates that agency-centered narratives remain minority perspectives in mainstream spaces.

Evidence of the Rohingya Agency

The chapter documents multiple forms of proactivity, including active participation in repatriation decision-making; community leadership by figures such as Muhibbullah and organizations such as RYA; cultural preservation through initiatives such as Art Garden; Rohingya poetry publishing; environmental stewardship through tree-planting campaigns; and educational leadership through youth training programs. Rohingya voices directly challenge deficit-based narratives, emphasizing that dependency results from structural constraints rather than inherent characteristics.

Conclusion

The chapter concludes that recognizing Rohingya agency requires a paradigm shift from deficit-based humanitarian approaches to strength-based partnerships. Digital platforms enable marginalized communities to assert narrative sovereignty and construct empowering identities that challenge reductive stereotypes, demonstrating that refugees are active architects of their futures rather than passive subjects of aid.

Chapter 10: Unveiling the Overlooked: Positive Perceptions of Rohingya Resilience and Integration in Bangladeshi Host Community and Media Narratives

Chapter Ten examines overlooked positive perceptions of Rohingya refugees among Bangladeshi host communities and media, moving beyond dominant narratives that frame refugees as burdens or threats. Using Contact Theory, Integrated Threat Theory, Social

Identity Theory, and Representation Theory, the chapter analyzes qualitative interviews with 22 participants: 10 local community members, 10 Rohingya community members, and two journalists, to identify conditions under which positive recognition emerges.

Key Findings

Despite predominantly negative attitudes, the research uncovered multiple domains of positive recognition. Local respondents acknowledged the Rohingya's educational resilience and adaptability, particularly among earlier arrivals who had integrated into professional life. Youth leadership emerged through initiatives like Khin Maung's leadership training program for 300 young people. Economic productivity was recognized through skills in fishing, agriculture, net weaving, and women's vocational training. Social integration occurred through shared religious activities, sports participation, and informal "tea stall" conversations that serve as micro-publics for intercultural dialogue. Digital literacy and self-representation through YouTube channels, Facebook activism, and strategic media engagement demonstrated sophisticated communication capabilities.

Theoretical Insights

Contact Theory was validated as positive perceptions emerged most strongly among those with direct, cooperative interactions. However, the "paradox of competence recognition," as aligned with Integrated Threat Theory, suggests that when locals acknowledged Rohingya intelligence and adaptability, this sometimes-heightened threat perceptions rather than reducing prejudice. The Common Ingroup Identity Model posits that initial sympathy is based on shared Muslim identity, though this erodes over time as subgroup distinctions become more salient.

Critical Finding on Repatriation

The most significant finding challenging negative stereotypes was the Rohingya participants' emphatic and consistent commitment to repatriation. As Ro Khin Maung stated, "No one wants to stay here. Myanmar is my identity and my country." This directly contradicts prevalent fears about permanent settlement intentions.

Conclusion

The chapter concludes that positive recognition exists across the educational, social, religious, cultural, digital, and economic domains, suggesting multiple intervention points to improve

refugee-host relations. Understanding and communicating the Rohingya commitment to repatriation may be essential for rebuilding trust in this protracted displacement situation.

Chapter 11: Diverse Identity Portrayals of Rohingya People in Myanmar Social Media

Chapter Eleven examines how Rohingya identity has been systematically constructed, contested, and weaponized through Myanmar's media and social media platforms, particularly Facebook. Drawing on extensive literature, the chapter reveals how digital representations contributed directly to the genocide perpetrated against the Rohingya by creating a "permissive environment" for mass atrocities.

Theoretical Framework

The chapter applies Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (identity as constructed through discourse), Foucault's analysis of the politics of naming and classification, and Castells' network society theory to understand how the power to name and classify populations operates as a mechanism of control with life-or-death consequences.

Historical Context of Identity Reclassification

The chapter traces the systematic reclassification of Rohingya identity through six distinct stages: from recognition to denial (1948-1962), from citizen to foreigner (1962-1982), from documented to undocumented (1982-1993), from mobile to immobile (1993-2015), from counted to uncounted (2014), and from civilian to terrorist (2016-2017). The 1982 Citizenship Law excluded the Rohingya from 135 recognized ethnic groups, making them stateless.

Key Representational Strategies in Myanmar Media

The analysis identifies several interconnected mechanisms. Identity denial involved a systematic refusal to use "Rohingya," substituting "Bengali" or "illegal immigrant" to erase indigenous claims. Threat narratives constructed the Rohingya as demographic, religious, and security threats through viral posts claiming they would "outbreed" Buddhists or were connected to global Islamic terrorism. Dehumanization employed eliminationist rhetoric, with posts calling Rohingya "dogs, maggots, rapists" and comparing persecution to Hitler's treatment of Jews—one viral post stated, "Pour on gas and light it so they get to Allah faster."

Military-Backed Social Media Operations

The chapter documents coordinated propaganda campaigns involving up to 700 military personnel creating fake accounts and flooding platforms with anti-Rohingya content. Reuters found that 62% of new Twitter accounts created during the August 2017 military crackdown were anti-Rohingya.

Platform Complicity

The UN Fact-Finding Mission concluded that Facebook played a "determining role" in the genocide, with Amnesty International finding that Meta's algorithms "proactively amplified and promoted" hate content. Facebook eventually removed 425 Pages, 17 Groups, 135 accounts, and 15 Instagram profiles in 2018, but only after violence had reached genocidal proportions.

Conclusion

The chapter demonstrates how Myanmar's media ecosystem transformed Rohingya from human beings with legitimate claims to belonging into existential threats requiring elimination. This literature-based analysis provides essential context for understanding the stakes of identity construction in digital spaces. It serves as a warning about social media's potential to facilitate genocide against vulnerable populations.

Chapter 12: Rohingya Identity Construction in Bangladeshi Media and Social Media

Chapter Twelve examines how Rohingya identity is constructed across Bangladeshi media and social media platforms, analyzing 348 posts from six sources and 33,918 user comments from 2017 to 2023. Drawing on Hall's Representation Theory, Goffman's Frame Analysis, and Entman's Framing Paradigm, the chapter reveals how different stakeholders employ distinct terminological strategies that reflect their institutional mandates and political objectives.

Shift in Media Narratives

The chapter documents a dramatic transformation in media framing. Initial coverage in August 2017 was highly sympathetic, focusing on genocide and humanitarian crisis. However, this gradually shifted to portraying Rohingya as "burdens," with increasing emphasis on economic costs, environmental impacts, and criminal activities, particularly drug smuggling.

Platform-Specific Identity Framing

The analysis reveals distinct framing strategies across platforms. Prothom Alo used "Rohingya" in 92.31% of posts, emphasizing geographic origin and Myanmar nationality. UNHCR emphasized refugee/humanitarian identity in 96.9% of posts, consistent with its institutional mandate. Aman Ullah balanced "Rohingya" (75.76%) with ethnic/indigenous framing (24.24%), asserting citizenship claims. RYA used "Rohingya" (93.55%) alongside "genocide survivors" framing (6.45%), demanding accountability and justice. MOFA used "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals) in 40% of posts, reflecting Bangladesh's diplomatic stance on temporary protection and repatriation.

Social Media User Comments

Analysis of 33,918 comments reveals alarming patterns: victim-blaming/dehumanization (25.93%), social support/humanitarian advocacy (23.60%), xenophobic content (23.46%), and genocidal threats/incitement to violence (3.48%). The discourse transformed dramatically over time from "oppressed Muslim brothers" in 2017 to systematic dehumanization by 2019-2020 using animal metaphors ("crocodiles," "snakes," "parasites," "cockroaches"), disease imagery ("cancer," "virus"), and explosive metaphors ("nuclear bomb," "powder keg").

Key Dehumanizing Patterns

The most pervasive metaphor was "crocodiles in the canal," suggesting Bangladesh foolishly invited dangerous predators. The "baby boom" frame expressed demographic anxieties about Rohingya birth rates. The "free-loader" frame portrayed the Rohingya as lazy parasites receiving benefits while Bangladeshis struggled.

Conclusion

The chapter demonstrates how social media discourse can rapidly transform humanitarian crises into security threats and refugees into enemies. While 23.60% of comments were supportive, hostile discourse accounted for more than 52% of all comments, underscoring the devastating implications for vulnerable populations seeking protection.

Chapter 13: Conclusion

Chapter Thirteen synthesizes findings from the comprehensive study of Rohingya representation across Bangladeshi social media platforms. Through analysis of 348 posts from six organizational sources, 33,918 user comments, and 22 stakeholder interviews spanning 2017-2023, the research documented profound transformations in how the Rohingya are portrayed and perceived in the digital public sphere.

Key Findings Synthesized

Victimhood and Vulnerability: Mainstream media showed the highest emphasis on persecution narratives (Prothom Alo: 40.56%), while Rohingya-led platforms exhibited the lowest emphasis (RYA: 3.23%), representing conscious resistance to externally imposed victimhood. A critical disconnect emerged between digital humanitarian representations and local community perceptions, with 95% of interviewed host community members expressing a desire for the Rohingya departure.

Securitization: The study documented a systematic transformation from humanitarian subjects to security threats. Supportive comments declined from 34.51% (2017) to 17.15% (2023), while xenophobic framing peaked at 42.97% during the Bhasan Char relocation. State institutions, mainstream media, and social media users collectively participated in constructing threat narratives.

Burden and Dependency: MOFA placed the highest emphasis on burden (60%), strategically positioning Bangladesh for international support. Social media comments revealed anxieties about burdens triggered by specific factors, such as perceived permanence concerns, policy decisions, and perceived resource competition.

Agency and Resilience: Counter-narratives documented sophisticated forms of Rohingya agency across education, youth leadership, digital literacy, cultural preservation, and economic productivity. Community-led platforms achieved remarkably high levels of supportive engagement (RYA: 98.93%) compared with mainstream media (22.94%).

Identity Construction: The analysis revealed a complete transformation of identity construction from "Muslim brothers" (2017) to "pests," "crocodiles," "future Israeli occupiers," and "terrorists" (2021) through systematic deployment of dehumanizing metaphors.

Theoretical Contributions

The study validated and extended Hall's Representation Theory by demonstrating how digital platforms function as contested sites of meaning-making. It extended Kelman's Social Influence Theory by identifying "attitude exhaustion" as a third outcome, alongside support and hostility. The research productively integrated securitization theory, framing theory, Contact Theory, and Integrated Threat Theory to provide a comprehensive analytical apparatus.

Policy Implications

For humanitarian actors: move beyond victim-focused narratives, amplify community voices, and address the structural conditions that create dependency. For the government: Recognize that securitized framing undermines protection and enables violence; communicate the commitment to Rohingya repatriation to rebuild trust. For media: Adopt systemic understanding over episodic crisis coverage; challenge misinformation. For platforms: Address vulnerabilities of refugee populations to coordinated hate campaigns through improved content moderation.

Concluding Reflections

The thesis documented a profound transformation from "oppressed Muslim brothers" (2017) to "parasitic pests" requiring elimination (2021). However, spaces of resistance and alternative representation persisted through Rohingya-led platforms, maintaining agency-centered narratives. The Rohingya case offers critical lessons about digital media's potential to be weaponized against vulnerable populations and possibilities for resistance through counter-narrative and assertion of dignity.

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Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW[1]

2.1 Introduction

The representation of the Rohingya people in the media has attracted growing scholarly attention, especially after the 2017 mass displacement to Bangladesh. Researchers have examined how both traditional and social media shape public understanding of this marginalized community (Rahim & Khan, 2021; Uddin, 2021). This chapter reviews existing studies on Rohingya representation, organizing the literature by themes to highlight key findings and scholarly approaches.

This chapter reviews scholarship on media representations of refugees and minorities, establishing the conceptual foundations that inform studies of the Rohingya. Subsequent sections analyze research on social media's role in refugee discourse; scholarly investigations of Rohingya representation in Myanmar's media ecosystem; studies examining host-country media coverage; research on Rohingya self-representation and counter-narratives; and the linguistic and discourse-analytical approaches employed by researchers. The chapter concludes by synthesizing key insights from the scholarship reviewed. Theoretical frameworks guiding this study Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958)—are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

2.2 Media Representation of Refugees and Minorities

Many studies have explored how the media portrays refugees and ethnic minorities, providing theoretical and empirical foundations for understanding Rohingya-specific representations. Scholars stress that the media informs the public, influences perceptions of pressing issues, and depicts people in ways that shape political views and participation (Bleich et al., 2017). Pandır (2020) argues that media portrayals can produce both prejudice and acceptance, suggesting media can be part of the problem or part of the solution in refugee-host community relations.

[1] A part of this chapter was published as a book chapter by Springer, Singapore.

The media often portrays refugees through binary frameworks, either as helpless victims or as dangerous outsiders threatening national security.

Research identifies three main patterns in media representation of minorities: underrepresentation, stereotyping, and negative framing (Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011; ter Wal, 2004). Ethnic minorities often do not see themselves accurately reflected in the media, and this marginalization perpetuates feelings of exclusion (Mahtani, 2001). When minorities do appear, they are frequently portrayed as objects rather than subjects characterized by generalized traits rather than recognized as individuals (D'Haenens & Bink, 2007). The media tends to talk about minorities rather than allowing them to speak for themselves (Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011).

Esses et al. (2013) found that the media employs dehumanizing metaphors depicting refugees as "floods" or "invasions," framing displacement as a natural disaster rather than a human experience, thereby reducing empathy. Wake and Bryant (2018) found that even sympathetic coverage often depicts refugees as passive victims, flattening their agency and complexity. Pandır (2020) identifies adverse effects, including victimization, dehumanization, and homogenization, explaining how these representations stigmatize refugees as "other" and produce xenophobia.

Scholars have also examined how media intersect with securitization processes. Buzan et al. (1998) theorized that securitization transforms issues into existential threats, and Huysmans (2006) demonstrated how European media increasingly framed migration through security lenses. Research also reveals a hierarchy in ethnic group portrayal; migrants from distant countries or different religions, especially Muslims, receive more negative coverage (Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011; Atuel et al., 2007).

However, scholars have identified positive strategies that can reduce prejudice. Pandrang (2020) suggests that empathizing with refugees and adopting a rights-based journalism approach can promote inclusion. These insights provide a foundation for understanding how representations of the Rohingya operate across different media platforms and contexts.

2.3 Social Media and Refugee Discourse

Social media has changed how refugees are represented, creating spaces for both negative and supportive discussions. Digital platforms serve two purposes they help refugees connect

and share information, but they also spread hateful and exclusionary messages (Grasso, 2023; Gillespie et al., 2018). The online environment often fuels polarized debates about refugees that can be exploited for political purposes (Pöyhtäri et al., 2021).

On the positive side, social media enables refugees to share information, support one another, and maintain relationships across borders (Marlowe, 2020). Anderson et al. (2020) found that refugees use online spaces to seek advice, share their experiences, and correct misunderstandings about their lives. However, Madianou (2019) warns that digital platforms also expose refugees to government and organizational surveillance and data collection.

On the negative side, social media enables the spread of racism and hate speech. The anonymity of online spaces allows people to say things they would not say in person (Murthy & Sharma, 2019; Ozduzen et al., 2021). Studies show that crime- and threat-related topics predominate in online discussions about refugees (Pöyhtäri et al., 2021). Ekman (2018) found that anti-refugee groups use social media to organize and spread their message.

Research on host communities shows how online attitudes are formed. Alam and Jahan (2021) found that Bangladeshi social media users often repeat negative narratives about refugees, as reflected in media and government statements. Siapera et al. (2018) identified different groups on Twitter, some supportive, some hostile, and some mixed, that interact to shape public opinion. Platform features, such as algorithms, also affect which posts about refugees become visible (Leurs & Smets, 2018; Dekker et al., 2018).

Social media can also create solidarity. Images like that of Alan Kurdi, the drowned Syrian boy, spread widely and triggered support for refugees (Trenz et al., 2020). However, Sajir and Aouragh (2019) found that emotional images do not always lead to real action; they only create temporary sympathy without lasting change. Understanding social media's role in refugee representation requires examining both its positive potential and its capacity for spreading hate.

2.4 Scholarly Analysis of Rohingya Representation in Myanmar Media

Researchers have extensively documented how Myanmar's state-controlled media systematically constructed Rohingya identity through exclusionary discourse. Kironska and Peng (2021) conducted a detailed analysis of the Global New Light of Myanmar, finding that

state media consistently depicted Rohingyas as "a homogenous, active group of perpetrators to spoil the national stability" (p. 16). Their study revealed systematic use of dehumanizing language, including references to Rohingyas as "detestable human fleas," and documented how state media established discursive templates that framed military violence as legitimate "clearance operations" against "Bengali terrorists."

Lee (2019) extended this analysis by examining how Myanmar's official media established boundaries of acceptable discourse that encouraged nationalist hate speech while suppressing dissent. Her research applied extreme speech theory to demonstrate how the state media's consistent framing normalized violence against the Rohingya by positioning them outside the boundaries of national belonging.

The role of social media in Myanmar's anti-Rohingya violence has attracted substantial scholarly attention. Mozur (2018) documented how Myanmar's military employed up to 700 personnel to create fake accounts and pages flooding Facebook with inflammatory anti-Rohingya content. Stecklow (2018) compiled over 1,000 examples of posts, comments, images, and videos attacking Rohingyas, including calls for extermination that remained public for years.

Academic researchers have theorized Facebook's role through various analytical frameworks. Aziz (2021) examined platform accountability, arguing that Facebook's algorithms "proactively amplified" anti-Rohingya content while the company failed to develop adequate content moderation capacity in Burmese. Stevenson (2018) documented Facebook's admission that it was "too slow" to address hate speech. Guzman (2022) argued that Facebook's business model, prioritizing engagement over content quality, created structural incentives to amplify inflammatory content.

Researchers have also examined the intersection of traditional and social media. Brooten (2016) analyzed how media censorship and military control over information shaped journalistic coverage of Rakhine State. Rahim and Khan (2021) argued that because of direct censorship, virtually no independent coverage of Rohingya issues existed, with private media following official narratives portraying Rohingyas as "immigrants" or "illegal Bengali immigrants."

2.5 Rohingya Representation in Host Country Media: Bangladesh and Beyond

Scholarly research on Rohingya representation in Bangladesh has revealed complex dynamics of sympathy, anxiety, and hostility coexisting within host community discourse. Rashid and Al-Zaman (2023) conducted one of the most comprehensive analyses, examining 10,907 social media comments to identify dominant themes in Bangladeshi online discourse. Their thematic analysis revealed four primary themes: asylum debates, media bias, religious sentiments, and controversial roles.

Ahammad et al. (2024) employed computational methods to analyze 6,840 online texts, using topic modeling and sentiment analysis to reveal fifteen distinct themes in Rohingya-related discourse. Their research found that religious identity functioned ambivalently: as a source of sympathy (viewing Rohingyas as fellow Muslims deserving protection) and as a source of anxiety (fearing religious tensions or extremism).

Research on traditional media in Bangladesh has documented temporal shifts in framing. Uddin (2021) conducted a framing analysis of mainstream Bangladeshi newspapers, identifying four dominant frames: human interest, responsibility, securitization, and conflict. His research revealed that human-interest frames dominated immediately following the 2017 influx but were increasingly supplanted by securitization frames.

Fatima and Torun (2022) similarly examined Bangladeshi newspaper coverage, noting that while newspapers often adopted neutral tones, they consistently foregrounded humanitarian suffering alongside concerns about repatriation. Rahim and Khan (2021) characterized this pattern as an oscillation between empathetic humanitarian narratives and securitized frames.

Research on Rohingya representation in other countries has revealed similar patterns. Mohanty (2022) documented how Indian media increasingly adopted exclusionary frames portraying Rohingyas as security threats. Aldamen and Jaleel (2024) analyzed Indian online platforms and found that negative framing and dehumanization dominated coverage. Khan and Qadir (2020) similarly found that Indian media narratives were increasingly aligned with government security discourse.

2.6 Rohingya Self-Representation and Counter-Narratives

An emerging body of scholarship examines how Rohingya refugees use digital platforms to resist dominant narratives and construct alternative representations. Sonia (2023) provides crucial insights through ethnographic fieldwork in refugee camps combined with digital

ethnography. Her study demonstrates that Rohingya youth use social media not merely for communication but also to construct identities that challenge victim/threat binaries. Her finding that digital connectivity becomes existential for refugees is captured in the participant statement, "Without internet, we have no existence" (p. 1), which reveals how platforms offer mechanisms for asserting presence and humanity.

Ma et al. (2018) explored the construction of Rohingya counter-narratives, explicitly applying Stuart Hall's Representation Theory. Their research revealed significant differences between how Rohingyas describe themselves, emphasizing historical continuity, cultural richness, and communal bonds, and how mass media portray them, focusing on statelessness, victimization, and passivity.

Aziz (2024) examined Rohingya diaspora activism in Australia, demonstrating how digital platforms enable the formation of geographically dispersed resistance networks. His study shows how Facebook groups and YouTube channels allow communities to coordinate advocacy and share human rights documentation. Kunnawut (2018) examined how Rohingya refugees, local Muslim organizations, and international NGOs collaboratively use alternative and social media to reframe Rohingya images in Thailand. However, scholars also identify significant limitations to Rohingya self-representation. Sonia (2023) documents multiple barriers: limited internet access in camps, digital literacy challenges, language barriers, algorithmic marginalization, and ongoing harassment from nationalist trolls.

2.7 Linguistic and Discourse Analytical Approaches

Scholars have employed various linguistic and discourse analytical methods to examine how the media constructs the Rohingya identity through language. Isti'anah (2018) applied Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Grammar to compare newspaper headlines in Myanmar and Bangladesh, revealing stark ideological differences encoded in linguistic choices.

Research has documented systematic patterns in dehumanizing language targeting the Rohingyas. Zarni and Cowley (2014) traced the use of the racist term "kalar" referring to dark-skinned people, connecting colonial-era prejudices to contemporary hate speech. Kironska and Peng (2021) extended this analysis to state media, documenting systematic use of dehumanizing metaphors.

Scholars have also examined how terminology itself becomes a site of political contestation. Multiple studies document the Myanmar government's refusal to use the term "Rohingya," instead employing "Bengali" to construct this population as foreign immigrants (Ullah & Chattoraj, 2023). Radio Free Asia (2016) documented government orders to state media prohibiting "Rohingya" terminology during UN visits.

Scholars have applied Herman and Chomsky's (2010) propaganda model to analyze structural factors shaping the representation of the Rohingya. Researchers applying this model note that state ownership of media, dependence on government sources, and ideological alignment with Buddhist nationalism create structural conditions that favor anti-Rohingya discourse (Kironska & Peng, 2021).

Recent scholarship has begun applying computational discourse analysis to large-scale social media data. Ahammad et al. (2024) employed topic modeling and sentiment analysis to identify patterns across thousands of online texts. However, scholars note limitations of computational approaches, particularly challenges in capturing contextual nuance and culturally specific meanings (Ahammad et al., 2024).

2.8 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter reveals several key findings about Rohingya representation in the media. First, research shows that media do not simply reflect reality; they actively construct refugee identities through framing, language choices, and platform features (Esses et al., 2013). Studies across different contexts show that media representation affects public attitudes and government policies, shaping how displaced populations are treated. Second, scholarship documents how Rohingya representation in Myanmar was central to their persecution. Researchers found systematic coordination between state media propaganda, military-led social media campaigns, and platform designs that spread hateful content (Kironska & Peng, 2021; Lee, 2019; Mozur, 2018). This research shows that representation was not separate from violence; it helped create conditions where genocide could happen with public support. Third, research on host countries reveals mixed dynamics in which humanitarian sympathy and security concerns coexist (Rashid & Al-Zaman, 2023; Uddin, 2021). Studies show that framing shifts from sympathetic to security-focused as refugee situations continue over time (Fatima & Torun, 2022). This pattern appears across multiple countries, suggesting it is a common trend rather than specific to one place.

Fourth, emerging research on Rohingya self-representation shows how refugees use digital platforms to challenge negative portrayals and create their own narratives (Sonia, 2023; Ma et al., 2018; Aziz, 2024). However, researchers also note limitations, including resource constraints, platform biases, and structural barriers, that limit the reach of these counter-narratives. Finally, researchers have examined media representations of refugees using various approaches. Some researchers count and categorize media content. Others examine how media frames issues or analyze language patterns. Some use computer software to study large amounts of online data, while others spend time directly with refugee communities to understand their experiences (Isti'anah, 2018; Ahammad et al., 2024). However, most studies focus on only one method, one platform, or one country. This study addresses this gap by analyzing Rohingya representation across Bangladeshi social media platforms and examining how different groups create, challenge, and negotiate narratives about the Rohingya community.

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Chapter 3

A HISTORY OF ROHINGYA DISPLACEMENT, ROHINGYA ETHNICITY AND CONTESTED IDENTITY IN MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH[2]

3.1 Introduction

According to Islam (2018), the Rohingyas are a primarily Muslim population that descended from a variety of ancestors over many years, with historical ties to Bengali, Persian, and Arabian high cultures (Islam, 2018). Anthropologist Dr. Nasir Uddin (2015), on the other hand, classifies them as a South Asian ethno-linguistic and religious minority group who currently have no state. However, they have lived in Myanmar for the past 200 years (Uddin, 2015). Whereas, the United Nations (UN) termed Rohingyas as "the most persecuted" group of minorities in world history due to the decades of forced migration, relocation, restrictions on their freedom of movement, brutality, and oppression by the Myanmar government (Sudheer & Banargee, 2021). From 1978 to 2017, Rohingyas were sporadically forced to flee to different neighboring countries to save themselves from such persecution. At present, around 1.3 million Rohingyas are living in the different refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, a southern part of Bangladesh, as forcibly displaced people (FDMN), and the majority of them came after 25 August 2017 to protect them from the crackdown by the Myanmar military (Alam, 2021). However, the history of the Rohingyas in Myanmar has always been divisive and turbulent, and there are some controversies about the identity of this group of people in the country. For example, Dr Eye Chan (2005) described that.

In the 1950s, a few Bengali Muslim intellectuals who migrated from the Chittagong district of the then East Pakistan started to use the term 'Rohingya ' to describe themselves (Chan, 2005). Some academics, on the other hand, pronounced that Rohingyas are the mixed blood of Arabs, Moors, Parsians, Turks, Mughals, and Bengalis who mostly came as traders, warriors, and pilgrims via land and maritime routes (Chowdhury, 2006; Uddin, 2020). While the Myanmar government refers to "Muslims in Rakhine State" rather than "Rohingya," some anti-Islamic radicals in the country refer to Rohingya as "Bengalis." Nevertheless, the Muslims of Rakhine prefer to be referred to as "Rohingya" (Ebbighausen, 2017). Besides,

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Myanmar not only officially does not recognize the Rohingya as an ethnic group, but also asserts that the Rohingyas were never residents of Burma; instead, they migrated to Arakan during the British Colonial era beginning in 1824. These state narratives helped to create the 1982 Citizenship Act, which denied citizenship and fundamental rights to the majority of Rohingyas (The Guardian, 2014; Uddin, 2020). In addition, except for the Rohingya, Myanmar's government recognizes 135 ethnic groups. This ethnic system was enabled by political compromise, adverse influences, and the peculiarities of military leadership (Uddin & Jenkins, 2022). Anyway, the conflict surrounding the Rohingya people of Myanmar involves a multitude of factors involving identity, politics, and power struggles. However, by first focusing on the formulation of Rohingya identity and its subsequent contestation, the nuances of the conflict to date can be better understood, and its future trajectories can be more accurately predicted.

The present chapter aims to analyze the name "Rohingya," the history of the ethnic minority in Myanmar, its way of life, and its citizenship status in Myanmar. To support this aim, diverse sources have been drawn on to illustrate the meaning of "Rohingya," their roots, lives, and citizenship issues. This chapter begins with a definition of the term "Rohingya," followed by an account of their identity and life in Rakhine State. This paper then examines the citizenship status of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Finally, a conclusion has been presented that summarizes the relevant issues.

3.2 What Does the Term "Rohingya" Mean?

Historically, the term "Rohingya" refers to the Muslim Arakanese (Charney, 2005). The term's origin is "Rohai" or "Rohangee," which denotes the Muslim people inhabiting historic Arakan (Yunus, 1994). According to Aman Ullah (n.d.) Arakanese Muslims refer to their country as "Rohang" or "Roang" in their local language and identify themselves as "Rohangya" or "Roangya," which is short for "native of Rohang or Roang" (Ullah, n.d). However, Dr. Aye Chan (2005), a historian of ancient Burma and Arakan and a professor at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, states that the term "Rohingya" denotes the ethnic and religious identity of Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar. The name originated in the 1950s and has been part of public debate ever since (Chan, 2005). Alternatively, Dr. S. Hussain (2018) writes that the term "Rohingya" was historically pronounced "Rwangya" and that some historians believe the name may be derived from "Rakhanga" or "Roshanga." These

had been in use since before the British occupation of Arakan, and, in 1799, the historian Francis Buchanan Hamilton wrote that the name was common in Royal Burma (Hussain, 2018). In another book entitled *History of the Rohingya Nation*, N.M. Habibullah (2017) argues that the words "Rowai," "Rohingya," and "Rosang" have been modified to appear as "Rosang" to Bengali poets but as "Rowang" to the local people. Meanwhile, experts hold differing views on the origin of the term "Rowang" or "Rolang." Dr. Satyendranath Ghoshal, Dr. Ahmad Sharif, and others believe that the words "Roang/Rohang/Rosang" derive from "Mrohang," the former capital of Arakan (Habibullah, 2017). In ancient times, Arakan was known as "Rakhaing," and later it was rendered as "Rakhang" or "Arkahang" by Muslim writers. Later, it became Arakan, and the last capital of Arakan was pronounced as "Mrohaung," which, in the mouths of the local people of both Arakan and Chittagong, became "Rohang," and thus the people came to be known as "Rohangi" or "Rohingya" (Karim, 2016). Nasir Uddin (2020) also provided similar information on the origin of the word "Rohingya". He identified Mrohong as the original Arakanese name for Rohang, and the Rohingyas as its inhabitants (Uddin, 2020). Abdur Razzak and Mahfuzul Haque (1995) observed that, in the dialect of Chittagong, the word "Rakhine" came to be pronounced as "Rohong" or "Rohang," and the inhabitants of the region are therefore called "Rohingya" (Razzak & Haque, 1995). In addition, there is a myth about the origin of the term "Rohingya" that claims that when an Araba ship capsized close to the Arakan coast, the passengers begged for assistance by saying "Raham, Raham" which is in Arabic as "compassion, compassion", locals then pronounced it as "Rohang" and ever since, the inhabitants of the coast has been referred to as the Rohingya (Yen, 2005). According to the same myth mentioned by Froster and Chowdhury and cited by Zahed and Zenkins (2022) that locals saved the survivors of the sinking ship and brought them to then-king Maha Taing Chandra (788-810 CE), and the king allowed them to live in his kingdom, and overtime Raham changed to "Rohang" and is associated with the Rohingya.

3.3 History of Rohingya Identity and Life in Rakhine State

Rohingyas are known as Arakanese Muslims in the Burmese constitution, and they are actually a language-based nation who live in Arakan and speak this language (Ullah, 2017). A large part of the population of Arakan is followers of Islam, Zerbadee, Kamein, Rohingya, etc., but Rohingyas are the largest Muslim ethnic group among them (Akhanda, 2018). Even though the majority of the Rohingyas follow Sunni Islam or Sufism, a small number of them practice

Hinduism and Christianity (International Christian Concern, 2021). Since not all Rohingyas are Muslims, as mentioned, some are Hindus and Christians, and they do not speak the same language or have the same physical appearance. However, the creation of a homogenous image of this community obscures the astonishing diversity it contains (Nursyazwani & Freeman, 2020). They came to Arakan in several phases. Some came as traders from as far as Arabia and Persia; others came as conquerors in the train of the invading army; some came as victims of pirates; and still others came in peaceful pursuits (Karim, 2016). Therefore, the Rohingyas are not homogeneous because they originated from various ethnic groups rather than simply one race or ethnicity (Habibullah, 1995).

The origin and ethnicity of the Rohingyas are, however, a matter of considerable debate. Some believe that Rohingyas are not Myanmar's citizens; instead, they are illegal immigrants from a neighboring country. In contrast, others claim to be the country's indigenous people. However, due to the lack of primary studies or supporting documentation, there is an uncertainty, which made the issue quite problematic (Washaly, 2019). Jacqques Leider (2018) noted that "Rohingya" refers to an ethno-religious identity of Muslims in North Rakhine State in Myanmar, and they are different from the Burmese population in terms of religion and outward appearance (Leider, 2018). Due to their mixed ancestry, Rohingyas have noses that are not flat, eyes that are not as narrow as those of Rakhine Maghs and Burmans, less prominent cheekbones, a darker complexion, and a slightly higher forehead than Rakhine Maghs (Alam, 1999). Additionally, it is said that Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bengal because they have a dialect similar to that of the Chittagong people, however Imtiaz Yusuf (2018) over this issue argued that, the Rohingyas, whose language has a Bengali influence, because of once there used to be no borders in the northwest of modern- day Myanmar and had a strong political tie with Bengal (Yusuf, 2018). Minahan (2016), a reputable scholar from Spain who has written several encyclopedias on statehood and identity, noted that the Rohingyas trace their descent to Arabs who settled in the port cities of what is now Myanmar in the 600 CE. They are of mixed Arab, Bengali, and Burmese ancestry (Minahan, 2016). On the other hand, the Myanmar government defines only those who inhabited the region before the capture of Arakan in the first Anglo-Burma War in 1824 are their citizens, but not the latter population, as the Myanmar government and military leaders argue that the Rohingya were brought to the Rakhine region by the British Raj for farming and other jobs in the area. The Rohingya people are their descendants (Hussain, 2018).

However, history reveals that the Rohingyas are not the British-era immigrants, as Islam arrived in Arakan before 788 A.D., and since then, it appears that Rohingyas have been living there, as well as the Rohingya and the Buddhist Arakanese both speak the same language, which was the original lingua franca in Arakan (Jilani, cited as Sohel, 2017). In addition, Ludden, quoted by Ahmed and Biswas (2022), also notes that historical records indicate that the Rohingya people have been in the Arakan region since the eighth century (Ludden, cited as Ahmed and Biswas, 2022). Moreover, several Arabic and Persian words in the Burmese lexicon attest to Muslim presence, as they were supposedly used by Muslim traders who came to Burma between the ninth and sixteenth centuries (Yeagar, 1972). Also, there is a myth about the identity of the Rohingyas that claims that following the Carbala War in 680 CE, Hazrat

Ali's son, Mohammad Bin Hanafi, traveled to Arbshah Para, which is very close to Maungdaw in Northern Arakan. At that time Kayapuri was ruling the Cannibals, who according to legend, controlled a neighboring forest and attacked as well as pillaged the Arkan population, later Hanafi converted Kayapuri to Islam and married her. It is said that followers of the Hanafi and Kayapur schools intermarried and coexisted amicably, and that their descendants, known as the Rohingya today (Alam, 1999), are the result of this intermarriage. Walter Hamilton (1820) identified that Arakan was known to the Moguls as Rakhang, and the residents of this Rakhang were called "Rooinga" or the natives of "Aracan (Hamilton, 1820). Besides, Late-18th century traveler Francis Buchanan also referred to the Rohingya as natives of Arakan (Buchanan, 1799).

Further, the much-contested origins of the identity of Rohingyas or Rohingya Muslims have their basis in this period, especially between the 15th and 18th centuries under Narmeikhla's rule (Bhonsale, 2015). When the Burmese king Myinsaing invaded Arakan in 1406, Narmeikhla escaped and sought safety in Gauda, the then-Bengali capital ruled by the Ilyas Shai dynasty. Around 24 years ago, Narmeikhla resided in Gauda and developed an interest in Islamic history, politics, and civilization, after which he changed his name and became known as Mohammad Solaiman Shah. After that, in 1430, Narmeikhla, with the help of Gaurda Sultan Nasiruddin Shah rescued his kingdom Arakan by sending twenty thousand soldiers under the command of Wali Khan, later he founded a dynasty called Marauk-U in Arakan under the name of Mohammad Solaiman Shah, and thus Arakan leaned towards the Muslim state, which later became Rosang and identified as civilization (Ullah, 2017).

Opposing the state narratives of Myanmar, Nasir Uddin (2015) notes that the Arakanese first came into touch with Muslims when Arab traders stopped at an Arakan port while travelling to China in the ninth century, and the Rohingyas are said to be descended from this group of Muslims (Uddin, 2015). Mentioning anthropologist Fredrik Barth's "social organization of cultural differences," Uddin (2020) also underscored that Rohingyas should never be regarded as Bengalis based on their social, cultural, material and non-material markers, because their behavior, attitudes and interactions with others are entirely different from Bengalis, who Barth's organizational framework emphasizes to be an ethnic group (Uddin, 2020).

The discussion above delineates two opposing accounts of the Rohingya's identity: one from the Rohingya's perspective and the other from the perspectives of the Rakhine and Bamar. The Rohingya version of the region's history emphasizes five key points, including the fact that ethnic Rohingya have lived in Rakhine for centuries, even before Islam arrived at the end of the eighth century. The Rohingya language and culture predominated in Rakhine during the Mrauk-U Dynasty's rule of the region from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Following the fall of the Mrauk-U Dynasty in 1785, the Burmese Empire conquered Rakhine, ending Muslim rule in the region. In 1826, Rakhine became a British colony, making the Rohingya British subjects. During the World War II, many Rohingya enlisted in the British Army and engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese with a hope to get Rakhine as their own country; however the British government broke its promise to establish it an independent country for the Rohingyas after war, so the Muslim region Rakhine remained a part of Myanmar (Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, n.d.). On the other hand, the narratives of the Rakhine and Bamar peoples insist that the Rohingya are Bengali migrants, or "Chittagonians," who arrived in 1826 after the British conquest of Rakhine, while the few Muslims who lived in Rakhine prior to British colonialization were not the ancestors of the modern Rohingya. Besides, the Rohingya benefited from British colonialization and used World War II to strengthen their position further, claims this narrative; Islam had only a marginal presence in Rakhine during the Mrauk-U dynasty's rule, which was Buddhist, not Muslim (Ibid, n.d.). Professor Imtiaz Ahmed (2009), in his book titled *The Rohingya: From Stateless to Refugee*, also notes that two theories exist regarding the Rohingya's origins. One theory suggests that the Rohingyas are a mixed group of people with many ethnic and racial connections. Rohingya leaders and academics who support the Rohingya cause generally adopt this stance. The second theory proposes that Rohingyas are descendants of illegal

immigrants who fled East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and India during the British era. The government and the majority of the population of Myanmar adopted this idea because it argues that the dialect of the Rohingyas is remarkably close to that of Chittagong, Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2009).

3.4 Rohingya Life in Rakhine State

Muslims in Myanmar are a diverse group; they can roughly be divided into four groups: Rohingya, Bamar, Zerbadees, and Indians. The majority of them, nearly a million, are Rohingyas, also known as Arakanese Muslims. Bamar Muslims are Burmese who converted to Islam, while Indian Muslims, those with Indian ancestry, come from Indian parents, and the Zerbadees are the offspring of mixed-race parents, for example, Indian fathers and Burmese mothers (Yin, 2005). On the other hand, Yusuf (2018a) asserted that Myanmar is home to five distinct Muslim groups. They are "Zerbadees", "Indians", Panthy-Chinese", "Malay or Pashu", and "Rohingya." Zerbadees have assimilated into Burmese society at the linguistic and cultural levels. At the same time, Indians also have social ties to the majority of Burmese. Panthy-Chinese, who migrated from China's Yunnan province in the 19th century, are primarily traders living in Mandali, Malaya. Pashu Muslims reside in southern Burma, and the largest Muslim group, the Rohingya, live in Arakan (Yusuf, 2018a). Myanmar is a non-secular nation with a majority of Buddhists (around 88% of the total population), 6.2% Christians, 4.3% Muslims, 0.5% Hindus, and 2% of other religions (Devi, 2019). At least two million Muslims live in Myanmar as of the 2014 census, with Rohingya Muslims accounting for roughly half of all Muslims in the nation (Kyaw, 2015). However, the majority of Rohigya Muslims live primarily in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung in Northern Rakhine State, though there are also Muslims in cities like Yangon, Mandalay, and Mawlamyine (Yusuf, 2018). Since the 7th and 8th centuries, Islam and Buddhism have coexisted peacefully. Muslim scholars of comparative religion and world history produced works on Buddhism during the 11th-15th centuries, which helped advance the scholarly study of Buddhism relative to other monotheistic religions (Yusuf, 2018b). However, during the World War II, when the British withdrew to India and the Japanese forces made progress in Arakan then colonial times' tension between Buddhists and Muslims reached a breaking point. The Rakhine Buddhists formed alliances primarily with the Japanese and Aung San's Burmese Independence Army. Besides, when the war first began, the Buddhists drove the Muslims from the Japanese-controlled areas of Southern Arakan, killing many of them in the

process. Muslims in Northern Arakan were provided with firearms by the British before they were forced to flee the regions they controlled. However, an armed conflict between Muslims and Buddhists broke out after the conflict, with the north being predominantly Muslim and the south predominantly Buddhist, and the communal divide reaching an impasse (Galache, 2014). Additionally, the Rohingya were not included in the 1931 classification of Burma's population, which included 15 indigenous races and 135 sub-races. This is even though some Rohingya received national registration cards after the country gained independence in 1948. After the military coup in 1962, the Rohingya's civil and political rights began to erode, as evidenced by the 1974 national elections held under a new constitution (Mahmood et al., 2017). However, from 1978 to 2017, Buddhist radicals and the State's security forces persecuted the Rohingya, forcing them to escape their home country. For instance, more than 773 00 Rohingya, including 400,000 children, crossed the border of Bangladesh, and the Bangladeshi government accommodates them in several refugee camps in Cox's Bazar on humanitarian grounds (Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 2017).

3.5 Citizenship Status of the Rohingya People in Myanmar

A citizen is a person who belongs to a political or national community and has the same rights and obligations as other citizens. Citizenship is the legally recognized membership of a state, is not optional, and brings a sense of democratic inclusion or belonging (Macfoy, 2014; Bosniak, 2008). However, in the case of the Rohingya, their citizenship status in Myanmar could be described as ambiguous (Brett, 2020). In Myanmar, there are approximately 135 recognized ethnic minorities, divided into eight major ethnic groups. However, the Rohingya were excluded from these clusters, even though many of them can trace their ancestry back millennia in Myanmar (Albert & Maizland, 2017). There are three categories of citizens under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law: Full Citizens, Associate Citizens, and Naturalized Citizens. Full citizens are those who belong to one of the 135 ethnic minorities and migrated to Burma before 1823, while Associate citizens are those born in the country after 1823. Naturalized citizens are those whose parents hold one of the three forms of citizenship, whereas Rohingyas are considered "Residential Foreigners" (Sohel, 2017). Due to a lack of full citizenship rights, Rohingyas became victims of several forms of discrimination, including limits on their freedom of movement, unfair barriers to accessing education, and arbitrary property expropriation.

Nevertheless, according to Panglong Agreement, the Union Constitution was formed 1947 and citizens here are defined as those people who are of a "indigenous race" have a grandparent who is of a "indigenous race" or offspring of citizens, or those who resided British Burma prior to 1942, however the Rohingya people were, unfortunately, not considered to be an indigenous group and were therefore disqualified from being citizens of the country (Hung, 2021). To establish a long-term solution to refugee flows, citizenship refusal and the rights that accompany it invariably present significant barriers (Human Rights Watch, 2000). In addition, the Myanmar government introduced three different types of color-coded Citizens Security Cards (CRCs) in 1989. For example, pink colored cards are issued to Full citizens, blue-colored cards to Associate Citizens, and green-colored cards to naturalized citizens. However, the Rohingya were excluded again in this process, although following UNHCR's recommendations to the Rohingya in 1995, the authority issued a white-colored temporary registration card, but the cardholder's place of birth is not indicated on the document, making it impossible to claim citizenship. (Khan & Tasneem, 2021). Moreover, according to a report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Myanmar authority issued white cards for 35,000 Rohingya refugees of 230,000 who were brought back to Rakhine State from Bangladesh between 1992 and 1997 as a preliminary step to reestablishing one of the largest communities of stateless people in Asia (McKinsey, 2007).

However, under the white card system, the Rohingya people's freedom of movement started in Sittwe, the capital city of the Rakhine State, and quickly spread throughout the entire state. Almost no Rohingyas were permitted to leave the state without permission from the authorities. Additionally, travel within the state was difficult and limited to two weeks; for example, moving within the same municipality required a "departure certificate," and sleeping over at someone else's house required police permission. Francis Wade, in his book, described the issue as follows. Along the east-west road between Maungdaw and Buthidaung in the north, there is a series of checkpoints where police inspect the identity papers and travel documents of passing Rohingya. Along the roadside, for all to see, they are pulled from their buses and ordered into police booths. When a Rohingya person wanted to leave their village in northern Maungdaw township to visit a relative in Buthidaung, thereby crossing the township boundary, they must apply to the local immigration office for a permit and pay a fee of up to $8 each time (Wade, 2019). He also stated that the authority even imposed restrictions on the marriage and reproduction issue of the Rohingya population by releasing an order in 2005, which read that those who are allowed to marry must be kept to children to

a minimum; the ruling power thought this threatened the region's Buddhist population. Besides, the Na Sa Ka personnel, the border security forces of the country, as well as the feared authority in the state, often invaded the private space of the Rohingya to enter their houses and forced mothers to breastfeed their children in front of the personnel. It is worth mentioning that, historically, the Rohingya people were issued National Registration Cards (NRCs) along with everyone else in the country; but when the Ne Win government implemented discriminatory policies toward the Rohingya in the 1970s, the NRCs of the Rohingya people were confiscated by the authorities using various means. Ridiculously, these same Rohingya citizens were then told to register themselves to prove their citizenship. However, most of them now cannot provide any citizenship documents, resulting in their being identified as "Bengalis" or immigrants by the junta government (Lewin, 2012). Even though the government confiscated Rohingya IDs and other government-issued documents and implemented systematic discriminatory measures, they were still considered Burmese nationals up until 1982. But the Citizenship Act promulgated in 1982 is the official document that stripped the citizenship of the Rohingya.

Furthermore, Rohingyas were not included in Myanmar's first nationwide census in 2014. According to a Reuters report, Myanmar released the findings of its first census in 2014. However, the survey excluded the country's Muslim Rohingya minority, who complain of deep state-sanctioned discrimination (Reuters, 2015). In a report, the Guardian revealed that during the census in the violent state of Rakhine, census staff went to people's homes to register them. However, as soon as they learned they were Rohingya, they went away from the house without doing so. (The Guardian, 2014). The report also added that Ye Htut, a spokesperson for Myanmar's president, stated that only those who identified as Bengalis would be counted in the official tally, and that anyone identifying as a Rohingya would not be, which was against their promises as the government committed in an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that the government will follow the international census standards and human rights principles. Muslim minority had been permitted to identify as Rohingya prior to the census, but after Buddhist fanatics boycotted it, the government decided that Rohingya could not register as Rohingyas but could register themselves as Bengalis instead (Kipgen, 2020). But the Rohingya who failed to enroll themselves as Bengali and without satisfactory documents were forced to move to the internally displaced camps. American professor of International Relations Lindsey L. Kingston thinks that the Myanmar government took this strategy to discriminate against the

Rohingya so that later it would be easy for the government to exclude them from naturalized citizenship and deportation (Kingston, 2015).

In addition, the 1982 citizenship law establishes a hierarchy among those who hold full citizenship, while others are accorded a lesser right. This practice is fundamentally discriminatory based on ethnicity, race, or religion against the country's long-term inhabitants (UN Universal Periodic Review, 2020). Due to systematic inequality, the country has been suffering from several internal ethnic armed conflicts, including the recent Rohingya and Rakhine conflict (Jabeen, 2018). According to Hla Min, among the officially recognized national races, the largest group is the Burman, accounting for 65 percent. At the same time, the minority groups include the Kachin, Kaya, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Shan, and Rakhine, who account for only 35 percent of the total population (Min, 2000). Additionally, Matthews (2001) notes that there are significant numbers of undocumented ethnic minorities, including Chinese, Anglo-Burmese, and Rohingya, as a result of prolonged internal ethnic armed conflicts since its independence (Matthews, 2001). Besides, the 1962 military takeover resulted in the process of “Burmanization” which can best be described as the creation of majoritarian national identity and this effort replace all other ethnicities, languages, and faiths of the country, for example Rohingya have faced many difficulties following the military coup and have been labeled as “outsiders” or “illigals” in their own nation as well as been subjected to persecution (Ahmed, 2021).

3.6 Conclusion

History indicates that the Rohingyas have been living in Myanmar for many centuries. However, they are not considered citizens, as they lack a formal claim to one of the country’s eight major ethnic groups, which are further divided into 135 subgroups. Their ancestry is also a subject of debate, as some historians argue they are of Arab, Persian, Mughal, Turk, Pathan, and Bengali origin. In contrast, others assert that they are illegal immigrants from what was then East Pakistan during British rule, which is also the viewpoint of the majority of the population and the government of Myanmar. As a result, since Burma’s independence, the Rohingya have been subjected to regular and organized persecution by the government as well as the Buddhist fanatics. Even the country’s 1982 Citizenship Law classified them as "residential foreigners," thereby restricting their fundamental rights and other privileges. Due to the repeated targets of killings and persecution, Rohingyas are forced to seek refuge in

Bangladesh and other nearby countries. Approximately 1.3 million Rohingyas are now being hosted by Bangladesh. Despite international pressure on Myanmar, the repatriation process has yet to start; the stateless Rohingya population waits for the Myanmar government to recognize their ethnicity and restore their citizenship rights.

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Chapter 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides this study, comprising two complementary theories: Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958). These theories collectively address the central research question: How are Rohingya refugees represented across social media platforms in Bangladesh, and how do these representations influence public perceptions? By examining social media content from diverse sources, mainstream media outlets, government accounts, humanitarian organizations, and Rohingya-led pages, this study investigates how different actors portray Rohingyas through various frames such as victimhood, vulnerability, threat, burden, dependency, and resilience. It also analyzes how identity labels, including "Rohingya," "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)," "Refugee," and "Citizens of Rakhine," are deployed and what political meanings these terms convey.

The two theories address distinct but interconnected dimensions of the research problem. Representation Theory addresses the content dimension, namely how meanings about the Rohingya are constructed through language, and how identity labels are used across different platforms and by different actors. Social Influence Theory addresses the reception dimension, how these representations shape public attitudes, and how users engage with, support, or challenge these portrayals through comments, reactions, and shares. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how social media discourses construct, circulate, and contest meanings about the Rohingya, which aligns with the research objectives of this study.

4.2 Stuart Hall's Representation Theory

4.2.1 Overview of the Theory

Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born British cultural theorist, developed Representation Theory at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham during the 1970s and 1980s, with his most comprehensive articulation appearing in his seminal 1997 edited volume *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying*

Practices (Rojek, 2009; Hall, 1997). The theory emerged within the broader framework of Cultural Studies and was significantly influenced by semiotics and post-structuralist thinkers, particularly Michel Foucault. Hall's fundamental purpose was to examine how meaning is constructed and communicated through language, signs, and images, and how these processes of meaning-making are inextricably linked to relations of power.

According to Hall (1997), "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people. It is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs, and images which stand for or represent things" (p. 15). Hall elaborates that "representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" (p. 17). This definition establishes representation not as a passive reflection of pre-existing reality, but as an active, constitutive process through which reality itself is constructed and made meaningful.

Hall's central argument is that representation does not simply mirror reality like a transparent window; instead, it actively constructs reality by shaping how we understand and interpret it. He states that "it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Hall, 1997, p. 25). This constructionist approach recognizes that the words, images, symbols, and narratives we choose to describe people, events, and phenomena fundamentally shape how others perceive and understand them. For instance, calling someone a "Rohingya refugee" creates a different meaning than calling the same person a "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar National" or an "illegal immigrant." Each term carries different political, legal, and social implications that construct the individual's identity and status in fundamentally different ways.

Hall conceptualized culture as operating through a 'circuit' comprising five interconnected moments: Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption, and Regulation. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, these five moments are articulated together in a continuous circuit, with each moment influencing and being influenced by the others. While all five moments are crucial to understanding cultural processes, this study focuses specifically on Representation as the

entry point for analyzing how meaning about the Rohingya is constructed and circulated through social media discourse in Bangladesh.

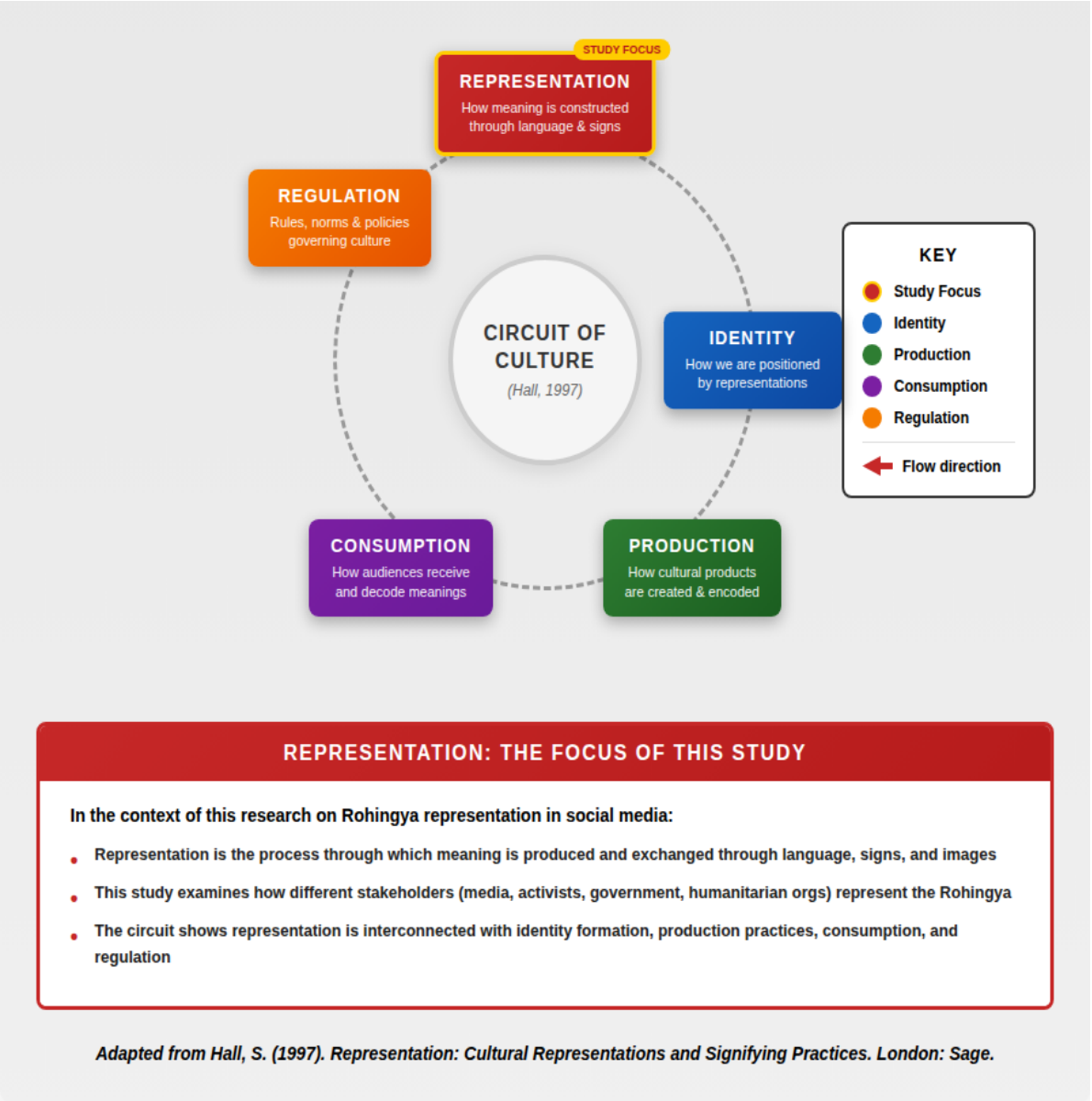


Figure 4.1: Stuart Hall's Circuit of Culture and Representation. The diagram illustrates the five key moments in cultural production and meaning-making: Representation (how meaning is constructed through language and signs), Identity (how we are positioned by representations), Production (how cultural products are created and encoded), Consumption (how audiences receive and decode meanings), and Regulation (rules, norms, and policies governing culture). Representation is highlighted as the focus of this study. Adapted from Hall, 1997

The Circuit of Culture model demonstrates that representation cannot be understood in isolation; it is intimately connected to questions of identity (how the Rohingya are positioned and how they position themselves), production (how media organizations, activists, and governments create content about the Rohingya), consumption (how audiences in Bangladesh interpret and respond to these representations), and regulation (how laws, policies, and social norms shape what can be said about the Rohingya). By focusing on representation while remaining attentive to these interconnections, this study captures the dynamic, multi-directional nature of meaning-making in the context of the Rohingya crisis.

4.2.2 Key Concepts of Representation Theory

Language, Signs, and Power

In Hall's theory of representation, language occupies a central role in the production and communication of meaning within culture. Hall argues that language, broadly defined to include spoken and written words, visual images, symbols, gestures, and signs, is not a neutral or transparent tool for describing pre-existing reality, but rather a site where meaning is actively constructed. Hall (1997) explains that "the term 'language' is being used here comprehensively and inclusively. The writing system or the spoken system of a particular language is obviously a 'language'. However, so are visual images, whether produced by hand, mechanical, electronic, digital, or some other means, when they are used to express meaning. And so are other things which are not 'linguistic' in any ordinary sense: the 'language' of facial expressions or of gesture, for example, or the 'language' of fashion, of clothes, or of traffic lights. Even music is a 'language'" (pp. 18-19). This expansive definition of language is particularly relevant to the analysis of social media, where meaning is constructed through text, images, videos, memes, emojis, and other forms of visual and symbolic communication.

Crucially, Hall emphasizes that language is deeply intertwined with power. Those who control language and media possess the power to define how issues, identities, and communities are represented. This means they can influence who becomes visible, who is silenced, and how different groups are framed, for example, as victims deserving sympathy, as threats requiring containment, or as burdens straining resources. Hall (1997) notes that representation determines "who gets to speak, who is silenced, and how identities are framed" (pp. 42-43). Media representation is thus not merely a descriptive or informational act but a profoundly political one, wherein power operates through language to reinforce, naturalize,

or potentially challenge dominant ideologies. In this view, representation is fundamentally about control over meaning, the capacity to define what is real, standard, and deviant.

Shared Codes and Cultural Meaning

Hall (1997) explains that representation operates through two interconnected systems. First, individuals rely on mental concepts to interpret both real and imagined phenomena, including tangible objects and abstract ideas such as love, justice, and war. Second, these concepts are organized within a broader "system of representation" that arranges and classifies them based on principles such as similarity and difference. This system enables us to generate meaning by establishing structured relationships between concepts. Meaning, therefore, is not inherent in objects or words themselves but is constructed through cultural codes that link concepts and language.

For example, the word "tree" does not naturally belong to the object; instead, it gains meaning through a shared system of representation within a culture. These codes are rules that govern the relationship between our mental concepts (the idea of a tree) and the words or signs we use to represent them ("TREE" in English or "ARBRE" in French). Hall emphasizes that these codes are not universal or natural; they are social conventions, learned over time through cultural participation. Children internalize these systems and, by doing so, become culturally competent individuals capable of making and sharing meaning with others. This understanding highlights the deep connection among language, meaning, and culture and demonstrates why representation is central to how people make sense of the world.

The Constructionist Approach

Hall (1997) identifies three main approaches to representation: the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist. The reflective approach suggests that language mirrors the real world, representing objects, people, and events as they actually exist, a kind of transparent window onto reality. The intentional approach argues that meaning derives solely from the speaker, writer, or artist's intended message, that meaning is what the author intends it to be. In contrast, the constructionist approach, which underpins this study, holds that meaning is not directly given by either the material world or individual intentions but is constructed through language and shared cultural systems.

According to Hall (1997), a shared cultural system comprises common beliefs, values, symbols, norms, language, and practices that are collectively understood and used by members of a society or community. This system shapes how people interpret the world, communicate with each other, and make sense of events, objects, and experiences. For example, in many Western cultures, the color white symbolizes purity and is associated with weddings, whereas in several Asian cultures, white is associated with mourning and funerals. This illustrates how the same symbol can carry fundamentally different meanings depending on the shared cultural system supporting the constructionist view that meaning is culturally produced rather than naturally given. Meaning is also created and shared through various forms of media, particularly modern mass media and global communication platforms (p. 21). The constructionist approach acknowledges the existence of the material world but emphasizes that meaning arises from the symbolic practices and processes, such as language, used to represent our concepts. Thus, things do not inherently carry meaning; instead, meaning is constructed through the social and public system of language.

Representation and Identity Formation

Representation plays a crucial role in shaping identity because meaning and identity are deeply interconnected. According to Hall (1997), "Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity of who we are and with whom we 'belong,' and meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part. Moreover, it is also produced in a variety of different media; especially, these days, in the modern mass media, the means of global communication, by complex technologies, which circulate meaning between different cultures on a scale and with a speed hitherto unknown in history" (p. 3). Hall explains that meaning provides individuals with a sense of who they are and where they belong within social structures.

Hall emphasizes that identity is not something innate, essential, or fixed but is continuously formed and transformed through the meanings we produce and the representations we engage with, particularly within cultural contexts such as media. In this view, identity emerges through language, discourse, and social interaction, rendering it a dynamic, socially constructed process. For marginalized communities like the Rohingya, this has profound implications: the ways they are represented in media directly shape not only how others perceive them but potentially how they perceive themselves. Negative representations that

frame Rohingyas as threats, burdens, or illegitimate can contribute to their social exclusion and marginalization. In contrast, positive or humanizing representations can support recognition of their identity and rights.

Stereotyping and the Politics of Difference

Hall's concept of stereotyping is crucial for understanding how marginalized groups are represented in media. Stereotyping reduces complex, multidimensional individuals and communities to simplified, fixed, and often negative characteristics. Hall (1997) argues that stereotypes work by naturalizing difference, presenting socially constructed distinctions as natural and inevitable, and by marking boundaries between those who "belong" and those who do not. Stereotyping thus serves as a mechanism of symbolic exclusion, positioning certain groups as fundamentally different from others and as outside the boundaries of the normal community.

In the context of refugee representation, stereotyping manifests in recurring frames that reduce diverse refugee populations to homogeneous categories: the helpless victim requiring rescue, the dangerous infiltrator threatening security, the economic burden draining resources, or the criminal element disrupting social order. These stereotypes obscure individual stories, agency, and diversity within refugee communities, replacing complex human experiences with simplified, often dehumanizing images. For the Rohingya specifically, stereotypes circulating in Bangladeshi social media may portray them as ungrateful guests, potential criminals, religious extremists, or economic competitors, each stereotype constructing them as fundamentally different from and threatening to the host community.

Representation as a Site of Struggle

Hall (1997) recognizes that representation is not merely a top-down process of imposition but a site of ongoing struggle in which meanings are "negotiated, contested, and sometimes resisted" (p. 61). This insight is particularly valuable for analyzing the contemporary media landscape, where multiple actors compete to define how issues and identities are understood. While dominant groups may control mainstream media and have greater resources to shape public discourse, marginalized communities are not merely passive recipients of representation. They can and do create counter-narratives that challenge dominant portrayals, assert alternative identities, and contest the meanings attached to them.

Over time, representation theory has evolved to examine how media constructs and circulate images of race, gender, and marginalized communities, particularly in digital and global settings. The rise of social media has created new possibilities for contestation, allowing previously silenced voices to participate in meaning-making processes. For the Rohingya, social media platforms enable diaspora communities and activists to construct and disseminate counter-narratives that challenge stereotypes, assert ethnic identity, document human rights abuses, and demand recognition. This makes representation theory especially valuable for analyzing social media discourse, where narratives, images, and discourses not only shape public opinion but also become sites of active contestation between dominant ideologies and resistant counter-discourses (Ahmed & Hassan, 2024).

4.2.3 Application in Refugee and Minority Studies

Representation Theory has been extensively applied to studies of how refugees, migrants, and minorities are portrayed in media across national and regional contexts. Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), in their analysis of European media coverage during the 2015 refugee crisis, published in Media, Culture & Society, applied Hall's framework to identify distinct representational regimes operating in news coverage. They found that refugees were portrayed through binary representations: either as helpless victims deserving humanitarian intervention and rescue, or as dangerous masses threatening European security, identity, and social cohesion. Their study demonstrated how these binary representations simplified complex human experiences into stereotypes that shaped public perception and policy responses, with significant consequences for how European societies addressed refugee arrivals.

Similarly, Bleiker et al. (2013), writing in the Australian Journal of Political Science, examined photographs of refugees in Australian media and found that most images depicted refugees as distant, anonymous crowds rather than as individuals with faces, names, and stories. This visual representation, they argued, facilitated what they termed "visual dehumanization"—making it easier for the public to perceive refugees as undifferentiated "others" rather than as fellow human beings deserving empathy, protection, and rights. The absence of individualizing imagery contributed to public support for harsh border policies by reducing refugees to abstract categories rather than concrete human persons.

In the European context, Van Gorp (2005), in a study published in the European Journal of Communication, analyzed Belgian newspaper coverage of asylum seekers and identified two dominant frames: the "victim" frame that emphasized refugees' vulnerability, suffering, and need for protection, and the "intruder" frame that portrayed them as threats to national security, cultural identity, and welfare systems. Van Gorp's research demonstrated that different frames produced distinct public attitudes: the victim frame elicited sympathy and support for assistance, whereas the intruder frame elicited hostility and support for restrictive policies. Extending this work, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017), in a study commissioned by the Council of Europe examining media coverage across eight European countries, found that refugees were predominantly represented through frames of vulnerability or threat, with limited attention to their agency, skills, contributions, or individual humanity.

Research on the politics of naming has also drawn significantly on Hall's framework. Zetter (2007), in a landmark article published in the Journal of Refugee Studies, examined how labels such as "refugee," "asylum seeker," "migrant," and "illegal immigrant" are not neutral descriptors but carry significant political and legal weight. Zetter argued that governments strategically deploy different labels to manage public perception, limit legal obligations, and control access to rights and resources, a process he termed "labelling." This insight is directly relevant to this study's investigation of how terms such as "Rohingya," "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals), and "refugee" are used across Bangladeshi social media platforms and the political meanings these terminological choices construct and convey.

4.2.4 Application in Rohingya Studies

Representation Theory has been explicitly applied to analyze media portrayals of the Rohingya in several important studies spanning different national contexts. Brooten et al. (2015), in their study published in the International Communication Gazette, analyzed how Myanmar's state-controlled media portrayed the Rohingya before and during the 2012 violence in Rakhine State. They found that state media systematically employed "othering" language that presented the Rohingya as outsiders who do not belong to Myanmar, as foreign infiltrators rather than indigenous inhabitants. The term "illegal Bengali" was commonly used instead of "Rohingya," effectively denying their ethnic identity, historical presence in Myanmar, and claims to citizenship. Brooten and colleagues demonstrated how this

representational strategy contributed to dehumanizing the Rohingya and creating discursive conditions that facilitated and legitimized violence against them. In China, Ma et al. (2018) applied Stuart Hall's Representation Theory to analyze how the Rohingya are portrayed across different media, including mainstream news, activist media, and their own self-representations. Their study adopts a constructionist approach, aligning with Hall's idea that meaning and identity are produced through media narratives rather than merely reflected. In Thailand, adopting Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation, Kunnawut (2018) explores how Rohingya refugees, along with local Muslim organizations and international NGOs, use alternative and social media to reframe their image. These networks challenge negative mainstream portrayals and produce their own narratives to reconstruct Rohingya identity. Through interviews and media analysis, the study demonstrates how representation serves as a tool for resistance, advocacy, and meaning-making in the Rohingya struggle.

In Bangladesh, several studies have examined how local media represent the Rohingya population. Uddin (2020), writing in Asian Affairs, analyzed Bangladeshi newspaper coverage and found that securitization frames increasingly dominated the discourse. Rohingyas were progressively portrayed as security threats, criminals, and burdens on the host community rather than as people in need of humanitarian protection. This securitization discourse constructs Rohingyas primarily through the lens of threat and risk, emphasizing their potential to destabilize social order, strain resources, and compromise national security. Islam (2019), in a study published in the Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, conducted a critical discourse analysis of Bangladeshi media and documented a significant temporal shift in representation. While initial coverage following the 2017 influx was largely sympathetic, emphasizing humanitarian crisis, suffering, and the need for international response, media narratives gradually became more negative, emphasizing problems attributed to refugees rather than their suffering and needs. This temporal shift in representation from sympathy to hostility is directly relevant to this study's objective of tracking changes in Rohingya representations from 2017 to 2023.

Examining digital media specifically, Hussain (2018), writing in Digital Journalism, studied how the Rohingya crisis was represented on social media platforms and found that representations varied significantly depending on the source. Humanitarian organizations tended to emphasize victimhood and vulnerability, deploying images of suffering women and children to generate sympathy and mobilize donations. Government sources emphasized the

burden on host countries and security concerns, framing the Rohingya presence as a problem to be managed rather than a population to be protected. Meanwhile, Rohingya activists and diaspora groups used social media to construct counter-narratives that challenged both victimhood stereotypes and threat narratives, emphasizing their rights, agency, cultural identity, and historical belonging in Myanmar instead. This diversity of representations across different platform actors is central to this study's research design, which examines content from mainstream media, government accounts, humanitarian organizations, and Rohingya-led pages.

4.2.5 Application to This Study

Representation Theory directly supports the study's objectives in several interconnected ways, providing conceptual and analytical tools to examine how the Rohingya are portrayed across Bangladeshi social media platforms.

First, regarding the mapping of representational frames (Objective 1), Hall's framework provides the conceptual tools to analyze how Rohingyas are portrayed across different frames—victim, threat, vulnerable, burden, dependency, and resilient by different social media actors, including mainstream media outlets, government accounts, humanitarian organizations, and Rohingya-led pages. The theory enables identification of which frames are dominant in the discourse, which actors employ which frames, and how these frames construct particular meanings about the Rohingya community. By attending to the specific language, imagery, and narratives used in social media content, this study can map the representational landscape and identify patterns of meaning-making across different sources and platforms.

Second, regarding the analysis of identity labels (Objective 2), Hall's emphasis on the politics of naming, combined with Zetter's (2007) work on refugee labelling, provides a framework to investigate how terms like "Rohingya," "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals), "Refugee," and "Citizens of Rakhine" carry different political and discursive implications. The term "Rohingya" denotes an ethnic identity and historical belonging, asserting the existence of a distinct people with claims to recognition. "FDMN" is the official Bangladeshi government term that deliberately avoids recognizing either refugee status under international law or ethnic identity. "Refugee" implies legal rights and protections under

international law. The theory explains why different actors choose different labels and what meanings these terminological choices construct for audiences.

Third, regarding counter-narratives (Objective 4), Hall's recognition that representation is a site of struggle in which meanings are contested provides a framework for documenting how Rohingya-led organizations and activists construct alternative narratives to challenge dominant negative portrayals. As Hussain (2018) documented, Rohingya activists use social media to present representations that emphasize rights, agency, cultural heritage, and resilience rather than victimhood or threat. The theory enables analysis of how these counter-narratives work to resist dominant representations, assert alternative identities, and contest the meanings attached to Rohingya communities.

Fourth, regarding temporal changes (Objective 5), the theory helps explain how representations are not fixed but change over time in response to political events, policy shifts, and evolving power relations. As Islam (2019) demonstrated in the Bangladeshi context, media representations of the Rohingya shifted significantly from initial sympathy during the 2017 crisis to more negative framing in subsequent years. Hall's framework provides tools to analyze these temporal shifts, identifying how changing political contexts, government discourse, and public sentiment interact to transform dominant representations.

4.2.6 Conceptualization of Representation in This Study

This study conceptualizes representation as the active process by which meaning about Rohingya refugees is produced on Bangladeshi social media platforms. Drawing on Stuart Hall's (1997) foundational definition, representation is understood as "the production of meaning through language" (p. 28), an active, constitutive process rather than a passive reflection of reality. Hall emphasizes that "it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Hall, 1997, p. 25). This constructionist understanding is grounded in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic framework, which establishes that language operates as "a system of signs" (Culler, 1976, p. 19), where each sign comprises a signifier (the form word, image, sound) and a signified (the concept evoked). Crucially, Saussure demonstrated that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary"there is no natural or inevitable link between the signifier and the signified" (Culler, 1976, p. 19) meaning that meanings are culturally

constructed rather than naturally given, and are subject to historical change since "the sign is completely subject to history" (Culler, 1976, p. 36). Roland Barthes extended this framework by distinguishing between denotation (literal, descriptive meaning) and connotation (broader cultural and ideological meanings), enabling analysis of how social media content operates at multiple levels, what it literally shows, and what deeper meanings it evokes (Hall, 1997, pp. 38-39). Michel Foucault's discursive approach adds attention to power, conceptualizing discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 1997, p. 44), and emphasizing that "knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true" (Hall, 1997, p. 49). This foregrounds questions of who controls representation and whose voices are silenced. Minelle Mahtani (2001) provides practical categories for analyzing problematic representation, identifying under-representation (the absence or marginalization of minority voices) and misrepresentation (stereotypical, negative portrayals), noting that "the media plays a powerful role in shaping attitudes and influencing the construction of identity of viewers" (p. 102). Finally, Joanne Cartner (2009) emphasizes the cumulative nature of representation, arguing that "the power in representation is found in its cumulative nature, when a particular meaning is applied intertextually a regime of representation is created" (pp. 7-8), and that representation has material consequences it is "a site of life and death" (p. 54) that shapes policies, attitudes, and the lived experiences of refugees. Synthesizing these perspectives, this study defines representation as the process through which meanings about Rohingya refugees are constructed through social media posts, images, videos, frames, and identity labels; these meanings are arbitrary and culturally determined, operate at both denotative and connotative levels, are embedded in power relations that determine who speaks and who is silenced, accumulate through repetition to create regimes of representation, can be problematic through under-representation or mis-representation, change over time in response to events and shifting power dynamics, and have real material consequences for how refugees are perceived, treated, and governed.

4.3 Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory

4.3.1 Overview of the Theory

Social Influence Theory (SIT) constitutes a foundational framework in social psychology that examines how individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped through their interactions with others and the broader social environment. Herbert C. Kelman, an American social psychologist at Harvard University, introduced this theory in his seminal 1958 article "Compliance, Identification, and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change," published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Kelman and Hamilton (1989) define social influence as a change in an individual's behavior resulting from persuasion or pressure exerted by another person or group. The theory emerged during a period of significant social and political transformation, including the civil rights movement and anti-war protests, providing crucial insights into how people conform to rules and social norms even when they may not genuinely believe in them (Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2024).

Kelman's (1958) central contribution to social psychology lies in his identification of three distinct processes through which social influence operates: *compliance*, *identification*, and *internalization*. Each process represents a qualitatively different mechanism of attitude change, characterized by distinct underlying motivations and varying degrees of permanence. The theory argues that attitude change is not a singular phenomenon but occurs through different pathways depending on the individual's relationship to the influencing agent and the nature of the influence situation. The literature on social influence provides extensive evidence that individuals, regardless of personal differences, are frequently influenced by others, often without fully realizing it (Estrada et al., 2011). This framework proves particularly valuable for understanding how media representations shape public perceptions and attitudes toward marginalized communities such as refugees.

Figure 4.3 illustrates these three processes as a pyramid structure, demonstrating the progression from surface-level compliance at the base to deep internalization at the apex. The pyramid metaphor reflects both the depth of attitude change (increasing from bottom to top) and its durability (temporary at the base, permanent at the top). Each level includes specific examples from the Rohingya context to demonstrate how these processes operate in social media discourse about the displaced community in Bangladesh.

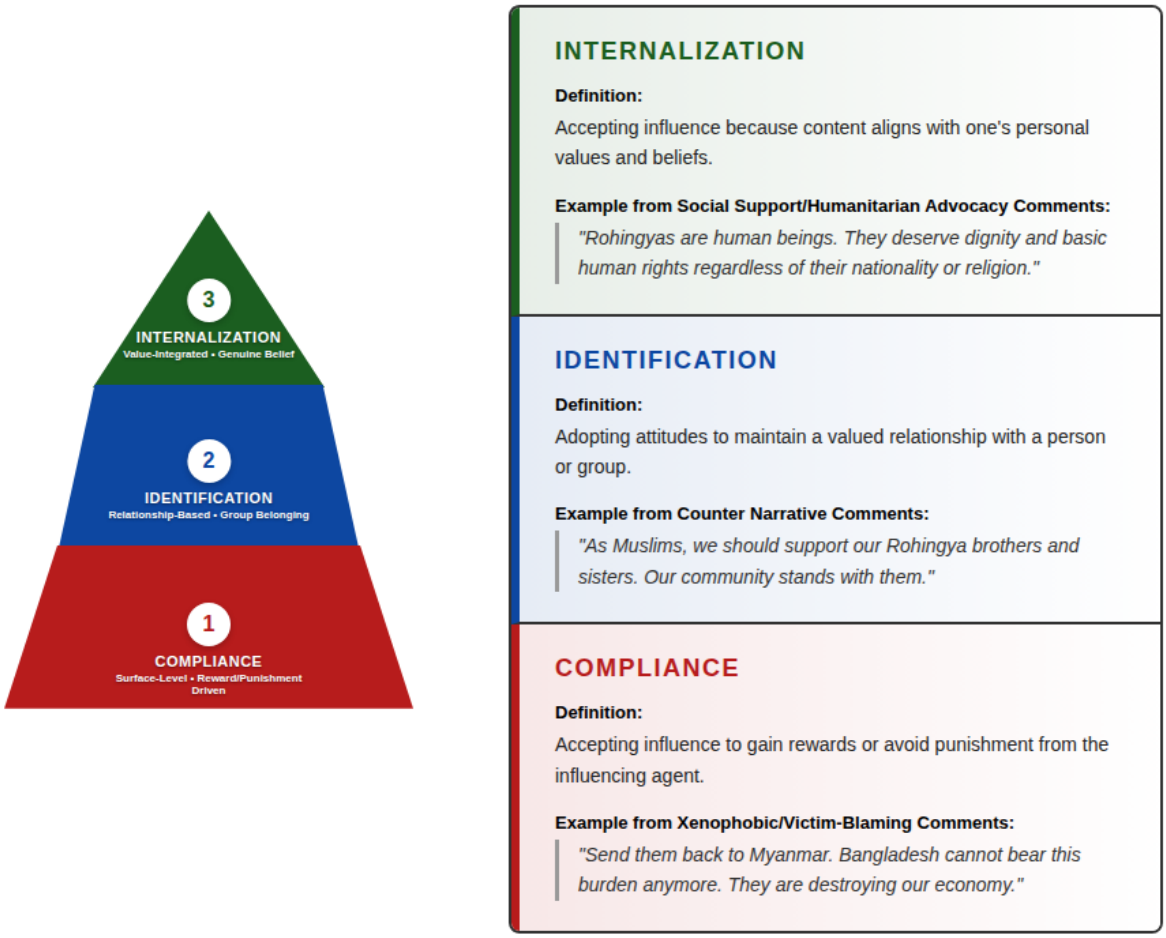


Figure 4.2: Kelman's Three Processes of Social Influence. The pyramid illustrates the three levels of attitude change: (1) Compliance at the base, surface-level acceptance driven by rewards/punishments; (2) Identification in the middle, relationship-based acceptance tied to group belonging; (3) Internalization at the apex, value-integrated, genuine belief. The diagram includes examples of the Rohingya context for each level and a comparison table of key characteristics. Adapted from Kelman, 1958.

The Three Processes of Social Influence

Compliance represents the first process, occurring when individuals publicly adopt certain behaviors or express particular opinions to gain rewards or avoid punishments from others, without privately accepting these positions (Kelman, 1958). The attitude change under compliance is typically superficial and remains dependent on the influencing agent's surveillance. The individual adopts a behavior or attitude solely to elicit a favorable response from another person or group, and this adoption is contingent on the influence agent's ability to monitor and sanction behavior. Kelman (1958, 2017) describes compliance as occurring

when an individual changes their behavior to gain rewards or avoid punishment, without genuinely believing in the behavior, for example, expressing certain views publicly to avoid criticism while privately holding different opinions. In the context of social media discourse about the Rohingya, compliance manifests when users express opinions that align with their network's dominant view to avoid criticism, social exclusion, or negative engagement, even if they privately hold different beliefs about the refugee community. For instance, a user might share or endorse anti-Rohingya content because such content is popular in their network, despite personally feeling sympathy for refugees.

Identification, the second process, occurs when individuals adopt attitudes because they want to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person or group (Kelman, 1958, 2017). Unlike compliance, the individual genuinely holds the adopted opinions; however, their acceptance is intrinsically tied to social relationships rather than to the substantive content of those beliefs. The satisfying aspect of this relationship may derive from a sense of belonging, admiration for the influencer, or an aspiration to belong to a group. Identification involves adopting behavior to maintain a satisfying relationship or role with another person or group, such as imitating a mentor, conforming to group norms to feel accepted, or aligning with a community one admires. On social media platforms, identification occurs when Bangladeshi users adopt attitudes that align with groups they admire or aspire to join, whether nationalist groups emphasizing Bangladesh's security interests, humanitarian organizations promoting compassion and human rights, religious communities advocating Muslim solidarity with fellow Muslims, or activist networks challenging dominant narratives about the Rohingya.

Internalization, the third and deepest process, occurs when individuals genuinely accept influence because the induced behavior or belief is congruent with their value system (Kelman, 1958). This represents the most stable form of attitude change. The new attitude becomes integrated into the individual's personal value system and persists independently of external social pressure or the presence of the influencing agent. Internalization occurs when a person fully accepts a behavior or belief because it aligns with their values, such as following expert advice that resonates with their personal views and integrating it into their worldview. Kelman (2017) elaborates that internalized attitudes become part of one's identity structure and guide behavior across diverse contexts. On social media, internalization occurs when repeated exposure to certain representations leads users to genuinely believe particular

views about the Rohingya because these views align with their core values, whether those values emphasize national security, religious brotherhood, the concept of the Muslim ummah, humanitarian compassion, or human rights principles. These processes highlight the different motivations and levels of genuine belief involved in how others influence individuals.

4.3.2 Theoretical Development and Extension

While initially rooted in social psychology to understand group dynamics, persuasion, and attitude change, Social Influence Theory has since been extended into communication studies, media research, and the analysis of political behavior (Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2024). In media studies, particularly regarding digital platforms, SIT is instrumental in explaining how people conform to dominant narratives and adopt shared perspectives through peer influence and social validation mechanisms. The theory's applicability to media effects research has grown significantly with the proliferation of social media platforms, on which influence processes operate through visible, quantifiable engagement metrics that make social consensus observable in real time.

Cialdini's (2001, 2009) influential work on persuasion complements Kelman's framework by identifying "social proof" as a fundamental principle of influence. Social proof operates when individuals, uncertain about how to think or behave in ambiguous situations, look to others' actions for guidance. In the digital era, especially on social media, influence manifests through mechanisms like likes, shares, retweets, and comment sections, which serve as visible indicators of social consensus (Cialdini, 2001). Individuals often adopt opinions that appear popular within their peer groups or echo broader cultural and national sentiments (De la Haye et al., 2017). When a social media post about the Rohingya receives substantial positive engagement, it signals that many people agree with its content, leading others to assume this represents the correct or socially acceptable position a phenomenon with significant implications for how public attitudes toward refugees are formed and reinforced.

De la Haye et al. (2017) further extend this understanding by demonstrating how individuals frequently adopt opinions that appear popular within their peer groups or echo broader cultural and national sentiments. In online spaces characterized by echo chambers or algorithmically curated feeds, people repeatedly encounter similar opinions. Putri and Khairunissa (2024) argue that this repetition increases the likelihood that individuals will internalize these commonly expressed views as their own, transforming what may begin as

compliance into deeper identification and eventual internalization. This progression through Kelman's three processes illustrates how social media can facilitate gradual but profound shifts in public attitudes. Initial conformity to visible opinion trends can evolve into genuine belief integration over time.

4.3.3 Social Influence in Digital Media Contexts

The extension and validation of Kelman's theory in digital media contexts has been undertaken by numerous researchers, demonstrating the framework's continued relevance in contemporary communication environments. Social media platforms make social influence visible and measurable through engagement metrics, transforming previously private conformity processes into public, observable phenomena. This visibility creates feedback loops in which individuals can assess community consensus in real time, calibrating their expressed attitudes accordingly and observing the social rewards or punishments that follow different positions.

The power of social media influence was demonstrated empirically by Bond et al. (2012) in a landmark study published in Nature. Their experiment involving 61 million Facebook users during the 2010 U.S. congressional elections found that social messages showing friends' voting behavior significantly increased voter turnout compared to informational messages alone. This large-scale study provided robust evidence that observing friends' actions on social media directly influences people's own behavior—a finding with significant implications for understanding how attitudes toward refugees and displaced populations spread through social networks. The study demonstrated that identification-based influence, in which individuals align their behavior with their social relationships, constitutes a powerful mechanism of behavioral change in digital environments.

Research has also examined how authority figures and credible sources influence attitudes on social media. Messing and Westwood (2014), in a study published in Communication Research, found that social endorsements from friends and contacts often outweighed traditional partisan cues in shaping how people evaluated news content. However, content from official sources, government accounts, established news organizations, and recognized experts still carries significant authority and influence, particularly on politically contested issues such as refugee policy. This dual-influence mechanism, operating through both peer networks and institutional authority, creates a complex landscape in which attitudes toward

the Rohingya may be shaped by multiple, sometimes competing, sources of social influence operating through different processes.

Bail et al. (2018), in a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, examined how exposure to opposing political views on social media affects attitudes. Surprisingly, they found that such exposure can actually reinforce existing attitudes rather than change them, a phenomenon known as the "backfire effect." This highlights the complex dynamics of social influence in digital environments where users can selectively engage with content that confirms their existing beliefs and may react defensively to counter-attitudinal information. This finding has important implications for understanding why negative attitudes toward the Rohingya may persist despite counter-narratives, as users who already hold negative views may become more entrenched when exposed to pro-refugee content from perceived out-group sources.

4.3.4 Application in Refugee and Minority Studies

Social Influence Theory has been productively applied to understand how public attitudes toward refugees and minorities are formed, maintained, and potentially changed. Esses et al. (2013), in a comprehensive study published in the Journal of Social Issues, examined the role of media in shaping attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in Western countries. They found that media portrayals significantly influenced public opinion through the mechanisms Kelman identified: when media repeatedly framed refugees as threats to security and economic welfare, public attitudes became more negative; conversely, when media emphasized refugees' vulnerability and need for protection, attitudes became more sympathetic. Their research demonstrated the power of repeated exposure to particular representations in shaping public attitudes—a key mechanism operating through Kelman's concept of internalization, wherein mediated messages become integrated into individuals' belief systems through sustained exposure.

Verkuyten (2018), in his comprehensive volume The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity published by Routledge, examined how group identities influence attitudes toward refugees and ethnic minorities. His research found that people who strongly identified with their national in-group tended to view refugees and immigrants more negatively, perceiving them as threats to national identity, cultural values, and economic resources. Conversely, those who identified with broader humanitarian values or superordinate identities (e.g., "global citizen"

or a shared religious identity such as the Muslim ummah) exhibited more welcoming attitudes toward refugees. This research directly illustrates Kelman's identification process attitudes toward refugees are substantially shaped by the groups people identify with and wish to belong to. In the Bangladeshi context, this suggests that individuals' attitudes toward the Rohingya may depend significantly on whether they primarily identify with national Bangladeshi identity, emphasizing security and resource concerns, or with broader Muslim solidarity, emphasizing religious brotherhood.

Extending this work to the digital context, Siapera et al. (2018), in a study published in the Journal of Communication, examined racist discourse against refugees on social media in Greece and found that users frequently referenced national identity and in-group membership when expressing hostile attitudes. Comments explicitly invoking national identity, such as "as Greeks, we must protect our country," illustrated how identification with national groups shaped the expression of anti-refugee attitudes. Their study also found evidence of compliance dynamics: users were more likely to express hostile views in comment threads where such views were already dominant and receiving positive engagement, suggesting that visible social proof of anti-refugee sentiment encouraged further expression of similar views through conformity pressures.

4.3.5 Application in Rohingya Studies

Research on public attitudes toward the Rohingya in Bangladesh provides substantial evidence of social influence processes at work across all three of Kelman's mechanisms. Ullah (2014), in a study published in the Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, documented how Bangladeshi public attitudes toward Rohingya refugees shifted dramatically over time. Initially, many Bangladeshis welcomed the Rohingya due to religious solidarity (both groups being predominantly Muslim) and ethnic-linguistic ties (many Rohingya speak a dialect similar to Chittagonian Bengali). However, as the refugee population grew and economic pressures increased, attitudes became progressively more negative, influenced by media coverage emphasizing security threats, criminal activity, and resource competition. This temporal shift reflects how social influence, operating through media discourse, government statements, and community discussions, can transform public attitudes from sympathy to hostility, demonstrating the dynamic nature of the three influence processes Kelman identified.

Riley et al. (2017), in a BBC Media Action report, conducted audience research in Bangladesh and found that media consumption significantly shaped attitudes toward the Rohingya. Bangladeshis who consumed more news media were more likely to hold opinions, positive or negative, that aligned with the dominant frames in the news sources they consumed. Those who primarily watched government-aligned media were more likely to view the Rohingya as a burden on national resources and a security concern. At the same time, those who consumed content from humanitarian organizations expressed greater sympathy and support for refugee assistance. This finding illustrates how exposure to different sources of influence yields distinct patterns of attitude formation, a key insight from Kelman's theory: the source of influence significantly determines which attitudes are adopted and how.

Research has also documented how social media shapes explicit attitudes toward the Rohingya in the Bangladeshi context. Ahmed et al. (2019), in a study published in Telematics and Informatics, examined Facebook use in Bangladesh and found that users' attitudes toward social issues were significantly influenced by the content they encountered in their algorithmic feeds and the visible reactions of their Facebook friends. When harmful content about the Rohingya received high engagement (likes, comments, shares), it signaled social acceptability. It influenced others to adopt similar views, demonstrating the social proof mechanism described by Cialdini (2009) operating through Kelman's compliance process. Conversely, users embedded in networks in which humanitarian content was shared and positively engaged with were more likely to express sympathetic attitudes, indicating identification with pro-refugee social groups.

The application of Social Influence Theory to the Rohingya context reveals the complex interplay of compliance, identification, and internalization in shaping public discourse. Compliance manifests when Bangladeshi social media users modify their expressed opinions about the Rohingya to align with perceived community consensus, sharing or endorsing content critical of refugees to avoid social criticism or adverse reactions from their networks. Identification occurs when users adopt attitudes consistent with groups they admire or wish to affiliate with—whether nationalist groups emphasizing Bangladesh's security interests, humanitarian organizations advocating for refugee rights, or religious communities promoting Muslim solidarity. Internalization represents the deepest level of attitude change, occurring when individuals, through sustained exposure to particular representations and engagement with specific communities, come to genuinely believe in certain positions about

the Rohingya as expressions of their core values regarding national interest, religious duty, or humanitarian responsibility.

4.3.6 Application to This Study

Social Influence Theory provides essential analytical tools for addressing the reception dimension of this study's research question: How do representations of Rohingya refugees influence public perceptions in Bangladesh? The theory directly supports several research objectives by providing a framework for understanding how social media users engage with, respond to, and are shaped by different representations of the Rohingya community.

Regarding user engagement patterns (Objective 3), the theory provides a framework for analyzing how Bangladeshi social media users respond to and engage with different representations of the Rohingya. By examining user comments supportive, hostile, or neutral this study can identify patterns corresponding to Kelman's three processes. Compliance patterns emerge when users express opinions that mirror the dominant sentiment evident in comment threads, particularly when such expressions appear strategic or superficial. Identification patterns become evident when users explicitly invoke group membership in their comments, expressing views linked to national identity ("as a Bangladeshi"), religious affiliation ("as a Muslim"), or other social categories. Internalization patterns manifest when users express deeply held, consistent beliefs about the Rohingya that appear to reflect genuine value commitments rather than social conformity.

Regarding temporal changes in attitudes (Objective 5), Social Influence Theory helps explain how public attitudes shift over time in response to changing representations, events, and dominant narratives. As documented by Ullah (2014) and Islam (2019), attitudes toward the Rohingya in Bangladesh changed significantly between 2017 and subsequent years. By analyzing user comments from 2017 to 2023, this study traces how dominant attitudes in social media discourse shifted from initial sympathy during the 2017 humanitarian crisis to growing ambivalence during repatriation debates, and then to increasingly negative attitudes as the refugee presence persisted without resolution. The theory explains these shifts as products of social influence processes: compliance with changing dominant narratives in media and government discourse, identification with groups whose positions evolved, and internalization of new attitudes through repeated exposure to particular frames and representations.

Regarding the comparison of digital and ground-level perspectives (Objective 6), the theory illuminates the relationship between social media representations and the attitudes held by different stakeholders in offline contexts. By comparing how the Rohingya are represented and discussed on social media platforms with perspectives from local host communities, Rohingya refugees, journalists, NGO workers, and government officials, this study can examine how social influence operates across online and offline spaces. The theory provides tools to assess whether social media reflects, amplifies, or diverges from ground-level attitudes—and how digital influence processes may reinforce or potentially challenge attitudes formed through direct experience and face-to-face interaction.

Regarding counter-narratives and resistance (Objective 4), while Representation Theory addresses the content of counter-narratives, Social Influence Theory explains the social dynamics through which alternative representations gain traction or face resistance. The theory illuminates why counter-narratives from Rohingya-led organizations may struggle to achieve widespread acceptance when dominant anti-refugee sentiments are already established and socially reinforced. Conversely, it helps explain how counter-narratives can succeed by leveraging identification processes appealing to shared Muslim identity, humanitarian values, or regional solidarity to create alternative communities of influence that support more positive representations of the Rohingya.

4.4 Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory together provide a comprehensive framework that addresses the central research question: *How are Rohingya refugees represented across social media platforms in Bangladesh, and how do these representations influence public perceptions?* The two theories are complementary, each addressing distinct yet interconnected aspects of the relationship between media content and public attitudes. Their integration enables analysis of both the production and reception of meaning in social media discourse about the Rohingya.

Representation Theory addresses the first part of the research question: *How are Rohingyas represented?* Drawing on Hall's framework and its application in refugee studies by scholars such as Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), Brooten et al. (2015), and Uddin (2020), this theory provides analytical tools to examine the frames used to portray Rohingyas (victim, threat, burden, vulnerable, dependent, resilient), the identity labels employed (Rohingya, FDMN,

refugee), how different sources construct different representations, and how counter-narratives challenge dominant portrayals. The theory explains the production and content of representations—what social media says about the Rohingya and how meaning is constructed through language, imagery, and discourse.

Social Influence Theory addresses the second part of the research question: *How do these representations influence public perceptions?* Drawing on Kelman's framework and its application in refugee attitude research by scholars such as Esses et al. (2013), Verkuyten (2018), and Ullah (2014), this theory provides tools to analyze how users respond to different representations through comments and engagement, what patterns of supportive, hostile, or neutral responses emerge, how group identity and social proof shape attitudes, and how attitudes have shifted over time from 2017 to 2023. The theory explains the reception and effects of representations, how social media shapes public perceptions of the Rohingya through compliance, identification, and internalization processes.

Together, these frameworks fulfill the objectives of this study by explaining how social media discourse constructs, circulates, and contests meanings about the Rohingya. Representation Theory explains how different actors construct meanings and how they create representations through language, labels, imagery, and frames. Social Influence Theory explains the *circulation of meanings*, how representations spread through social networks via compliance, identification, and social proof, and the contestation of meanings, how users accept, reject, or challenge representations through their engagement, comments, and counter-narratives. The integration of these theories provides a robust analytical framework for examining the complex relationship between media content and public attitudes in the digital age.

Figure 4.1 below illustrates the integrated theoretical framework, showing how Hall's Representation Theory (which explains the content and construction of meaning) connects with Kelman's Social Influence Theory (which explains the reception and attitude formation). The diagram illustrates the flow from representation construction on the left, through the integration zone in the center, where social media dissemination occurs, to attitude formation on the right, ultimately yielding observable research outcomes in public perceptions of the Rohingya.

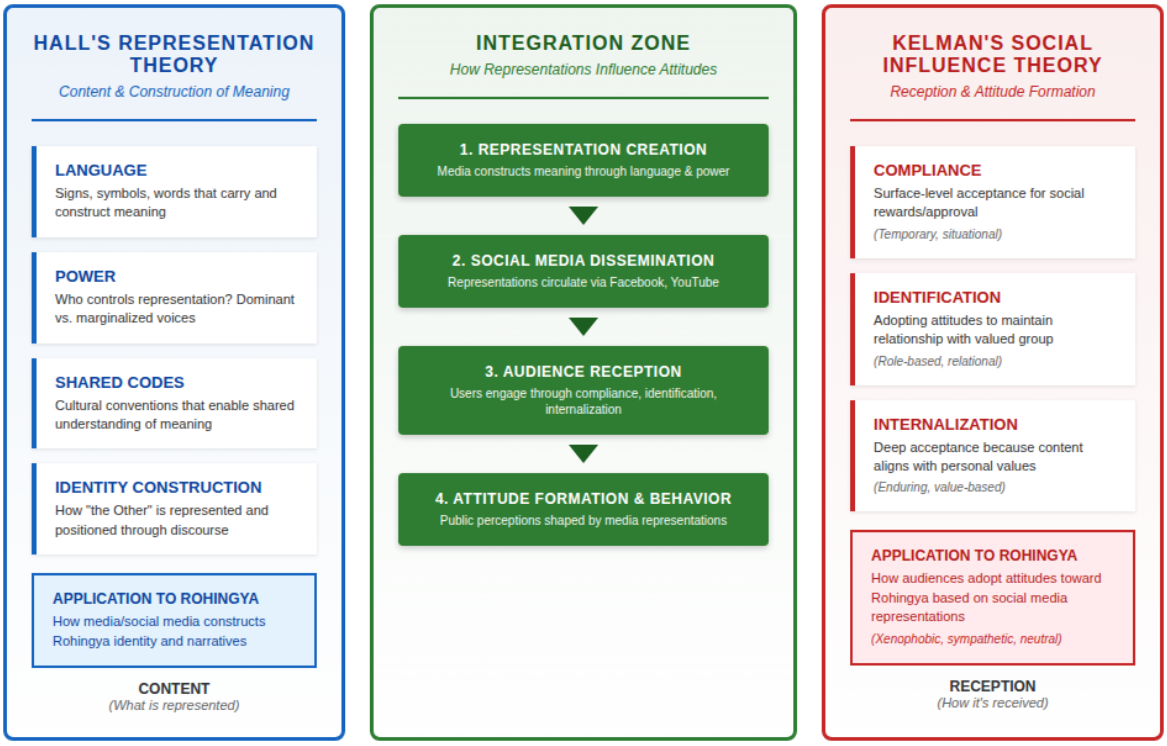


Figure 4.3: Integrated Theoretical Framework: Hall's Representation Theory and Kelman's Social Influence Theory. The left side depicts Hall's concepts (Language, Power, Shared Codes, Identity Construction) that explain the construction of content. The right side depicts Kelman's processes (Compliance, Identification, Internalization) that explain attitude formation. The center illustrates how representations influence attitudes through social media dissemination. The bottom shows research outcomes: negative, mixed, and positive attitudes toward the Rohingya. Source: Original conceptual framework developed for this study, integrating Hall (1997) and Kelman (1958, 1961).

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, this integrated framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining how media representations of the Rohingya are constructed by various stakeholders (mainstream media, humanitarian organizations, government bodies, and Rohingya activists) and how these representations subsequently shape public attitudes through the three processes of social influence. This dual-theory approach enables the study to capture both the production side (what is being said about Rohingyas and how) and the reception side (how audiences respond to and internalize these messages), providing a holistic understanding of the representation-perception nexus in the context of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework guiding this study, comprising two complementary theories that address different dimensions of the research problem. Hall's Representation Theory (1997) provides conceptual and analytical tools for examining how the Rohingya are portrayed on social media, the frames, identity labels, imagery, and narratives employed by different sources. This theory has been successfully applied in studies of refugee representation in Myanmar (Brooten et al., 2015), Europe (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Van Gorp, 2005; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017), Australia (Bleiker et al., 2013), and Bangladesh (Uddin, 2020; Islam, 2019), demonstrating its utility for analyzing media portrayals of marginalized communities across diverse contexts.

The conceptualization of representation developed in Section 4.2.6 synthesizes perspectives from Hall, Saussure, Barthes, Foucault, Mahtani, and Cartner to establish a comprehensive understanding of how representation operates in this study. This synthesis defines representation as the active process through which meanings about Rohingya refugees are constructed through social media content, operating through arbitrary and culturally determined signs at both denotative and connotative levels, embedded in power relations, accumulating through repetition to create regimes of representation, potentially problematic through under-representation or mis-representation, changing over time, and having material consequences for refugees' lives.

Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) provides tools for understanding how these representations shape public attitudes through the distinct processes of compliance, identification, and internalization. This theory has been applied to study attitudes toward refugees and minorities (Esses et al., 2013; Verkuyten, 2018), validated in large-scale social media research (Bond et al., 2012; Bail et al., 2018), and applied in the Bangladeshi context (Ullah, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2019), demonstrating its continued relevance for understanding attitude formation in digital environments.

By combining these two theories, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing both the content of Rohingya representations on Bangladeshi social media and the public attitudes expressed in response to these representations. This theoretical foundation supports all objectives of this study, enabling systematic examination of representational frames, identity labels, user engagement patterns, counter-narratives, temporal changes,

digital versus ground-level perspectives, and the overall processes through which social media discourses construct, circulate, and contest meanings about the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The framework acknowledges both the power of media representations to shape public perception and the agency of audiences to engage with, resist, and contest these representations, thereby providing a nuanced approach to understanding the complex dynamics of refugee representation in the digital age.

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Chapter 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Research methodology is a systematic approach for addressing research problems. It can be understood as the science of conducting research. This study examines the standard procedures researchers follow to address their research problems and provides justifications for each approach (Kothari, 2004). According to Goundar (2012), "research methodology" represents a systematic approach to scientific inquiry that researchers use to explore a topic and draw conclusions. Frankfort and Nachmias suggest that research methodology encompasses a framework of definitive principles and processes that underpin research and serve as a basis for evaluating claims to knowledge (Frankfort & Nachmias, 2007).

This chapter outlines the research approach and techniques utilized to investigate the portrayal of the displaced Rohingya population and their related difficulties on social media in Bangladesh. The study predominantly employed a qualitative methodology, using qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, and in-depth interviews to examine representations of the Rohingya, prevailing narratives about them, and the perspectives of social media users. It also explores how the Rohingya use social media to express their identities and how the public perceives this often-overlooked community.

While the study primarily focuses on qualitative data, it also includes quantitative data, such as percentages and frequencies of reactions like "angry," "like," "sad," and "haha." For example, if 75% of responses to a repatriation post are "angry," it indicates that users are dissatisfied with the situation. These quantitative insights bolster the qualitative themes by providing numerical evidence that supports public perceptions and emerging trends regarding the displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh.

This study draws on perspectives from various sources, including mainstream media, Rohingya activists, humanitarian organizations, social media users, and local communities, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the framing and discourse surrounding the Rohingya crisis. It references prior literature on qualitative assessments of representations of

displaced populations, including studies by Ma et al. (2018) and Sunata & Yildiz (2018), which examined media representations of Rohingya and Syrian refugees, respectively.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the procedures used in the study, ensuring transparency and accuracy in the research process. By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study addresses its core research questions and enhances understanding of how the Rohingya are represented on social media in Bangladesh.

5.2 Research Design and Approach

Choosing the research approach is an important step in the research design process, as it determines how to obtain the most useful information for the study (Sileyew, 2019). This study utilizes a qualitative research design to investigate the representation of the displaced Rohingya population and associated issues on social media in Bangladesh. Qualitative research offers a comprehensive, interpretative insight into the social realm by analyzing individuals' experiences, viewpoints, and histories within their social and material contexts (Brennen, 2021). This technique prioritizes data interpretation over numerical analysis, in line with Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) argument that qualitative research underscores the researcher's intimate engagement with the subject and the contextual factors that influence the investigation. This qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for this study, as it seeks to understand popular perceptions of the Rohingya, prevailing themes surrounding them, the host community's attitudes towards them, and the content-creation process related to the Rohingya issue. The project will elucidate the lived experiences of the Rohingya and their depiction in digital spaces using qualitative content analysis, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis. Furthermore, quantitative methods were used in this study to classify qualitative data, including social media users' responses and post categories related to the Rohingya.

Figure 5.1 shows the overall design and methods used in this investigation. The flowchart illustrates how the study topics influence the qualitative research design, which uses two main data sources: social media content (348 posts and 33,918 comments from Facebook and YouTube) and in-depth interviews with 22 participants. Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis are used to examine these data sources, and the results are cross-checked to ensure validity and reliability.

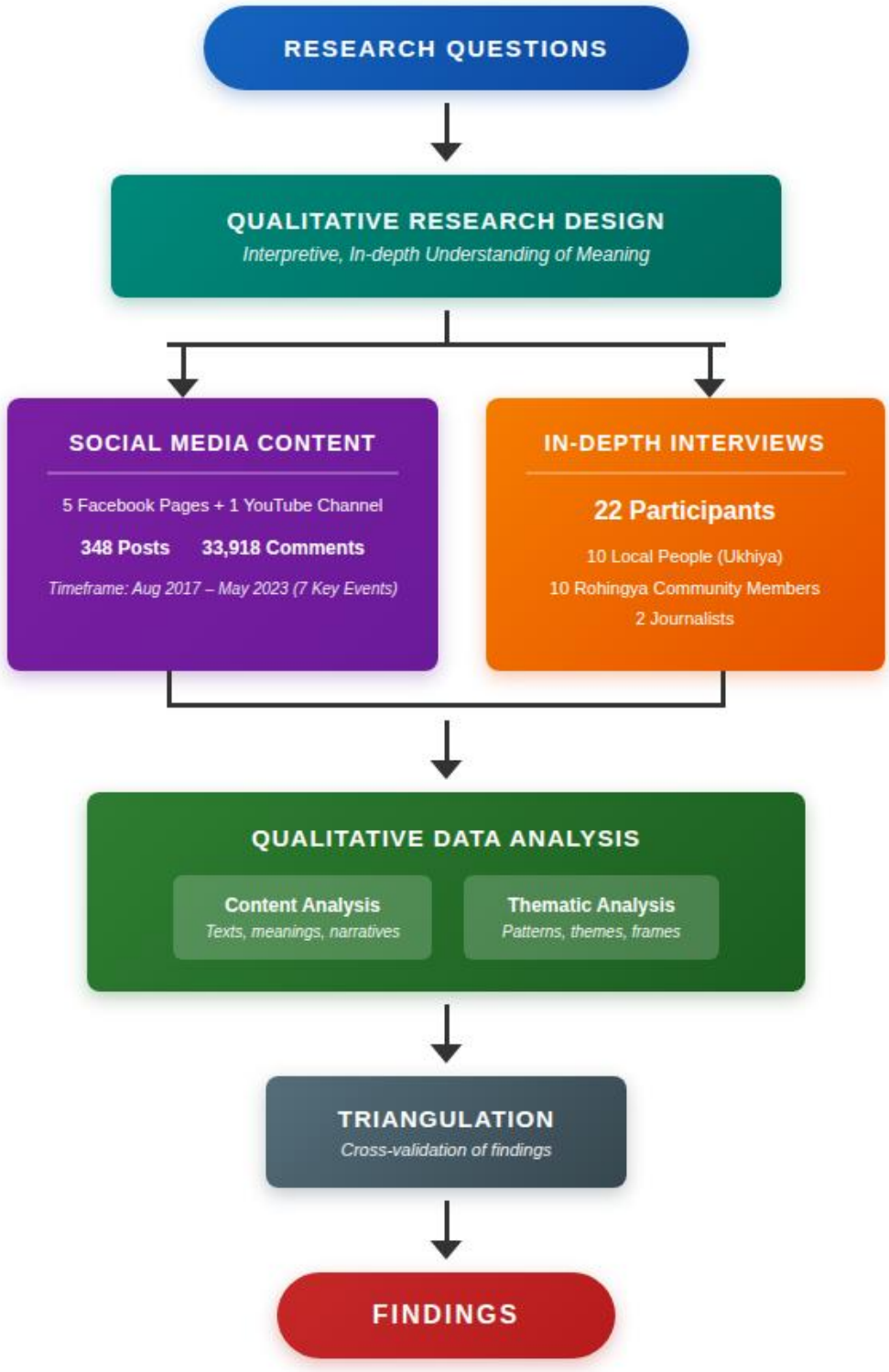


Figure 5.1: Research Design and Methodology Flowchart. The figure shows the qualitative study design, which moves from research questions to two data sources (social media materials and in-depth interviews), qualitative data analysis methods (content analysis and thematic analysis), triangulation, and, finally, to research conclusions. Source: Original diagram created for this research.

The qualitative research technique aligns with prior studies on media representation of refugees. For example, Mohanty (2022) used qualitative methods to examine how the media in India portrayed Rohingya refugees in print and online. In the same way, Sonia (2023) conducted a qualitative study of social media data examining how Rohingya refugees were portrayed on Twitter and analyzing both visual and written content from refugees and humanitarian groups. Aldamen (2023) employed qualitative methods to examine the negative portrayal of Syrian refugees on social media in Jordan and Turkey. Rothenberger and Schmitt (2024) performed a qualitative examination of YouTube content from Al Jazeera, the BBC, CNN, and Sky News, which were widely viewed in Europe, covering the period from 2011 to 2021. The study examines the representation of refugee women in the media, emphasizing their marginalization and clichéd portrayal as fragile victims.

5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

5.3.1 Data Sources

This research employs two principal data sources: social media platforms and human participants. In Bangladesh, social media is very important for affecting public opinion. When topics go viral, they can even change government policies. When the Rohingya exodus became news in 2017, Facebook played a big role in public discussions. This shows its importance as a data source for social media studies (Rashid & Al-Zaman, 2023).

The majority of the data was gathered from Facebook and YouTube. We chose these two social media platforms because they have large user bases in Bangladesh. DataReportal said that as of January 2024, Bangladesh had 52.90 million Facebook users, the most of any social media site. YouTube has 33.60 million users, and TikTok was close behind with 37.36 million. TikTok has more users than YouTube, but most of its content is brief, so YouTube is the better platform for this study because it focuses on long-form content. Instagram had 6.50 million users, and X (formerly Twitter) had 1.69 million users, both fewer than Facebook's 2.89 million users.

The study selected five prominent Facebook pages and three prominent YouTube channels related to news agencies, humanitarian groups, Rohingya advocacy groups, and government bodies to obtain representative insights. We chose well-known social media sites for our study based on their follower and subscriber counts and overall popularity.

Figure 5.2 shows the multi-platform data-collection framework and how the platforms are configured by stakeholder type. The UNHCR Bangladesh YouTube Channel and the RRRC YouTube Channel were initially included in the study but were later excluded from the analysis because there were no posts about the Rohingya during the study period. It should be noted, however, that both channels have a lot of Rohingya-related content that falls outside the given time frame.

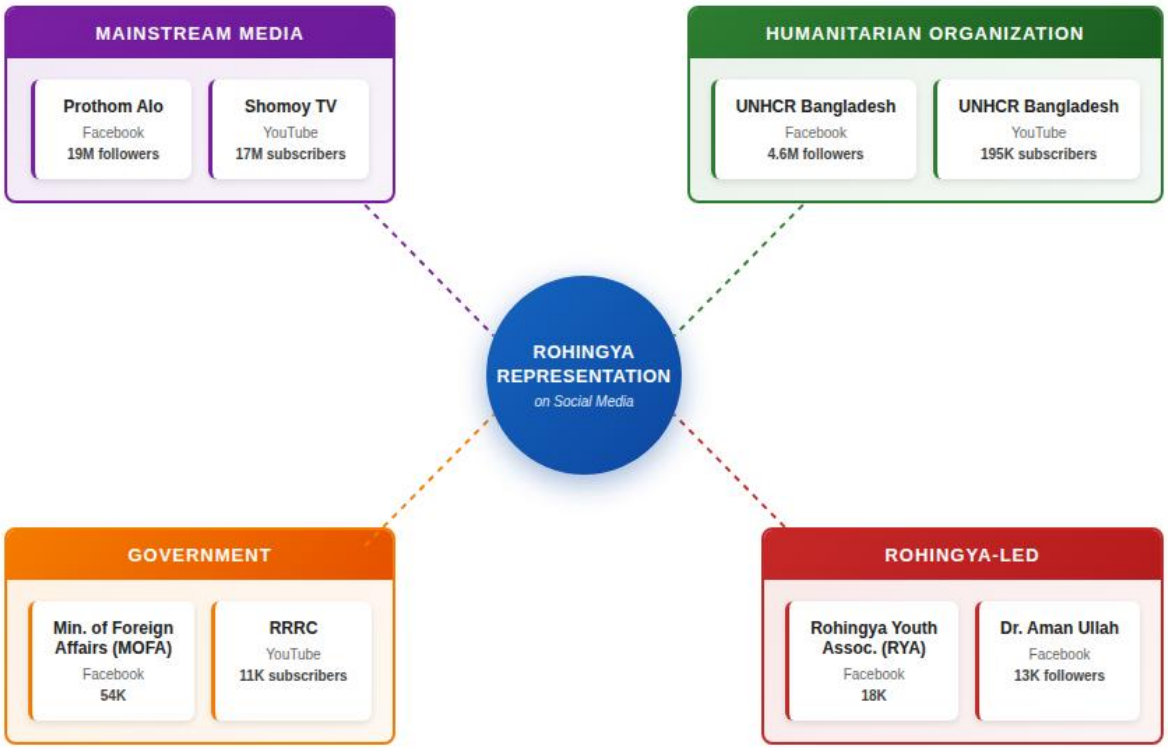


Figure 5.2: Multi-Platform Data Collection Framework. This diagram illustrates eight social media platforms categorized by four types of stakeholders: Mainstream Media (including the Prothom Alo Facebook page and Shomoy TV's YouTube channel), Humanitarian Organizations (UNHCR's Facebook page and YouTube channel), Government (MOFA's Facebook page and RRRC's YouTube Channel), and Rohingya-led initiatives (RYA and Mr. Aman Ullah's Facebook pages). Source: Original diagram developed for this study.

Note that the UNHCR Bangladesh YouTube Channel and the RRRC YouTube Channel were excluded from this analysis due to the absence of relevant posts related to the Rohingyas within the selected time frame.

Table 5.1: Social Media Data Sources

Platform	Organization Type	Page/Channel Name	Followers/Subscribers
Facebook	Mainstream Media	Daily Prothom Alo	19 million (F)
Facebook	Government Organization	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh	54,000 (F)
Facebook	Activist Group	Rohingya Youth Association (RYA)	18,000 (F)
Facebook	Humanitarian Organization	UNHCR, Bangladesh	4.6 million (F)
Facebook	Individual Activist	Mr. Aman Ullah	13,000 (F)
YouTube	Mainstream Media	Shomoy TV	17 million (S)
YouTube	Humanitarian Organization	UNHCR, Bangladesh	195,000 (S)
YouTube	Government Organization	Office of the RRRC	11,000 (S)
YouTube	Individual Activist	*Not found*	n/a
YouTube	Activist Group	*Not found*	n/a

Note: F = Followers; S = Subscribers

The chosen metrics for the Facebook pages and YouTube Channels are shown in **Table 5.1**. It indicates that Prothom Alo has 19 million followers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh has 54,000 followers, the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) has 18,000 followers, UNHCR Bangladesh has 4.6 million followers, and Dr. Aman Ullah's page has 13,000 followers.

We also found that Shomoy TV's YouTube Channel (17 million subscribers), UNHCR Bangladesh's YouTube Channel (195,000 subscribers), and RRRC's YouTube Channel (11,000 subscribers) were the most popular YouTube channels in their categories.

People searched for individual activists and activist organizations on YouTube, but none were found in these categories. So, the choice was based on how many people the platforms reached and how many people interacted with them, as shown by their subscriber numbers. (see Table 5.1 for more information).

5.3.2 Sampling Frame

Data were collected from August 2017 to May 2023 and included information on key events in the Rohingya conflict. To get the peak social media activity about the Rohingya Crisis, the study looks at seven important events in the crisis, such as the Rohingya exodus, the second anniversary, the ICJ case of Gambia in 2019, the community's move to Bhasan Char, a fire in Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, the murder of prominent Rohingya leader Master Mohib Ullah, and the process of repatriation in 2023.

We chose these events because each is a key moment in the Rohingya crisis that sparked widespread discussion on social media and changed how people and policymakers saw the issue. The "Rohingya Exodus of 2017" was the start of a lot of people leaving their homes, which is what started the movement on social media. "The Second Anniversary" is a time to think about changes in public opinion and long-term support. 'Gambia's ICJ case brings attention to cries for justice and expands the global and regional views on accountability. 'The move to Bhasan Char started conversations about rights and moral government, and the fire in the Rohingya camps showed how weak the group was, leading to calls for better protection. The "murder of Master Mohib Ullah" brought up concerns about safety and leadership in the community, and the "2023 repatriation process" sparked a range of viewpoints on the safety and viability of long-term solutions. Looking at these events on social media shows how representation has changed and provides a more detailed picture of how people feel about the Rohingya, how they advocate for them, and how society sees them.

Table 5.2: Sampling Frame of the Study

Issue	Before	Exact Date	After	Days
Rohingya Exodus	Aug 25, 2017	Sept 1, 2017	Sept 8, 2017	15 Days
2 Years Anniversary	Aug 18, 2019	Aug 25, 2019	Sept 1, 2019	15 Days
ICJ Case: Gambia 2019	Nov 4, 2019	Nov 11, 2019	Nov 18, 2019	15 Days
Bhasan Char Relocation	Nov 27, 2020	Dec 04, 2020	Dec 11, 2020	15 Days
Cox's Bazar Fire: March 2021	Mar 15, 2021	Mar 22, 2021	Mar 29, 2021	15 Days
Rohingya Leader Mohibullah Killed	Sept 22, 2021	Sept 29, 2021	Oct 6, 2021	15 Days
Rohingya Repatriation: 2023	Apr 28, 2023	May 5, 2023	May 12, 2023	15 Days

Table 5.2 presents the sampling frame for this study. Data collection was organized around seven significant events related to the Rohingya crisis, each with a 15-day sampling window. For each event, data were collected 7 days before, on the day of, and for 7 days afterward.

This approach enabled the study to capture the progress of social media discussions and public reactions across the full timeline of each critical incident.

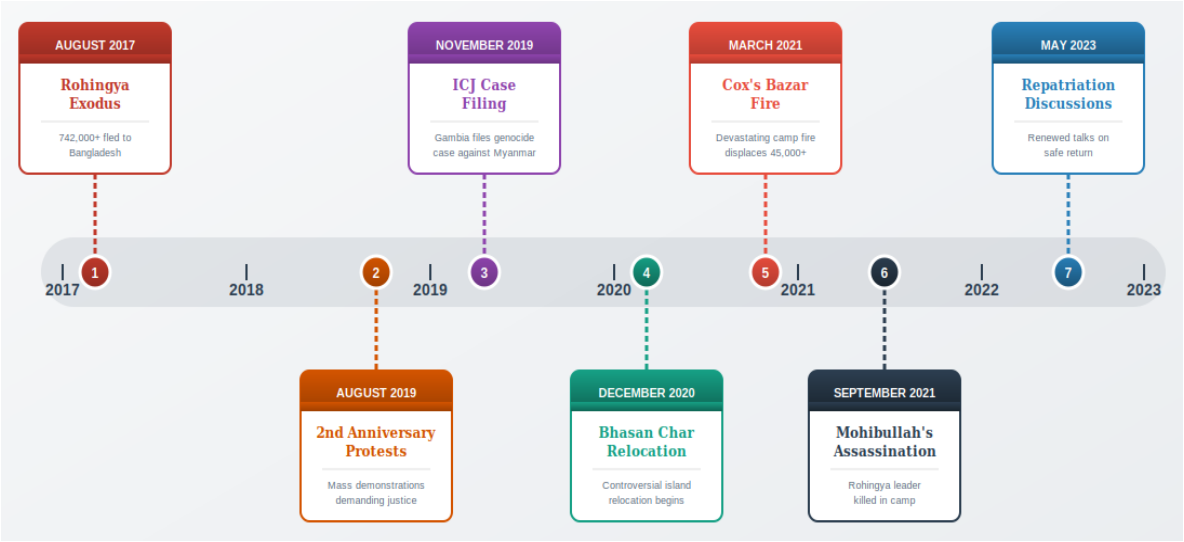


Figure 5.3: Timeline of Key Events in the Rohingya Crisis (2017–2023). The timeline illustrates the seven critical events analyzed in this study: (1) Rohingya Exodus, (2) 2nd Anniversary, (3) ICJ Case Filing, (4) Bhasan Char Relocation, (5) Cox's Bazar Fire, (6) Master Mohib Ullah's Assassination, and (7) Repatriation Discussions. Each event represents a 15-day sampling window for social media data collection.

Peak Time One (2017): The first significant peak period was during the Rohingya Exodus (August 25 - September 8, 2017), which marks the beginning of the mass exodus of Rohingyas into Bangladesh. Peak Time Two (2019): The coverage of the second anniversary of the Rohingya exodus (August 18 - September 1, 2019). Peak Time Three (2019): The ICJ Case filed by Gambia against Myanmar (November 4-18, 2019). Peak Time Four (2020): This period covered the Bhasan Char Relocation initiative (November 27 - December 11, 2020). Peak Time Five (2021): The devastating Cox's Bazar Fire incident (March 15-29, 2021). Peak Time Six (2021): The assassination of Rohingya Leader Master Mohib Ullah (September 22 - October 6, 2021). Peak Time Seven (2023): The final peak period focused on the Rohingya Repatriation efforts (April 28 - May 12, 2023), representing the most recent significant development in the ongoing crisis.

In this study, "peak time" refers to periods when news about the Rohingya is more prevalent or widely disseminated, indicating either increased public interest or significant developments in the crisis. These dates are usually tied to important events, including the start of the

Rohingya exodus, major judicial cases, anniversaries, or events in the camps that garner significant media attention and prompt people to discuss them on social media. The study focuses on these peak times to get the maximum activity on social media and in public discussions. This gives a more complete picture of how people feel, think, and talk about the Rohingya situation. This method helps us better understand how media coverage and public discussion change and intensify during critical periods, shaping how people see and discuss the Rohingya on social media.

By selecting 15-day intervals around seven key events in the Rohingya crisis, we can get a full picture of what people are saying on social media at times when interest and engagement are at their highest. This methodical technique allows the study to track how people's reactions, feelings, and stories change over time. Starting to gather data 7 days before each event allows us to record debates that occur beforehand, the media coverage that builds, and feelings of preparation. The day of the occurrence is usually when people talk about it the most. The next seven days are when the study examines how people reacted to, thought about, and spoke about the implications and ramifications. The Rohingya Exodus in 2017 and the Rohingya Repatriation efforts in 2023 are two of the most important events in the crisis. Each one shows a different problem, such as mass displacement, international accountability, resettlement, camp safety, and leadership issues. By concentrating on these dates, the study can better capture the complete range of public reactions. This allows for a more detailed look at how social media conversations change during these important periods and how they shape perceptions of the Rohingya over time.

5.4 Sample

A dual sampling strategy was employed, focusing on both social media content and human subjects. The sample size has been described below-

5.4.1 Social Media Content Sample

After choosing the data sources, we started a methodical approach for collecting the data. We first manually identified certain pages and channels from different organizations on Facebook and YouTube. We carefully reviewed each post published during these periods and kept only those that specifically addressed Rohingya-related topics. We left out postings that weren't relevant to our study objectives. For each selected Facebook page, we used filters to ensure

the content fit within our predetermined sampling frame. This meant looking at content from the 15 days before and after each of the seven major events. After carefully reviewing the selected time period, 309 posts were found across five platforms.

We searched for videos on various Facebook and YouTube channels using keywords such as "Rohingya," "Displaced Rohingya," "Forced displaced people," "Rohingya migrants," and "Rohingya refugee." After collecting all posts related to the Rohingya, we carefully reviewed them. For YouTube, we also included only those posts relevant to the selected events and time frames concerning the Rohingya. Content that was not relevant, such as posts outside the specified dates in the timeline, was excluded to avoid any bias. We identified 39 posts on the Shomoy TV YouTube channel during the selected time period. Note that the UNHCR Bangladesh YouTube Channel and the RRRC YouTube Channel were excluded from this analysis due to the absence of relevant posts related to the Rohingyas within the selected time frame. **Table 3** displays the number of posts found on each of the six social media platforms.

Table 5.3: Distribution of Rohingya-Related Posts across Facebook and YouTube by Source Type

	Facebook		**YouTube**	
Types	**Platform**	**Posts No**	**Platform**	**Posts No**
Mainstream Media	Prothom Alo	143	Shomoy TV	39
Humanitarian Organization	UNHCR in Bangladesh	64	UNHCR	0
Govt Organization	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	5	RRRC	0
Page Run by Rohingya People	Rohingya Youth Association	31	Not found	0
Rohingya Activist's Page	Mr. Aman Ullah	66	Not found	0
	Total	309	Total	39

Table 5.3 shows the total number of posts collected for analysis across both Facebook and YouTube platforms during the specified sampling timeframe. From Facebook, a total of 309 posts were collected: Prothom Alo (143), UNHCR Bangladesh (64), Mr. Aman Ullah (66), Rohingya Youth Association (31), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (5). From YouTube, 39 posts were collected: Shomoy TV (39), UNHCR (0), and RRRC (0). After identifying posts related to the Rohingya issue, they were manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet via a pre-developed Google Form.

5.4.2 Human Subjects Sample

We used purposive and snowball sampling to gather data from both human subjects and social media to examine how the Rohingya are represented there. Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) describe purposive sampling as the intentional selection of participants based on specified criteria. This method helped to find reliable Rohingya activists and groups. This method was very useful because it is the most popular way to conduct content analysis (Kyngäs, 2011) and allowed targeted selection while saving time and money (Black, 2010). In addition, snowball sampling was used. Gierczyk et al. (2023) argue that this is a good way to reach hard-to-reach groups through referrals. The story begins with Mayu Ali, a 31-year-old Rohingya PhD student in Ontario, Canada. He introduced Ro Khin Maung, a 26-year-old activist from Camp 13 in the Kutupalong Rohingya Refugee Camp. In turn, Khin provided information about Razia Sultana, a 52-year-old renowned lawyer of Rohingya descent living in Chittagong. Razia Sultana then introduced Aman Ullah, a prominent 61-year-old Rohingya activist and historian who also resides in Chittagong. Noy (2008) describes this referral process as iterative, with informants linking researchers to more informants, a method Khoury (2024) identifies as essential for establishing confidence and acquiring thorough qualitative data. Using purposive sampling made it easier to identify specific discussions about the Rohingya across different platforms. On the other hand, snowball sampling helps find trustworthy Rohingya activists' social media profiles by getting recommendations from trusted networks. This twofold sampling method was necessary to ensure the Rohingya people were accurately represented, build community confidence, reach hard-to-reach groups, and maintain the credibility of the sources when they are presented on social media.

This study involved interviews with 22 people, comprising local residents from diverse categories, all of whom were actively engaged on social media. The first group consisted of 10 people from Ukhiya. The second group consisted of 10 Rohingya community members who were interviewed. The third group included two journalists from Daily Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV based in Ukhiya.

The research focused on the Rohingya refugee camps located in the Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas of Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh. As of 2023, approximately 930,000 Rohingya refugees were living in 33 densely populated camps throughout the Cox's Bazar region, covering an area of about 24 square kilometers (UNHCR, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2023). Fieldwork

was conducted in September 2023 at Camp 12 and Camp 13 within the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site, aiming to explore Rohingya narratives and the perspectives of Facebook content producers on the Rohingya crisis. The Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site is recognized as the world's largest refugee camp, part of a mega-camp complex within the broader Cox's Bazar system, housing approximately 600,000 Rohingya refugees (UNHCR, 2023). These study sites were selected purposively because of the high concentration of Rohingya shelters, which facilitated easier access to participants.

Table 5.4: In-depth Interview Participants

Category	**Subcategory/Role**	**Number of Participants**	**Description**
1. Local People (Ukhiya)	Union Parishad Chairman (Local Government Representative)	1	Represents the local government's perspective on the Rohingya crisis.
	School Teacher	1	Provides educational insights and a community impact perspective.
	Student	3	Youth perspective on Rohingya issues.
	Small Business Owner	1	Economic perspective on the crisis.
	Youth	3	General youth perspective on social issues surrounding the crisis.
	Woman	1	Gendered perspective on the crisis.
Total (Local People)		10	
2. Rohingya Community	Majhi (Rohingya Leader)	2	Community leadership perspective from within the Rohingya population.
	Rohingya Youths	6	Youth views from the Rohingya community.
	Rohingya Activists	2	Mr. Aman Ullah and Ro Khin Maung provide insights from the activist community.
Total (Rohingya Community)		10	
3. Journalists	Prothom Alo Journalist	1	Perspective from a major Bangladeshi media outlet.
	Shomoy TV Journalist	1	The television media's perspective on the Rohingya crisis.
Total (Journalists)		2	
4. Officials (Excluded)	UNHCR Official (planned but not conducted)	-	Security concerns prevented the interview.
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official (planned but not conducted)	-	Security concerns prevented the interview.

Table 5.4 presents the findings from interviews conducted with 22 individuals across three distinct categories. The first group consisted of 10 residents from Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, which included one Union Parishad Chairman (a local government representative), one schoolteacher, one small businessman, and six youths, including one woman. Each participant offered unique perspectives on the crisis, shaped by their individual roles in the community. The second group comprised 10 interviewees from the Rohingya community. This group included two Majhis (Rohingya leaders), six Rohingya youths, and two prominent Rohingya activists: Mr. Aman Ullah and Ro Khin Maung, the Founder of the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA). The third group consisted of two journalists, one from Prothom Alo and another from Shomoy TV, both based in Ukhiya and actively covering issues related to the Rohingya. While the study initially aimed to interview officials from UNHCR in Cox's Bazar and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dhaka, these interviews could not be conducted due to security concerns.

The research involved in-depth interviews to gather data on the factors shaping social media content related to the Rohingya and the narratives surrounding them. Furthermore, the interviews sought to explore local perceptions of the Rohingya presence in their communities.

A structured, open-ended questionnaire was used to elicit detailed insights from participants regarding the Rohingya community and their representation on social media. To address language differences, translators were hired, enabling accurate communication with Rohingya-speaking participants and ensuring that their responses were captured with cultural and linguistic precision. The interview process also included several supportive tools, such as probing techniques to encourage clarification and deeper exploration of complex themes. Audio recordings (with consent) were made to ensure accurate analysis, and field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual information that added depth to participants' responses. A consent form was provided to uphold ethical standards and gather valuable background information. This comprehensive approach, utilizing translators, structured questions, and detailed observations, facilitated a culturally sensitive and thorough understanding of both local and Rohingya perspectives on social media narratives.

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method that involves intensive, one-on-one interviews with a small number of respondents to gather detailed insights into specific topics (Boyce & Neale, 2006). This approach effectively explores both narrowly defined themes and

interviewees' experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Brounéus, 2011; Mears, 2012). Historically significant in social research, in-depth interviews allow participants to reflect and interpret their responses (Lummis, 1988, as cited in Yow, 1994). Recent studies, such as those by Kamruzzaman et al. (2024) and Rahman et al. (2024), have employed this method to examine public perceptions of the Rohingya community. In the present study, participants were guided by a structured open-ended questionnaire to facilitate these discussions.

5.5 Data Collection Process

After identifying social media posts from the selected timeframe, the researcher and her two research assistants used Export Comments (https://exportcomments.com/), a paid service for social media data extraction, to gather post content, including comments, links, and interactions. We simply collected the main comments and left off the nested comments or replies. Researchers have utilized comment export tools for social media data analysis to investigate user participation, perceptions, and discourse patterns about specific themes (Al-Rawi, 2017; Bouvier & Machin, 2020; Choi et al., 2014).

There were 3,433,199 interactions on 5 Facebook platforms, and 43,801 of those were comments. The YouTube site, on the other hand, had 9,761,719 interactions, but only 2,902 were comments. A total of 46,703 comments were extracted, but nested comments were not included, and 33,918 comments were analyzed. The collected data was organized into separate Excel sheets and saved on Google Drive to make it easy to find and maintain.

The researcher, together with two research assistants, spent more than 15 days in Cox's Bazar conducting the second part of the PhD fieldwork at the Kutupalong Rohingya camps in Ukhiya. We conducted in-depth interviews in a friendly setting so participants could speak freely about their thoughts and experiences. To ensure the data analysis was accurate, the interviews were recorded with participants' permission. A designed open-ended questionnaire directed the interviews, facilitating consistent yet adaptable responses. Translators were hired to help people communicate and ensure that everyone understood what the Rohingya-speaking participants were saying. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio recorded, and probing questions were used to elicit thorough answers. The collected data, including interview recordings and transcripts, was organized into distinct files with specific names and stored securely on Google Drive. This made

analysis easy while preserving participants' privacy and data integrity. We spoke with 22 people in three groups to gather their thoughts on the topic.

5.6 Data Preparation and Preprocessing

Social media data was collected from selected platforms, specifically Facebook and YouTube. This included posts, comments, and interactions from news media pages, Rohingya activists' pages, humanitarian organizations, and government channels. The primary sources of data included the Facebook pages of the Daily Prothom Alo, The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA), Mr. Aman Ullah, UNHCR Bangladesh, Shomoy TV, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others.

Comments were extracted using the Export Comments tool, with a focus on direct interactions. Once the data was imported, only direct user comments were retained, eliminating nested or indirect responses. Comments were filtered using keywords related to the Rohingya, ensuring that only relevant discussions were analyzed. The text data was cleaned by removing duplicates and irrelevant content. Since many posts and comments were in Bangla, they were translated into English as needed, preserving the original meaning and tone to facilitate analysis.

Thematic coding was applied to the data, allowing for the identification of recurring narratives. Additionally, interview data were prepared for analysis by carefully transcribing the recordings, capturing both verbal responses and significant nonverbal cues. After transcribing all interview materials, we conducted an initial review to familiarize ourselves with the content and to identify preliminary patterns.

This preprocessing ensured that the analysis accurately reflected the complexities of public opinion and the predominant narratives surrounding the Rohingya issue. Once this was completed, the final dataset was prepared for qualitative analysis to examine insights into the social media portrayal of the Rohingya people in Bangladesh. This thorough data preparation and preprocessing ensured that all the information used was relevant, organized, and ready for meaningful analysis aligned with the study's objectives.

5.7 Data Analysis

Both content and thematic analyses were used to examine how the Rohingya are portrayed on social media. In accordance with Krippendorff's (2019) methodological approach, content analysis was used to systematically investigate Facebook and YouTube posts and user responses, focusing on quantifiable metrics (likes, shares, comments) and observable content trends. The analysis pinpointed essential frameworks, encompassing the formation of Rohingya identity, narratives of vulnerability, and discourses on security. It also classified user replies into themes such as xenophobic responses, humanitarian viewpoints, and community apprehensions. In addition, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was used to find deeper patterns of meaning in the social media discourse. This process consisted of six main steps: getting to know the data (data familiarization), generating codes systematically, developing themes, reviewing themes, refining definitions, and integrating the final analysis. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was chosen among the three varieties Braun and Clarke (2006) discussed, as it is not predefined but emerges from the organization of codes around a central concept interpreted by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

For this study, I used a thematic coding approach within a grounded theory framework to look at social media data. This allows themes to emerge naturally from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). It was an inductive process that started with open coding. This meant reading each social media post attentively to identify different themes in how the Rohingya people and their associated issues were portrayed. This first coding helped identify recurring themes such as humanitarian concerns, security issues, and cultural tensions, which I characterized accordingly (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After I finished open coding, I moved on to axial coding. This meant grouping similar themes and looking for links between them, such as the link between humanitarian stories and how people see them, or between government programs and how the media portrays them (Charmaz, 2006). This categorization offered an organized perspective on how social media users interpret the Rohingya situation, shaped by variables such as platform type and user viewpoint. Finally, I used selective coding to find the main themes that connect the data, such as "perceived identity of Rohingya" and "public versus institutional narratives" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). This iterative process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the complex, multi-layered representation of the Rohingya across

various social media platforms, grounding the findings in the data itself (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In this study, the unit of analysis for social media data is each post and its reactions (e.g., comments, likes, and shares), which reflect how the Rohingya community is portrayed. By analysing these precise parts, we can better understand both the content and how people interact with stories about the Rohingya on sites like Facebook and YouTube. Selecting the unit of analysis is crucial for clarifying a study's scope, as it defines the specific elements of the data that will be examined to address the research questions (Bryman, 2016). In the case of human data, the unit of analysis consists of individual perspectives gathered through in-depth interviews with residents, Rohingya activists, and journalists. This approach provides valuable insights into personal experiences, attitudes, and interpretations related to the Rohingya community and its portrayal on social media. By focusing on these individual narratives, the research enables a thorough exploration of both online narratives and human perceptions.

In this study, I, along with two research assistants, manually coded data from social media and interviews, breaking the content into three components. We all carefully read every sentence of each post, trying to find both clear (open) and hidden (implicit) meanings in the text. We used this thorough, sentence-by-sentence coding method to examine reactions, such as comments, to ensure we had a complete picture of the data. We put accuracy first, even if the procedure was long and hard, to show the content's true meaning. When there was confusion or disagreement in coding, the three of us talked it through until we all agreed. This made our analysis more reliable and thorough. This rigorous, collaborative process helped ensure that our interpretation captured all the many sides of the data. We put the coding data in a shared Google Drive spreadsheet so that the study team could work together in real time and easily retrieve it. This common method ensured that each coder could easily enter their findings, track their progress, and review others' work. This helped the coding process stay consistent and open.

This dual methodological approach enabled a systematic examination of both the manifest content and the interpretation of latent meanings. It was particularly effective in analyzing how various narratives regarding Rohingya identity and experiences emerged across different platforms (Snelson, 2016). The method successfully captured the broader patterns of

representation and the diverse ways users engaged with and responded to Rohingya-related content. This highlighted the complex intersections between media portrayals and public perceptions (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). The next section provides a detailed description of the methods used.

5.7.1 Content Analysis

The primary method used in this study is content analysis. According to Cole, Content analysis is a research method for analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Cole, 1988). Weber stated that content analysis is a research method that employs procedures to draw valid inferences from text, and these inferences concern the senders of messages, the messages themselves, or the audiences of messages (Weber, 1990). In addition, Bernard Berelson defined content analysis as a method for systematically describing the visible content of a communication in an analytical, logical, and quantifiable manner (Berelson, 1952). On the other hand, Krippendorf defined content analysis as the collection and analysis of data, such as texts, photographs, maps, artworks, voices, signs, symbols, and even numerical records, within a given context, in light of the meanings that a group or culture ascribes to them (Krippendorf, 2004). It is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing large amounts of text into fewer content categories based on explicit coding rules (Stemler 2000, as cited in Berelson, 1952).

The historical development of content analysis began in the early 20th century and was formalized by Harold D. Lasswell (1927) for analyzing propaganda. It has since been widely used to study violence, racism, and social issues in mass communication (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Macnamara, 2005).

This method also aligns with previous studies analyzing social media content related to the Rohingya. For instance, Hassan (2019) examined comments on the Facebook pages of two media outlets to explore online hate speech about the Rohingya in Bangladesh. Using this approach, he categorized different types of online speech and their dimensions within the context of the Rohingya issue. Lee (2019) used a similar method to examine newspaper articles in the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar, analyzing hateful expressions directed at minority communities by state authorities. Fink (2018) applied this method to examine dangerous speech and anti-Muslim violence on Facebook targeting the Rohingya in Myanmar. Similarly, Ciftci et al. (2017) used the same approach to analyze 500 tweets,

exploring how Muslims are perceived on Twitter by identifying emerging patterns within Muslim communities. Through content analysis, Son (2021) examined Facebook memes about the Rohingya, interpreting the sentiments and attitudes that may have contributed to their creation.

The literature shows that media researchers frequently use content analysis to assess the quality of mainstream and social media content. The primary aim of the present study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the displaced Rohingya population is portrayed across various social media platforms in Bangladesh. The research focuses on analyzing social media posts, particularly the texts, reactions, and comments from Facebook pages and YouTube channels of different organizations and groups. Therefore, content analysis is well suited to examining related content on the Rohingya. Data was gathered from five Facebook pages and three YouTube channels between August 2017 and March 2023, covering key events in the Rohingya crisis.

To systematically analyze social media content, this study developed a coding framework comprising seven primary identity frames to categorize representations of the Rohingya.

Figure 5.4 illustrates this hierarchical coding framework, showing how Rohingya are portrayed through various identity frames ranging from humanitarian narratives (victims, vulnerable) to negative/burden narratives (security threats, burden/dependents) to identity-focused narratives (displaced/stateless, active and resilient, differentiated identities). Each frame includes specific codes, definitions, and associated keywords derived from the literature review and pilot analysis.

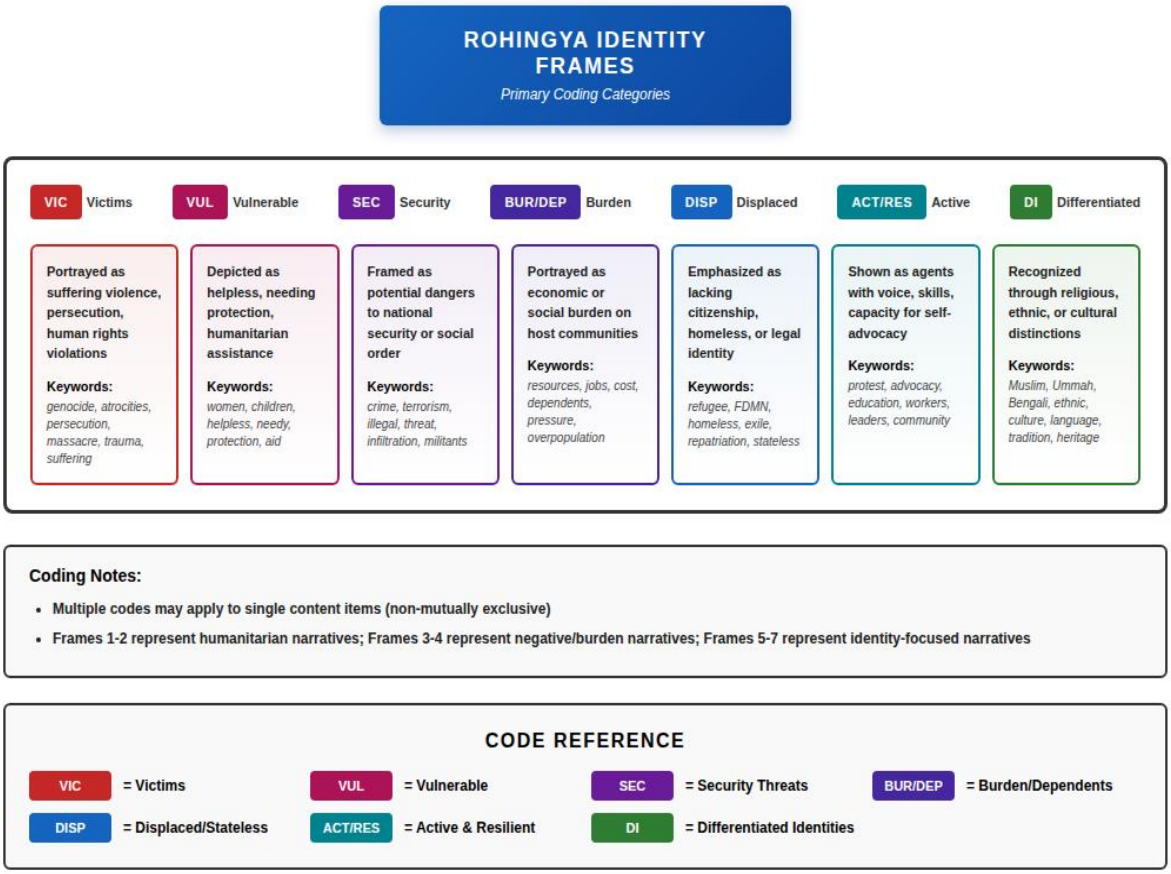
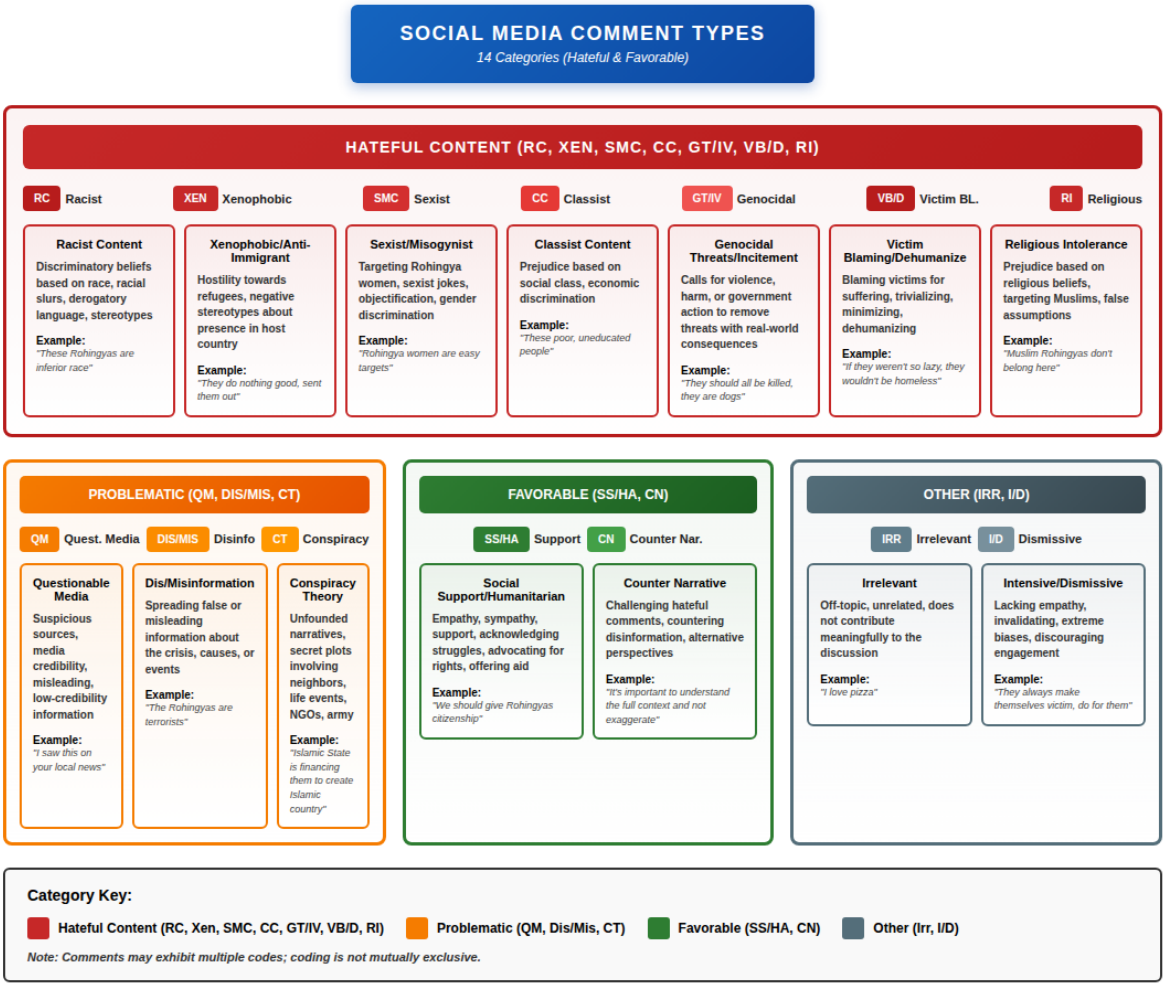


Figure 5.4: Coding Framework for Social Media Content Analysis. The diagram shows seven primary identity frames: (1) Victims (VIC), (2) Vulnerable (VUL), (3) Security Threats (SEC), (4) Burden/Dependents (BUR/DEP), (5) Displaced/Stateless (DISP), (6) Active & Resilient (ACT/RES), and (7) Differentiated Identities (DI). Each frame includes definitions and associated keywords. Multiple codes may apply to single content items. Source: Original coding framework developed for this study.

Five Facebook platforms were selected for analysis. For example, the mainstream media platform 'Prothom Alo's Facebook page, the Rohingya Youth Association's (RYA) Facebook page, the Rohingya Activist platform (Mr. Aman Ullah's personal Facebook page), the humanitarian organization UNHCR's Facebook page, and the government platform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Facebook page. Additionally, three YouTube platforms were chosen: the mainstream media outlet Shomoy TV, the humanitarian organization United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) channel, and the Bangladesh government's Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) channel.



Source: Original coding framework adapted from Banaji & Bhat (2022), Alkiveem (2023), and Rashid & Al-Zaman (2023).

Figure 5.5: Coding Framework for User Comment Analysis

5.7.2 Thematic Analysis

The study also employed Thematic Analysis (TA), which Boyatzis (1998) described as a process for encoding qualitative information and as a 'way of seeing' that systematically observes individuals, interactions, groups, situations, organizations, or cultures. Kiger and Varpio (2020) characterized it as a method for describing data, emphasizing that interpretation plays a role in selecting codes and forming themes. Similarly, Joffe (2011) defined TA as the identification of themes, specific patterns of meaning within data, including both explicit and implicit content. TA typically incorporates both types in its analysis, allowing researchers to uncover and understand collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This study aims to explore a comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of the Rohingya, including their own perspective, as well as the public and host communities' perceptions of this displaced group. Hence, Thematic

Analysis is applied to uncover both implicit and explicit content, offering insights into the overall understanding of the issue. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was selected from the three types outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) because themes are not predefined but emerge as codes are organized around a central concept interpreted by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Additionally, the researcher found this method to be the most suitable for exploring public perceptions of the Rohingya, as well as the viewpoints of both the Rohingya and the host communities.

Figure 5.6 illustrates the six-phase thematic analysis process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). This reflexive approach involves moving iteratively through the phases: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. The dashed arrows in the diagram indicate the iterative nature of this process, where the researcher may revisit earlier phases as understanding deepens.

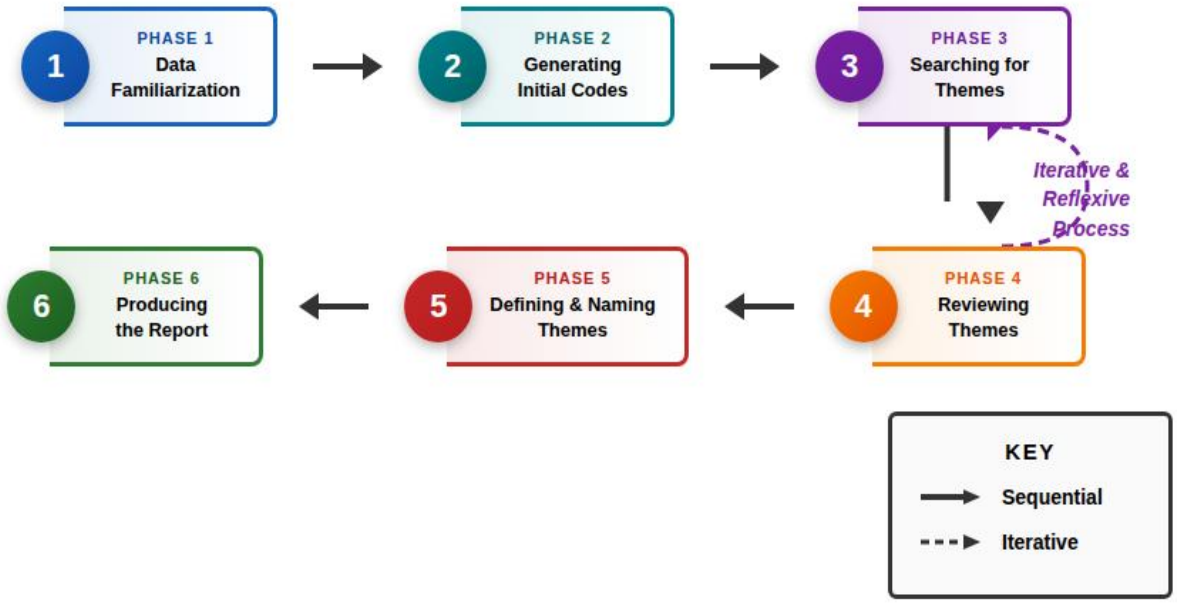


Figure 5.6: Thematic Analysis Process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The diagram illustrates the six phases: (1) Data Familiarization, (2) Generating Initial Codes, (3) Searching for Themes, (4) Reviewing Themes, (5) Defining and Naming Themes, and (6) Producing the Report. Solid arrows indicate sequential progression; dashed lines represent the iterative and reflexive nature of the process. Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2021.

Gerald Holton, a physicist and historian of science, first developed Thematic Analysis in the 1970s (Clarke & Braun, 2014), applying it to his work on 'Themata' in scientific thought. However, the term "thematic analysis" appears to have been in use before Holton's contributions (Joffe, 2012). Joffe also noted that since the early 20th century, the term has been used to describe various concepts, including data analysis techniques in the social sciences.

Previous studies have demonstrated that Thematic Analysis is widely used to extract meaningful insights from various sources, including social media content (e.g., texts, comments, and reactions) and newspaper articles. Rashid and Al-Zaman (2023) used Thematic Analysis (TA) to examine the main topics discussed on social media in Bangladesh regarding the Rohingya crisis. They conducted a qualitative analysis of 10,907 Rohingya-related comments from an equal number of social media users to gain insights into the host communities' perceptions of the Rohingyas. Using a similar method, Altintop et al. (2023) analyzed 3072 comments on the YouTube channels of the official EU website, Euronews, in both English and Turkish, focusing on the Turkish-Greek border crisis that erupted in March 2020 to understand online reactions and attitudes toward refugees. Jelínková (2019) analyzed 900 newspaper articles from three Czech newspapers using this method to examine how the media legitimizes anti-refugee policies through political discourse on refugees.

5.8 Variables and Measurement

In my study on the representation of the Rohingya on social media, I examine both independent and dependent variables. The independent variables include the social media platform (e.g., Facebook, YouTube), the type of content (e.g., news articles, personal narratives, humanitarian updates), and the source of information (e.g., mainstream media, humanitarian organizations, activist groups). These factors may influence user engagement and attitudes toward the Rohingya.

The dependent variables focus on user engagement, measured by likes, shares, comments, and overall interaction rates. I will analyze comments by categorizing them into various themes, such as social support, xenophobia, racism, classism, sexism, victim-blaming, religious intolerance, social narratives, counter-narratives, and irrelevant content. Additionally, I will identify dominant narratives through qualitative content analysis, focusing on themes like victim-blaming, identity, and security concerns.

Quantitative analysis will involve counting posts and reactions, while qualitative analysis will use content analysis, thematic analysis, and an open coding framework to identify recurring themes in user comments. The primary unit of analysis will be the text of each relevant social media post and its reactions, along with a closer examination of specific posts to evaluate how the Rohingya are represented.

5.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, we selected a diverse range of data sources to capture various perspectives. This included multiple social media platforms, as well as a variety of organizational Facebook pages and a YouTube channel, which allowed us to explore different aspects of Rohingya representation.

We also implemented a standardized coding system to accurately reflect user perceptions, involving multiple coders to enhance accuracy and consistency. The coding rules were refined for uniformity, and we conducted pilot testing to identify and address any inconsistencies. We acknowledged potential biases and carefully considered data-collection limitations to strengthen the research's validity and reliability.

5.10 Ethical Considerations

The study's data collection process involved two primary components: analyzing Facebook content related to the Rohingya crisis and conducting interviews with local people, members of the Rohingya community, and journalists. Due to the restricted access to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, ethical considerations were paramount. Access to the camps required official authorization from the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Office, as all researchers and outsiders must obtain permission to enter. To this end, I obtained a letter of recommendation from my supervisor outlining the study's purpose and the need for access to the camps in Cox’s Bazar.

This study recognizes that the participant community, which represents displaced Rohingyas on social media, is a vulnerable population that necessitates heightened ethical safeguards (Block et al., 2013; Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Research involving refugees and asylum seekers requires greater sensitivity due to their vulnerable legal status, limited political protections, and experiences of displacement, which make them especially prone to harm, burden, or undue influence in research settings (Seagle et al., 2020; Müller-Funk, 2021). Ethical guidelines stress

that researchers should treat these subjects with compassion and cultural sensitivity, acknowledging that their traumatic experience may hinder meaningful engagement (Liamputtong, 2007). Moreover, the politically unstable environments affecting refugee communities necessitate that researchers exercise heightened vigilance to prevent unintentional harm or exploitation (Pittaway et al., 2010). To address these challenges, scholars advocate for researchers to transcend traditional "do no harm" rules in favor of a more proactive ethical framework that includes beneficence, respect for autonomy, and mutual benefit for participants (Hugman et al., 2011; Pittaway et al., 2010).

Following these ethical guidelines, I set up this study to minimize potential hazards and avoid reliance on a single data source. Instead of relying only on interviews, I used a triangulated method that combined textual data from publicly available social media posts with in-depth semi-structured interviews (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). This methodological triangulation bolsters the legitimacy and validity of findings by cross-verifying data from diverse sources, while concurrently alleviating the burden on vulnerable participants (Carter et al., 2014). During data collection, I ensured I treated all participants with respect and care, recognizing the importance of sensitivity in research with immigrant groups (Block et al., 2013). Although the University of Dhaka (DU) does not have a formal institutional ethics review board mechanism, I adhered to internationally recognized ethical principles for research with vulnerable populations throughout the study design and implementation.

In the middle of January 2023, I went to Cox's Bazar with two research associates. We stayed there for more than 15 days to finish the second round of my PhD fieldwork. We went to the RRRC Office right away, and two days later, we got the formal approval letter. This let us into the Kutupalong refugee camp, one of the largest in the area. We presented our authorization to the Camp-In-Charge (CIC) office, where a Bangladesh government official oversees each camp, and to the Armed Police Battalion (APBN), which patrols the main gates. We made our research purpose transparent to officials and the community.

All 22 people who were interviewed for the study were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling and provided informed consent, in line with ethical best practices. The interviews examined how people used their Facebook accounts and what they shared, especially regarding the Rohingya issue. It was essential for participants to understand the research procedure, and I ensured they felt safe and comfortable answering questions, respecting their choice to withhold information if they wished.

Using Kutupalong as the study location was a wise choice, as it is home to over 700,000 of the 930,000 Rohingya refugees residing in Cox's Bazar, making it the largest refugee settlement in the world (UNHCR, 2023). This high concentration of people provides a comprehensive understanding of the community's experiences and feelings. Given the overcrowding, environmental sensitivity, and inadequate infrastructure in Cox's Bazar, I approached data collection with great caution.

To mitigate risks, I strictly adhered to confidentiality guidelines and initially planned to use pseudonyms and coded identifiers to protect the participants' identities. However, during the informed consent process, all participants expressed that they were comfortable being identified by their real names and agreed to allow their names to be used in this study. Therefore, with their full knowledge and explicit permission, I used the participants' real names in this dissertation.

5.10. Research Limitations

During my PhD research on the representation of the Rohingya people in social media, I encountered several limitations that may have impacted the study's findings. Data accessibility was restricted by social media policies that limit data extraction, potentially resulting in incomplete datasets. The purposive and snowball sampling methods, while intended to capture diverse perspectives, may not have fully represented the range of opinions within the Rohingya community. This could potentially skew the analysis of public sentiment.

Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative data analysis introduced the possibility of varying interpretations among coders and personal biases that could affect data interpretation. The focus on a specific timeframe (2017 to 2023) limited insights into the evolving discussions surrounding the Rohingya crisis. Linguistic and cultural distinctions also posed challenges to accurately capturing sentiment in translation.

Ethical considerations regarding the sensitive nature of the topic may have restricted the depth of inquiries. Furthermore, the findings may be specific to the Rohingya context in Bangladesh and may not be generalizable to other displaced populations, limiting the broader applicability of the results.

The manual coding and analysis conducted in the study could also affect the findings. The subjective nature of manual coding can lead to inconsistencies among coders, potentially

introducing bias and variation in coding decisions. Moreover, the time-consuming process may limit the volume of data that can be analyzed, thereby affecting the study's comprehensiveness. Human errors, such as overlooking relevant data or misclassifying themes, could further compromise accuracy.

5.11 Conclusion and Transition

In conclusion, this chapter on research methodology has described the methodological approach used to study the portrayal of the Rohingya on social media. This study employs qualitative content analysis, purposive and snowball sampling, and various data collection methods, including analysis of social media comments and interviews, to elucidate the diverse narratives surrounding the Rohingya issue. The ethical considerations, validity and reliability measures, and focus on cultural sensitivity further strengthen the research design. Recognizing the constraints of this study facilitates a comprehensive comprehension of the results. The next chapter will present the study's findings, shedding light on the complex ways in which Rohingya people are discussed on social media. The analysis will examine themes and perspectives derived from the data, providing insights into the formation and perception of Rohingya identity and experiences inside the digital realm. This inquiry aims to enhance understanding of the ongoing conversation about the Rohingya community and its consequences for broader societal narratives.

5.12 References

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Chapter 6

ROHINGYA: THE VICTIMS OF PERSECUTION AND A VULNERABLE POPULATION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which social media narratives in Bangladesh portray Rohingyas as vulnerable and persecuted. It examines these descriptions of victimization and vulnerability from a variety of angles, including those of the Rohingya themselves, the government, the local community, social media users, humanitarian groups, and the media of the host nation. This chapter demonstrates how organizations create and interpret depictions of the Rohingya on social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube, by examining these viewpoints. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958), which offer analytical frameworks for understanding how digital media creates meanings about marginalized communities and affects public attitudes through compliance, identification, and internalization processes, serve as the theoretical cornerstones of this chapter.

By analyzing the dominant narratives and points of view expressed in social media discussions about the Rohingya crisis, examining how the displaced Rohingya population and the issues surrounding them are portrayed on social media in Bangladesh, and examining how social media discourse affects public awareness and perceptions in Bangladesh, this chapter answers the study's three main research questions. The analysis shows how Rohingyas are explicitly portrayed as victims and vulnerable groups, investigates the opinions of the Rohingya community regarding these portrayals, looks at the opinions and reactions of social media users, and takes into account alternative and opposing viewpoints, such as counter-narratives that contest victim-centered discourse.

The study used a qualitative methodology, gathering data through in-depth interviews and thematic content analysis. A total of 348 social media posts from six organizational sources on Facebook and YouTube were analyzed as part of the data collection process, which also included interviews with 22 stakeholders, including journalists, local residents, and Rohingya refugees. Following six stages: familiarization, code creation, primary topic and sub-theme

development, review, refinement, and integration, the study used sentence-by-sentence coding to assess textual content, comments, and reactions, identifying both explicit and implicit meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

6.2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter places the study within the broader scholarly conversation on media representation and the portrayal of marginalized communities, drawing on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958). In contrast to Kelman's thesis, which examines how the Rohingya are perceived by the general public, Hall's theory examines how the Rohingya community is represented across social media platforms.

According to Hall (1997), representation actively alters reality rather than merely reflecting it. He highlights how language is used to produce meaning and how cultural practices within certain historical and social contexts shape that meaning. Hall's constructionist method, which contends that language, images, and cultural codes contribute to the construction of meaning, is employed in this examination. From this perspective, social media posts, images, comments, and narratives become sites where cultural codes of victimization, vulnerability, threat, and belonging are negotiated and challenged. To determine how various organizations and individuals construct meanings of Rohingya victimhood and vulnerability, this analysis will apply Hall's theory to textual content, visual imagery, and narrative patterns in Facebook and YouTube posts. Scholars studying how refugees and minorities are portrayed in the media have frequently used Stuart Hall's framework (KhosraviNik, 2010; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Seo & Kavakli, 2022), and it has been specifically applied to how the Rohingya are portrayed (Ma et al., 2018; Żerebecki, 2024; Kunnawut, 2018).

Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory provides a framework for understanding how social media representations affect public perceptions. Kelman (1958) distinguished three social impact processes: internalization, identification, and obedience. Internalization is the sincere embrace of new attitudes that are consistent with personal beliefs; identification is the alignment of attitudes with desired groups; and compliance is the adoption of attitudes to comply with peer expectations. To determine whether comments and reactions from social media users regarding Rohingya-related content reflect compliance, identification, or internalized beliefs,

Kelman's theory will be used in this investigation. Recent research has shown that the idea is applicable to digital contexts (Liang et al., 2024; McCann et al., 2023).

6.3 Conceptual Framework: Victims of Persecution and Vulnerability

When we encounter refugee stories through the media, we automatically imagine helpless individuals who need assistance. But this well-known imagery begs important questions: how are these people portrayed in this manner? Who decides which suffering is worthy of being addressed? Why are some groups ignored while others are hailed as worthy victims? Because refugee representation directly influences host-country policy and public opinions, it is imperative to comprehend these processes (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Esses et al., 2013).

In refugee contexts, victimhood has historically been used to describe people who have been harmed, persecuted, or displaced because of events beyond their control, making them worthy of protection and aid (Malkki, 1996). Nonetheless, researchers contend that victimhood is a socially created position that restricts agency and self-determination while simultaneously facilitating access to rights (Rajaram, 2002). The 'ideal victim' as defined by Christie (1986) indicates that victim status is contingent upon society's willingness to accept suffering. The perfect victim is described as being weak, naive, elderly, or extremely young, qualities that align with what society considers to be acceptable suffering.

In contrast to other types of relocation, persecution produces a distinct category of victimization. Persecution victims bear the moral burden of systematic, identity-based targeting that portrays them as experiencing injustice, especially because of who they are rather than where they happen to be, in contrast to victims of natural catastrophes or general conflict (Hathaway, 2005). This dynamic is best shown by the Rohingya, who experience systematic persecution in Myanmar due to their Muslim identity and ethnic background, leading to persecution-specific victimhood and subsequent relocation in Bangladesh (Ibrahim, 2016).

Beyond human weakness, vulnerability entails a limited capacity to respond to harm arising from broader social, economic, and political pressures (Blaikie et al., 2014). When vulnerability is viewed as a social construct, it becomes clear that institutional procedures, legal frameworks, and media portrayals generate categories of victims deemed deserving or undeserving (Butler, 2004).

Drawing on the ideas of vulnerability (Butler, 2004; Blaikie et al., 2024) and victimhood (Christie, 1986; Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002) that were previously discussed, this study views vulnerability and victimhood specific to persecution as related but separate analytical categories that collectively influence how the Rohingya are portrayed, comprehended, and dealt with in modern humanitarian and digital contexts. This paradigm provides a basis for the critical examination of digital discourse and representation practices by acknowledging both the protective roles of these identity categories and their limiting effects on agency and self-determination.

6.4 Historical Context of Rohingya Victims of Persecution and Vulnerability

6.4.1 Colonial Roots of Persecution

Beyond the 2017 crisis that raised awareness of their predicament on a global scale, the Rohingya group has a long history of abuse. Researchers like Leider (2014), Ibrahim (2016), and Siddiquee (2020) link Myanmar's post-independence citizenship rules and colonial policies to the systematic persecution of Rohingyas, thereby making them stateless. Charney (2005) shows how administrative integration with Bengal during British colonial rule drastically changed the demographic makeup of Arakan, resulting in movement patterns that would subsequently be used as a weapon against the Rohingya populations.

Through administrative categorization systems, the colonial era laid the groundwork for systematic exclusion. Egreteau (2011) examines how religious classifications and colonial census procedures produced documentation frameworks that post-independence governments used to deny Rohingya citizenship. According to Smith (1991), the practical choices made by British authorities regarding migration and settlement unintentionally created weaknesses that were subsequently exploited in persecution campaigns.

According to Holliday (2014), the 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar formalized the exclusion of Rohingyas from citizenship, resulting in legal vulnerability that enabled further persecution. What Agamben (1998) refers to as "bare life"—existence outside the political community where fundamental rights are denied—was brought about by this systematic exclusion. Kingston (2015) looks at how the statute created a thorough legal framework for statelessness while specifically excluding the Rohingya by recognizing just 135 "national races".

Studies by Mohajan (2018) and Kipgen (2013) detail decades of institutionalized discrimination, including limitations on employment, education, marriage, and mobility. Recurring patterns of military action, followed by widespread relocation, are documented in academic sources. Over 250,000 Rohingya were displaced by Operation Pyi Thaya in 1991–1992, and over 200,000 were displaced to Bangladesh by Operation Nagamin in 1977–1978.

6.4.2 Contemporary Persecution and Displacement

Scholarly analysis reveals the paradox of increased persecution during Myanmar's democratic transition. According to Green et al. (2015), the international celebration of Myanmar's democratic development coincided with the 2012 communal violence. There has been extensive writing on the emergence of Buddhist nationalism during the democratic transition. Crouch (2016) examines how social media platforms enabled hate speech and anti-Rohingya mobilization, while Walton and Hayward (2014) investigate how electoral competitiveness encouraged politicians to take anti-Muslim stances.

The "clearance operations" of 2017 are the result of persecution patterns that date back decades. The UN Fact-Finding Mission (2018) concluded that military acts constituted genocide under international law after providing thorough proof of systematic deaths, rapes, and village devastation. Ibrahim (2018) contends that rather than being the result of an unplanned conflict, the 2017 violence was the culmination of a protracted genocidal process.

Persecution produces enduring vulnerability that cuts across national boundaries, according to scholarly research on relocation trends. Milton et al. (2017) examine social and health issues in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Based on the same identification traits that led to the first persecution in Myanmar, Chowdhury (2019) examines how the Rohingya continue to be marginalized in Bangladesh. The vast body of scholarly research on past persecution offers essential background information for comprehending how Rohingya vulnerability and victimhood are portrayed in modern digital media.

6.5 Recent Studies on Rohingya Victimization and Vulnerability

Recent scholarship reveals the structural foundations of Rohingya victimization. According to Bhattacharjee (2024), Myanmar uses four systematic discourses to make the Rohingyas stateless: portraying them as economic risks, Islamic militants, illegal Bengali migrants, and

British collaborators. Salehin (2024) describes these circumstances as "doubly victimized" because displacement has exacerbated gendered victimization.

According to Kamruzzaman et al.'s (2024) study, the initial sympathy shown by host populations in Bangladesh "has gradually diminished, leading to a less peaceful cohabitation between the host and the refugees in Cox's Bazar." 95% of Rohingya households are totally dependent on humanitarian aid, and 65% of them are "acutely vulnerable," according to recent vulnerability assessments, revealing hitherto unheard-of systematic disadvantage (UNHCR, 2024). With over 500,000 children growing up in camps and over 75% of refugees being women and children, UNICEF refers to this group as a "lost generation" at risk of exploitation.

6.6 Media Representation and Discourse Analysis

International media coverage of the Rohingya crisis has often focused on dramatic violence, a tendency noted by Brooten et al. (2015) and Alam (2018). This focus tends to overlook the crisis's historical context and underlying structural causes. Such reporting reflects a broader trend in the representation of minorities, where "asylum seekers are depicted as either 'hapless victims' or 'troublemakers'" (Jamil & Retis, 2023).

Facebook and other social media sites deploy what Brooten et al. (2015) refer to as "politics of immediation," focusing on quick emotional reactions to Rohingya suffering instead of addressing the structural reasons for persecution. This strategy is consistent with Mutua's (2002) criticism of human rights discourse, which can unintentionally portray marginalized communities as helpless victims in need of external assistance rather than as agents of their own liberation.

Platform dynamics and political goals also have a big impact on media depictions. To achieve specific political goals, such as gaining sympathy abroad, defending restrictive laws, or rallying support at home, governments, political actors, and interest groups may deliberately develop narratives about refugees (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). While Bangladesh's government has occasionally highlighted the humanitarian burden to draw in foreign aid and support, Myanmar's government has historically pushed narratives portraying the Rohingya as "illegal immigrants" and "security threats" to justify persecution (Ibrahim, 2018). Social media sites are not inherently neutral; their algorithms tend to amplify sensational and

emotionally charged content, which may favor some narratives over others (Gillespie, 2018). Critically examining the construction and dissemination of representations of the Rohingya in digital spaces requires an understanding of these platforms and the political forces shaping them.

A more complex environment in which several discourses vie for supremacy is presented by social media representations. Across diverse platforms and user communities, narratives about the Rohingya reflect humanitarian, political, and security discourses that are frequently at odds, according to research by Uddin et al. (2020) and Saleem et al. (2021). This dichotomy is illustrated by Sudheer and Banerjee (2021), who show how social media platforms both support activism and counter-discourses while also amplifying biased narratives.

6.7 Findings: Rohingyas Depicted as Victims of Persecution

Table 6.1: Rohingyas are depicted as Victims of Persecution

	Prothom Alo	**%**	**UNHCR FB**	**%**	**Shomoy TV**	**%**	**Aman Ullah**	**%**	**RYA**	**%**	**MOFA**	**%**
Victims of persecution	58	40.56	5	7.81	11	29.73	20	30.30	1	3.23	1	20

Source: Social Media Monitoring of Rohingya-related content, 2017-2023

Interpretation of Findings

The data reveal significant variation in how different platforms emphasize victimhood, reflecting their distinct institutional purposes, target audiences, and communication strategies.

Mainstream Bangladeshi media outlets, such as Prothom Alo (40.56%) and Shomoy TV (29.73%), exhibit the highest emphasis on persecution narratives. This trend can be explained by news values that prioritize dramatic, emotionally compelling content to attract audience attention (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). As commercial media outlets, they frame persecution through crisis-focused reporting that generates reader engagement and public sympathy. Furthermore, Bangladeshi media may strategically emphasize persecution to highlight the humanitarian burden the country bears as a host nation, thereby supporting governmental appeals for international assistance (Alam, 2018).

Mr. Aman Ullah (30.30%), a Rohingya activist, demonstrates substantial engagement with persecution narratives that reflect the community's lived experiences and advocacy goals. His content serves an accountability function by documenting systematic violence for international audiences and legal mechanisms (Brooten, 2015).

The UNHCR Bangladesh's presence on Facebook (7.81%) shows a relatively low emphasis on persecution, despite its humanitarian mandate. This reflects the organization's broader mission, which goes beyond documenting persecution to include protection, assistance, and solutions-focused programming. Their communication strategy balances victim narratives with content that showcases resilience and positive developments to avoid "compassion fatigue" among donors (Chouliaraki, 2006).

The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) (3.23%) exhibits the lowest emphasis on persecution, a significant finding that supports theoretical frameworks on agency and self-representation. As a community-led organization, RYA intentionally resists victim-focused framing to assert the agency, capabilities, and resilience of the Rohingya people. This aligns with Smets et al.'s (2019) finding that refugees often reject being positioned solely as victims.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (20%) represents governmental discourse with moderate emphasis on persecution. The government's communication balances multiple objectives: highlighting the humanitarian crisis to attract international support while managing domestic concerns about the prolonged refugee presence.

These variations demonstrate that representations of victimhood are not neutral but are strategically constructed by institutional agendas and communication goals, thereby validating Hall's (1997) constructionist approach to representation.

6.7.1 Victims' Persecution Narratives across Platforms

The study findings reveal significant variations in how victims of persecution are represented across different social media platforms. The analysis shows that narratives of victims constitute a substantial portion of Rohingya representation, with percentages varying from 3.23% on the Rohingya Youth Association platform to 40.56% on Prothom Alo. This indicates diverse approaches to constructing the notion of victimhood in the context of persecution across various organizational contexts.

Prothom Alo constructs its narrative of persecution through comprehensive documentation of systematic violence and international recognition of crimes. The platform highlights genocidal violence, as seen in a September 6, 2017, post stating: "A humanitarian tragedy and a crime against humanity have taken a horrifying form in Rakhine State, Myanmar, requiring immediate intervention by the United Nations."

Shomoy TV addresses persecution by documenting systematic violence and exposing victim-blaming narratives used by the Myanmar state. Similarly, the UNHCR frames persecution in protection-focused language that emphasizes systematic targeting and the international responsibility to intervene. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) constructs the narrative by officially acknowledging systematic targeting and invoking humanitarian justification for international intervention.

Aman Ullah, a Rohingya activist, contributes to shaping the narrative by systematically documenting information that serves both accountability and advocacy purposes. The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) focuses on identity-centered narratives, emphasizing statelessness and systematic exclusion while also highlighting the agency of Rohingya individuals.

Critical Reflection on Platform Framing: While all platforms portray Rohingyas as victims of persecution, they use different framing strategies that reflect their institutional agendas. Mainstream media often emphasizes dramatic violence to engage audiences. Humanitarian organizations frame the persecution to justify their interventions and secure funding (Barnett, 2011). Government sources promote diplomatic objectives by using victim narratives to exert international pressure on Myanmar. In contrast, Rohingya-led organizations adopt minimal victim framing, which serves as a deliberate resistance to externally imposed victimhood and asserts community agency (Rajaram, 2002). These variations across platforms demonstrate that narratives of persecution are strategically constructed representations designed to serve specific institutional goals rather than being objective reflections of reality.

6.7.2 Local Community Perceptions on Victim Narratives

Research findings indicate that local communities in Bangladesh no longer perceive Rohingyas primarily as victims of persecution; instead, they view them as a source of concern and burden. This marks a significant shift from the initial response following the refugees' arrival in 2017 (Kamruzzaman et al., 2024; Uddin, 2022).

The community's perception of the Rohingya people has changed significantly over time. When the Rohingya first arrived in the area in 2017, there was considerable sympathy for them. A school teacher from Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, noted, *"There was sympathy for them as fellow Muslims who were persecuted by the Myanmar government"* (Field Interview, Md. Abdul Malek, 41, School Teacher, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2022). However, this kindness did not last long. The teacher later expressed a more negative view, stating, *"Rohingyas are ferocious; they have no education and are involved in abduction and killing."*

He identified several reasons for the decline in local opinions, emphasizing the crucial role of education in shaping behavior. He explained, *"They are not aware of their rights because they have no education, they are involved in criminal activities, hence, this attitude has influenced the change in local feelings toward them."* Public opinion has shifted dramatically due to perceived knowledge gaps and reports of criminal activity. The same teacher observed, *"Now, 95% of people want them to leave our country."* This illustrates how initial religious unity has given way to widespread animosity, fueled by social unrest and security concerns.

The shift from sympathy to hostility towards the Rohingya has been further confirmed by a local resident. He observed, *"Relations with the Rohingyas were good earlier, but now they have deteriorated. Everyone wants them to leave this country as soon as possible"* (Field Interview, Md. Helal Uddin, 24, Student, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). He explained that ongoing security threats have fueled this change, noting that *"every month, 5 to 6 local people are abducted by the Rohingyas."* Additionally, he highlighted the broader consequences for the host community, stating that *"many members of the host community are trapped in the Rohingya camps, which makes them vulnerable in terms of their safety, businesses, and agricultural activities."* Environmental degradation has added another layer of concern, as he pointed out that "the Rohingya exodus has severely damaged the environment."

Local people believe (whether true or not) that Rohingyas are involved in crimes.

Social Media narratives and political discourse have significantly amplified negative perceptions of the Rohingyas among local populations. Security-focused reportage has progressively replaced humanitarian framing in Bangladeshi media. For example, Prothom Alo's 2023 report titled *"Security Concerns Rise in Cox's Bazar*" contained headlines

connecting refugees to local insecurity, while The Daily Star's 2022 report titled *"Drug Trafficking Rises in Cox's Bazar Camps"* highlighted suspected Rohingya involvement in yaba smuggling. To garner voter support, local leaders have likewise embraced anti-Rohingya rhetoric (France 24, 2022; Rahman, 2010). Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) refer to this combination as "mediated hostility," in which media outlets propagate exclusionary narratives that triumph over humanitarian compassion.

Instead of recognizing Rohingyas' status as refugees, the current local discourse regularly portrays them as financial liabilities. In an interview, a small businessman from Palongkhali Bazar in Ukhiya expressed his dissatisfaction, stating that "the presence of the Rohingya has led to a sharp rise in the prices of essential goods" and increased local unemployment (Md. Anowar, 44, grocery shop owner, Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, September 24, 2022). Similarly, a local chairman reported that Rohingyas "have occupied lands that were previously used for farming, grazing, and gardening," resulting in the destruction of more than 100 acres of agricultural land (M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury, 50, Union Parishad Chairman, Palongkhali Union, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 23, 2022).

The focus of local narratives has shifted to security concerns. In an interview, one young person mentioned that "every month, five to six local people are abducted by the Rohingyas." Another individual described the camps as "hotspots for drug trafficking" (Md. Mamun Hossain, 25, day labourer, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 25, 2023; Mohammad Jobair, 21, day labourer, Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 23, 2023). These apprehensions are reflected in local testimonies and are supported by media articles, such as "Rohingya Camps Emerge as Drug Trafficking Hubs" (The Daily Star, September 2022), which portray refugees as potential security risks.

This change reflects broader trends in refugee studies, particularly the concepts of "compassion fatigue" and securitization (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024). This trend demonstrates how economic competition can diminish initial sympathy over time in contexts involving refugees, leading to what is termed "hospitality fatigue" (Hammerstad, 2008). According to realistic conflict theory, intergroup tensions increase regardless of the refugee's victim status when host communities perceive refugees as competitors for limited resources (Buzan et al., 1998). Furthermore, local society is increasingly viewing Rohingyas as a threat to their cultural identity and economic stability due to concerns about demographic changes.

6.7.3 Social Media Users' Perspective on Victims of Persecution Narratives

To examine public interaction with Rohingya-related content, the study collected extensive data from two major social media platforms. During the designated period, 309 Facebook posts and 39 YouTube videos were gathered. To ensure data quality and consistency, the study focused on 33,918 primary comments from the 46,703 in the entire dataset.

Critical Reflection on Data and Potential Bias: Recognizing potential biases in this social media data is crucial. First, only users who opted to participate openly are represented in the comments examined, potentially leaving out silent observers with different opinions (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). Second, certain kinds of content, especially emotionally charged posts, may be amplified by Facebook and YouTube algorithms, resulting in "filter bubbles" that influence which comments appear (Pariser, 2011). Third, the results may be skewed toward the platform's user base because Prothom Alo attracts more comments than other sources. These restrictions imply that rather than reflecting general public opinion, social media data reflect visible, active participants.

Users continuously portrayed the Rohingyas on many platforms as victims of systematic brutality motivated by prejudice based on identity, religion, and ethnicity. Christie's (1986) concept of the "ideal victim," which evokes empathy for people viewed as defenseless, innocent, and ethically deserving of assistance, is echoed in these depictions. By using religious, ethnic, and humanitarian lenses to reinforce prevailing narratives, social media users have been instrumental in portraying the Rohingyas as persecuted.

Figure 6.1 presents a sample of user comments from Prothom Alo's Facebook page, which illustrates the discourse surrounding victimization. These comments reflect how people engage with and respond to posts about the Rohingya crisis. They express outrage over the persecution faced by the Rohingya and call for humanitarian aid and international intervention.

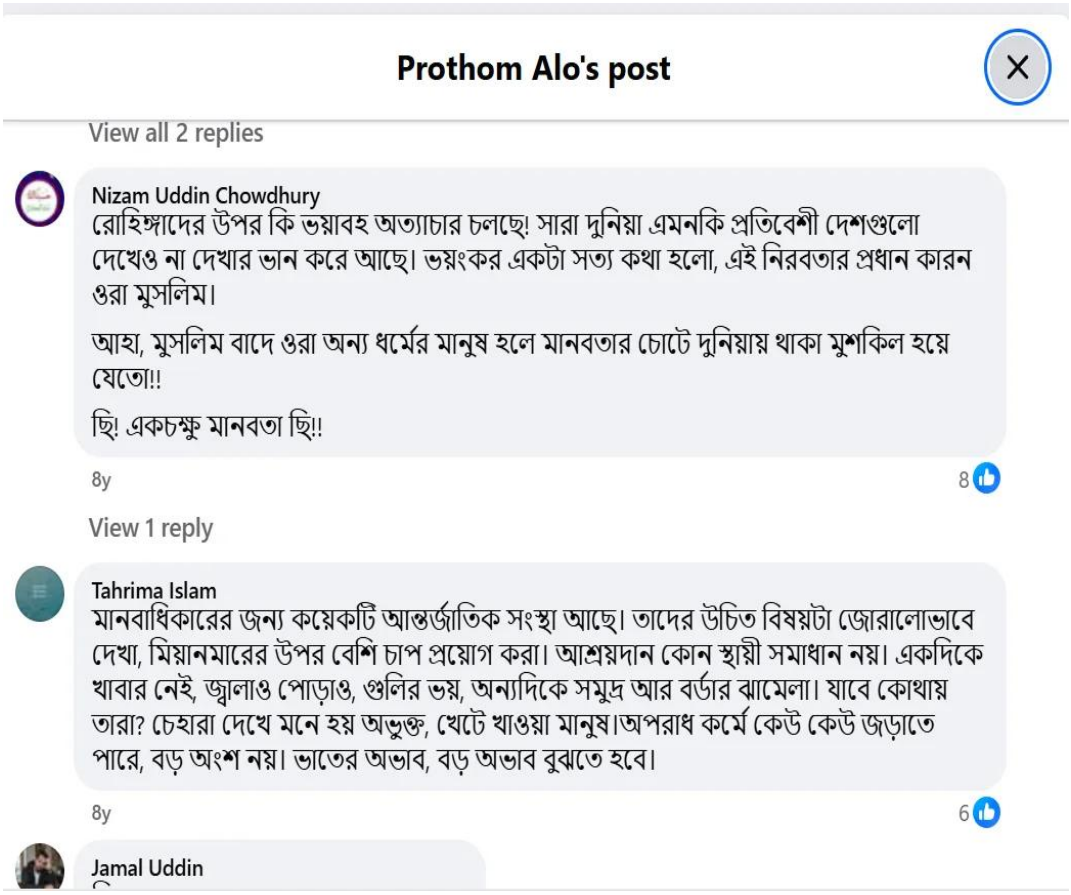


Figure 6.1: Screenshot Example of Victimhood Framing on Prothom Alo

Translation of Comments:

Nizam Uddin Chowdhury: "What terrible atrocities are being committed against the Rohingyas! The whole world, even the neighboring countries, is pretending not to see. A frightening truth is that the main reason for this silence is that they are Muslims. Alas, if they were not Muslims but people of another religion, it would have been difficult for humanity to exist in this small world!! Shame! Shame on this one-eyed humanity!!"

Tahrima Islam: "There are several international organizations for human rights. They should take this issue seriously and apply greater pressure on Myanmar. Providing shelter is not a permanent solution. On one side, there is no food, burning, bullets, and fear; on the other side, the sea and border trouble. Where will they go? Looking at their faces, they seem hungry, starving people. Anyone can get involved in crime, to a large extent. Food shortage, big shortage to understand."

Source: Screenshot from Prothom Alo Facebook page, August 28, 2017

The user comments exhibit several crucial aspects of victimhood framing, as shown in Figure 6.1. The first commentator specifically draws attention to the Rohingya's suffering and blames religious prejudice for the international community's apathy. The Rohingya are portrayed as victims of both international apathy and Myanmar's military. The second commenter calls for international pressure on Myanmar while highlighting the humanitarian catastrophe and detailing the Rohingya's plight, which includes violence, displacement, and a lack of food.

Many users made superficial humanitarian appeals at the compliance level, most likely because of societal norms or a desire to publicly express sympathy. The early public conversation surrounding religious solidarity is reflected in comments made by users like Nahid Bhuiya: *"The persecuted Rohingya Muslims should be allowed to enter Bangladesh because they are oppressed and tortured by Buddhists in their homeland, Myanmar." (Nahid Bhuiya, comment on Prothom Alo Facebook post, August 25, 2017).* Given that Bangladesh has a Muslim majority, the government should assist these individuals and provide rehabilitation. We should help refugees because it is the humane thing to do.

To justify Bangladesh's moral obligation, such statements draw on both Islamic duty and global humanitarianism, often comparing the situation to European responses to the Syrian refugee crisis. However, this kind of discourse might exemplify what Nekmat et al. (2015) refer to as "performative empathy", public expressions of sympathy aimed at maintaining social status within online communities, rather than demonstrating a genuine personal commitment to action.

Social media users often align themselves based on shared religious or national identities. Comments that portray the international response to the Rohingya crisis as discriminatory highlight a sense of religious solidarity. For example, user Fârhå Nåznéła remarked, "*The entire world, even neighboring countries, is pretending not to see. The awful reality is that the primary reason for their silence is that they are Muslims; if they practiced any other religion, it would have been hard for them to survive the outpouring of humanity. Disgrace! Humanity with one eye!"* (Fârhå Nåznéła, Comment on Prothom Alo Facebook Post, August 29, 2017,). Such statements frame the situation of the Rohingya as emblematic of broader Muslim marginalization in international politics.

Historical reciprocity also plays a significant role in these discussions. User Rakib Mustafa noted, *"Bangladeshi refugees also sought refuge in Burma... in the Muslim-populated Rakhine province during the Liberation War." On June 18, 1971, Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam formally thanked the Burmese government and people,"* (Rakib Mustafa, Comment on Prothom Alo Facebook post, Prothom Alo, August 27, 2017). These comments create a moral obligation by drawing parallels between the current plight of the Rohingyas and Bangladesh's own history with refugees.

Kelman's (1958) theory of identification suggests that individuals adopt attitudes to signify membership in preferred social groups. Bansak et al. (2016) provide empirical support for this theory, demonstrating that co-religionists tend to receive more favorable treatment in terms of refugee sentiments, thereby confirming that religious affiliation significantly influences public opinion. Similarly, Uddin (2019) argues that Bangladeshis develop "reciprocal solidarity narratives" that justify their aid to the Rohingya by referencing their own experiences as refugees in 1971.

A strong personal commitment to empathy, justice, and human rights that transcends group boundaries was evident in users' comments, which demonstrated internalization. *"What harm will it cause if they come to Bangladesh?"* user Nasir Khan remarked in response to a Shomoy TV YouTube post titled *"The Myanmar government is creating ethnic riots just to push the Rohingyas into Bangladesh."* He added, *"Allow them to visit Bangladesh. Please, Allah, keep them safe. You are the only one who can protect them; they are completely defenseless"* (comment on Shomoy TV, YouTube post, August 27, 2017). Another user in the same post posed morally challenging questions: *"Why don't these people have the right to live?" and "Those who must become victims of rape to survive, whose homes are set on fire, are they not human beings?" (Hossain,* comment on Shomoy TV, YouTube post, August 27, 2017).

These comments, from Shomoy TV, 2017, reveal deeply held moral convictions that go beyond national or religious boundaries.

Internalization is considered the deepest stage of attitude formation, as noted by Kelman (1958). In this stage, values become integrated into a person's fundamental identity and persist without external reinforcement. Chouliaraki (2006) refers to this phenomenon as "cosmopolitan empathy," a moral stance that transcends national, religious, and ethnic boundaries and embraces a universal view of humanity.

In discussions surrounding the Rohingya crisis, legal and human rights frameworks often label the situation as genocide. For instance, Kazi Belal remarked, "Genocide is being carried out against the Rohingyas," after posing the rhetorical question, "How do you define genocide?" (User Comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook Page, September 4, 2017). In his comment, Mr Belal harshly stated, "The world should stop barbaric hyena Suki and her terrorist government immediately because they are committing ethnic cleansing in Arakan #StopMuslimGenocideAtArakan" (User Comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook Page, September 4, 2017). These remarks illustrate how social media users mobilized to frame the issue in terms of ethnic annihilation and religious persecution.

Aung San Suu Kyi faced moral outrage from commenters who questioned the legitimacy of her Nobel Peace Prize in light of the military's treatment of the Rohingya. User Muslim Uddin expressed, "I don't know where the conscience of the world is right now... And what about those who awarded Suu Kyi the Nobel Peace Prize? We urge the Nobel Committee to revoke the Prize awarded to her" (User Comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook Page, September 4, 2017). Such calls for symbolic accountability highlight the perceived hypocrisy of granting international recognition to a leader now associated with severe atrocities.

These user perceptions reveal critical assessments of responsible actors. Social media users view the Myanmar government and its leadership as perpetrators of systematic persecution, as shown by the ongoing criticism directed at Aung San Suu Kyi, demands for the withdrawal of her Nobel Prize, and calls for accountability. Additionally, the criticism aimed at Muslim-majority nations and the UN for their inaction reflects a belief that international organizations prioritize words over action. This aligns with what Zarni and Cowley (2014) describe as international indifference, which allows genocide to occur due to geopolitical calculations that place Myanmar's strategic importance above the defense of human rights.

The assertion of cultural and historical legitimacy was a recurring theme in user responses regarding the Rohingya situation. Many users refuted official claims that the Rohingya are illegal immigrants, arguing that they have lived in the Rakhine state of Myanmar for centuries. User Mohammad Abohanifa commented on a Prothom Alo report about renewed violence in Rakhine, stating, *"It doesn't take an expert to understand that the Myanmar government's objective is to expel Muslims who have been living there for thousands of years and establish*

Buddhist settlements in their place." (Mohammad Abohanifa, Prothom Alo, Facebook comment on Violence again in Rakhine, 89 killed, August 26, 2017)

He questioned, *"How can an illiterate minority group attack a police station when they lack both weapons and education? This is just unbelievable."* Another comment stated, "*The Myanmar government staged another drama of police post attacks and began killing and persecuting Muslims the day after the United Nations requested that they grant citizenship to Rakhine Muslims"* (Prothom Alo, August 26, 2017). One commenter even remarked, *"the old Arakan or present-day Rakhine state is the original homeland of Rohingyas who have converted to Islam around the 10th century. I want the Rohingya's right to stay as citizens in their own country."* (Rifat Shahpar Khan, Prothom Alo, Facebook Comment, September 5, 2017).

Social media users contested the state-sponsored delegitimization of the Rohingya by challenging Myanmar's official narrative, which depicts them as recent migrants from Bengal. This opposition to the "othering" process, which seeks to deny their indigenous identity, is evident in these remarks. Edward Said (1978) recognized this form of discursive violence as essential to the creation of the colonial "Other."

The claims of historical presence made by users align with academic studies, such as those by Leider (2013) and Charney (2005), which indicate that the Rohingya inhabited the Arakan region long before colonial borders were established. By reclaiming their historical validity through collective memory and counter-testimony, these user-generated narratives serve as grassroots pushback against the prevailing frameworks that render the Rohingya disposable and stateless.

Rohingyas were frequently described in user comments as "helpless and persecuted" people who were forced to leave their country. Rohingyas are "facing brutal killings in Myanmar," according to comments, which portray their journey as a retreat from potentially fatal violence rather than a deliberate one. This framing is consistent with Christie's (1986) notion of the "ideal victim", blameless and innocent, and Malkki's (1996) portrayal of refugees as "speechless emissaries" devoid of agency. This language, which establishes moral deservingness of protection, risks causing what Rajaram (2002) refers to as the "reduction to bare life," in which refugees are portrayed not as political agents but only as suffering.

According to the examination of the comments, Rohingyas are portrayed as victims of both international desertion and oppression by Myanmar. Comments from users frequently attacked "the Muslim community, Muslim leaders, and Muslim countries" for not doing enough to help the Rohingyas, especially "Saudi Arabia and the OIC for remaining silent." Cohen's (2001) "states of denial," in which witnesses acknowledge pain but do nothing, are reflected in this dual victimization framework. According to Zarni and Cowley (2014), users' displeasure accurately reflects their impression of systemic shortcomings in international protection.

The results demonstrate how social media users utilize a mix of humanitarian rhetoric, religious solidarity, historical validity, and emotive appeals to portray the Rohingya as worthy victims. Social media users contest prevailing official narratives and recast Rohingya identity as persecuted, stateless, and morally entitled to international protection and justice, as Hall (1997) contends that representation is a conflict for meaning.

6.8 Portrayal of Rohingyas as Vulnerable

Based on social media data that reflects multifaceted vulnerability issues, this section portrays the Rohingya as vulnerable.

Table 6.2: Rohingyas are depicted as Vulnerable

	Prothom Alo	%	UNHCR FB	%	Shomoy TV	%	Aman Ullah	%	RYA	%	MOFA	%
Vulnerable	32	22.38	10	15.63	9	24.32	4	6.06	2	6.45	3	60

Source: Data from social media analysis (2017-2023)

Interpretation of Vulnerability Representation

According to **Table 6.2**, MOFA (60%) strategically positions Bangladesh as a suitable host for international burden-sharing assistance, placing the greatest emphasis on vulnerability (Parnini et al., 2013). Vulnerability narratives are used by mainstream media (Shomoy TV: 24.32%; Prothom Alo: 22.38%) to captivate viewers with emotionally stirring humanitarian content. To keep donors interested, UNHCR (15.63%) strikes a balance between resilience messaging and documentation of vulnerability. Rohingya-led sources (Mr. Aman Ullah: 6.06%; RYA: 6.45%) emphasize low vulnerability, reflecting resistance to externally imposed victimhood and an assertion of agency (Smets et al., 2019).

Vulnerability is portrayed in various ways. Forced displacement is frequently used to illustrate humanitarian vulnerability. The focus on statelessness creates political and legal vulnerability. Coverage of natural catastrophes and healthcare access frequently highlights health and environmental risks. Dependency on humanitarian aid serves as a metaphor for economic weakness.

Hall's (1997) theory of representation is demonstrated by this portrayal of vulnerability. According to Hall, representation is an active process of creating meaning through language, visuals, and cultural codes rather than a neutral mirror of reality. When UNHCR uses the phrase "hungry, in poor physical condition and in need of life-saving support," for instance, it portrays Rohingyas as physical beings in need of rescue rather than as political beings with rights and a voice. By portraying international organizations as saviors and Rohingyas as passive recipients, the persistent portrayal of Rohingyas as naturally vulnerable legitimizes external intervention and control.

Importantly, the prevailing vulnerability discourse is challenged by the counter-narrative presented by Rohingya-led organizations. The Rohingya Youth Association, which seeks to "combat negative stereotypes and portray the Rohingya youth as capable and forward-looking," has a significantly lower vulnerability proportion (6.45%). This is an example of what Hall would call counter-hegemonic discourse, in which underrepresented groups try to regain control over representation.

6.8.1 Social Media Users' Perception of Rohingya Vulnerability

Discussions on social media about the Rohingya show starkly different opinions about their vulnerability; some users express intense animosity, while others show compassion. This supports Bhattacharjee's (2024) conclusion that public and governmental discourses often degrade the Rohingya. These conversations are amplified online, leading to what Cottle and Cooper (2015) call "mediated humanitarianism", a situation in which digital platforms use selective framing and visibility to influence public perceptions of humanitarian crises, making vulnerability both hyper-visible and selectively acknowledged.

The most unsettling aspect is the widespread calls for violence, which indicate that some users have genocidal intent. This is consistent with Hall's (1997) thesis, which holds that language becomes a site of power that shapes public opinion and justifies exclusion.

According to Hall, representation entails "symbolic violence", the ability to delegitimize alternatives while making particular interpretations seem normal. In a similar vein, Galtung's (1990) notion of structural violence, which refers to social structures that inflict injury through unequal access to resources rather than overt physical force, is pertinent.

Due to their statelessness, Rohingyas are portrayed on social media as politically and legally weak. This supports Rajaram's (2002) claim that stateless refugees turn into "surplus populations", people who don't belong to the nation-state structure that grants them legal status and rights, making them disposable and politically invisible. Rohingyas are seen as unwelcome foreigners, which highlights their social fragility. Despite the frequency of hate speech, some users provide sympathetic counter-narratives, noting systematic brutality, echoing Bauman's (2004) portrayal of migrants as "wasted lives", populations deemed surplus to social necessities who are ejected or exterminated. There is clear criticism of the government's shortcomings, with users denouncing Bangladesh's "pushback" tactics. Invoking historical reciprocity, other users state that *"the people of Arakan gave shelter during our Liberation War",* a reference to the "norm of reciprocity" (Gouldner, 1960), which calls for the return of benefits.

Kelman's three stages of social influence are reflected in social media replies. Certain users display temporary compassion (compliance). Others adopt antagonistic viewpoints to conform to nationalist identities (identification), consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which holds that belonging to a group gives people a sense of self-worth. The most extreme remarks demonstrate internalization, which is the most dangerous stage since dehumanizing ideas become ingrained personal beliefs that last in any social setting.

6.8.2 Local Population Viewpoints

Local perceptions of the vulnerability of the Rohingya population have evolved significantly over time. Many residents now view the camps as unsafe, heightening concerns about security. *"Every month, five to six local people are abducted by the Rohingyas,"* stated Mohammad Jobair, a 21-year-old day laborer from Palongkhali (Interview, Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 23, 2023). This sentiment reflects the process of "securitization" (Buzan et al., 1998), in which issues are framed as existential threats that require urgent attention.

Local livelihoods have also been affected by environmental degradation. M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury, the Chairman of the Palongkhali Union Parishad, remarked, *"The Rohingya camps have taken over our grazing lands, forests, and gardens"* (Interview, Palongkhali Union, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 23, 2023). This observation aligns with findings from Ahmed et al. (2021), who reported that camp construction has resulted in approximately 4,000 hectares of deforestation.

Economic pressures represent another significant source of tension. Md. Anowar, a 44-year-old grocery shop owner, noted, *"Unemployment among educated youth is increasing because NGOs prioritize hiring Rohingyas"* (Interview, Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 24, 2023). These sentiments resonate with "relative deprivation theory" (Gurr, 1970), which posits that feelings of resentment arise when local residents believe that refugees are receiving benefits denied to them, regardless of their own levels of absolute poverty.

As a result of these combined factors, many members of the host community increasingly view the Rohingyas as a burden rather than as a vulnerable group in need of protection. This shift illustrates that initial recognition of refugee vulnerability does not necessarily lead to sustained compassion; local opinions are now more influenced by material concerns and perceived competition, which cannot be addressed solely through humanitarian narratives (Kamruzzaman et al., 2024).

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically examined how Rohingyas are constructed as victims of persecution and vulnerable populations across social media platforms in Bangladesh. Through in-depth interviews with 22 stakeholders and an analysis of 348 social media posts from six organizational sources, the study shows that representation is an active process of meaning-making that influences public perception and policy responses rather than being a neutral reflection of reality. With notable variations ranging from 40.56% in mainstream media (Prothom Alo) to 3.23% in community-led groups (Rohingya Youth Association), the analysis shows that Rohingyas are primarily depicted as victims of persecution throughout digital channels. Government sources promote diplomatic goals; Rohingya-led organizations fight victim framing to assert agency; humanitarian organizations frame it to justify interventions; and mainstream media highlight persecution to engage audiences.

Nonetheless, the study finds a significant discrepancy between local community perceptions and digital representations. Local host groups have seen a sharp shift from early humanitarian sympathy to rising animosity, despite social media platforms' constant portrayal of the Rohingyas as victims in need of protection. This discrepancy is explained by Kelman's thesis, which holds that although social media creates compliance-level sympathy through normative pressure, it cannot supersede material grievances arising from firsthand experience. An important advancement in questioning prevailing narratives is the rise of digital activism driven by the Rohingya. Although structural disparities in digital environments, such as language restrictions, restricted access, and the algorithmic amplification of mainstream material, limit its impact, this counter-discourse shows the Rohingya understanding of the political importance of representation.

According to the study, to provide effective refugee protection, structural issues that foster competition amongst populations must be addressed, rather than relying solely on victim narratives to elicit compassion. Recognizing that sustainable solutions require addressing structural inequalities rather than relying solely on moral appeals to human sympathy, effective refugee advocacy must integrate digital representation strategies with tangible interventions that support both refugee communities and host populations. The study advances our understanding of how digital platforms shape current humanitarian discourse and draws attention to the ongoing struggles of marginalized groups to manage their own representation in a world that is becoming more interconnected yet still unequal.

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Chapter 7

BEYOND HOSPITALITY: ROHINGYAS AS SECURITY THREATS

7.1 Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh serves as a critical case study for analyzing the evolution of humanitarian acceptance into securitized exclusion. After Myanmar's Tatmadaw violently cracked down on the Rohingya in August 2017, more than 700,000 of them migrated into Bangladesh, following earlier waves of people who had to leave their homes. In the days and weeks that followed, Bangladesh's response was mostly seen as moral and kind. On humanitarian grounds, then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina publicly declared, “If we eat one meal a day and share another meal with these distressed people,” a statement that resonated deeply with local communities who opened their homes and shared scarce resources with refugees (Islam, 2022; Sajjad, 2022). This early response exemplifies what Chimni (2009) describes as the humanitarian imperative, portraying refugees primarily as victims of tragedy entitled to protection, rescue, and compassion.

But as the displacement went on for a long time and solutions were hard to find, this humanitarian frame gave way to stories of anxiety, exhaustion, and insecurity. Recent discussions on the Rohingya in Bangladesh focus on high birth rates, claims of criminal activity, competition for jobs, damage to the environment, and strain on public resources (Rahman, 2010; Ashraf, 2021; Rana & Riaz, 2023). This change in language, from guest to threat, from victim to burden, and from protected person to dependent, reflects what Rajaram (2002) calls the contradictory ways in which refugees are discussed in politics and the media. Refugees are portrayed as both objects of pity and sources of danger, a dichotomy that deprives them of political agency and relegates them to either passive victims or securitized threats.

This change is not unique to Bangladesh and is not coincidental. Refugee-hosting states around the world have shown a trend where initial generosity fades with time due to demographic pressure, economic strain, and politicized narratives. Navruz and Çukurçayır’s (2015) examination of Syrian refugees in Turkey demonstrates the gradual transformation of hospitable sentiments into fatigue and animosity in response to perceived cultural, sectarian,

and economic concerns. In the same way, African countries with historically liberal refugee policies, such as Tanzania, have increasingly pushed for rapid repatriation because host communities and governments believe they don't receive sufficient external support to address the long-term social and environmental consequences (Crisp, 2003; 2005). Bangladesh's experience with the Rohingya exemplifies a global trend characterized by extended displacement and unresolved political crises that cultivate securitized perceptions of refugee presence (Kamruzzaman et al., 2024).

The structural conditions of host nations are a key factor in speeding up this change. Bangladesh's encampment policy keeps Rohingya refugees in very controlled camps, limits their freedom of movement, and forbids them from working formally (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016). These constraints make it harder for refugees to achieve economic independence, increase their reliance on humanitarian aid, and strengthen competition in informal labor markets, thereby fostering perceptions of immigrants as economic threats (Jacobsen, 2005). Extended displacement exacerbates these tensions. The Rohingya crisis is now considered by UNHCR (2023) to be one of the longest-lasting refugee situations in the world. Milner and Loescher (2011) argue that this long-term uncertainty leads to "compassion fatigue," which, in turn, results in political and media narratives that portray refugees as permanent burdens rather than temporary guests.

Insufficient international burden-sharing exacerbates these dynamics. Bangladesh has received inadequate and inconsistent global support despite hosting nearly one million Rohingya, given the magnitude of the situation (Ullah et al., 2020). Betts (2009) shows that when people perceive that responsibility is unfairly shared, host governments often respond by enacting overly stringent laws and using language that makes people feel safe. Simultaneously, camp-based containment measures paradoxically produce the security risks they purport to mitigate. Agier (2011) describes refugee camps as "cities of exception," places where legal uncertainty and long-term exclusion create conditions for informal government, criminal networks, and exploitation to thrive (Turner, 2016). Economic pressures on host communities, such as rising costs and overburdened services, exacerbate animosity, particularly among impoverished populations (Maystadt & Verwimp, 2014). As Huysmans (2006) points out, these structural weaknesses are often exploited for political purposes, allowing politicians to invoke nationalist sentiment to justify increased state control by framing migration as a security issue.

In this context, the media, especially social media, have become a powerful channel for disseminating security-related stories. Algorithms designed to maximize user engagement govern digital platforms. These algorithms routinely favor content that elicits fear, anger, or outrage (Bail et al., 2018; Brady et al., 2017). Security stories about refugees fit this algorithmic logic quite well. Pariser (2011) elucidates the notion of filter bubbles, which describes how users are progressively exposed to material that validates their pre-existing beliefs, while Sunstein (2017) illustrates how such environments cultivate ideological polarization. Empirical research substantiates that Facebook's news feed algorithm markedly diminishes exposure to dissenting perspectives, hence reinforcing prevailing narratives (Bakshy et al., 2015).

These factors have very strong effects on the Rohingya situation. A UN Human Rights Council (2018) fact-finding mission determined that Facebook played a "determining role" in disseminating anti-Rohingya sentiment in Myanmar, with analogous instances of algorithmic amplification and narrative diffusion seen in Bangladesh. Stevenson (2018) illustrates the rapid dissemination of inflammatory content, while counter-narratives contend for visibility. This conclusion is corroborated by Vosoughi et al. (2018), who show that misinformation circulates more swiftly and extensively than verified facts. As a result, social media is not just a place to express yourself; it is also a structural force that shapes how people see things and makes securitized views of refugees seem more legitimate.

In this context, this chapter analyzes the growing portrayal of Rohingya refugees as security threats in Bangladeshi social media discourse and the impact of these portrayals on public perceptions. It specifically examines three related questions: how social media in Bangladesh discusses displaced Rohingya; the main narratives shaping online discussions of the Rohingya crisis; and the extent to which social media influences public sentiment toward Rohingya refugees.

The study employs a qualitative research design that integrates thematic content analysis with comprehensive interviews. It examines 348 social media posts from eight organizational entities on Facebook and YouTube, as well as interviews with 22 key stakeholders. The data analysis adheres to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis paradigm. Theoretically, this chapter draws on Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation Theory, which argues that media is a site where meaning is actively constructed rather than passively reflected, and

on Herbert Kelman's (1958) Social Influence Theory, which explains how attitudes are formed through compliance, identification, and internalization. These frameworks collectively facilitate a sophisticated understanding of how Rohingya identity is constructed through digital media and the normalization of securitized narratives within public consciousness.

7.2 Conceptualizing Security Threats: The Shifting Nature of Security

When people talk about the Rohingya in Bangladesh, especially on social media, they mostly use the language of security. Examination of posts, comments, and reactions uncovers persistent narratives portraying Rohingya migrants as engaged in criminal acts, including drug trafficking, abduction, robbery, murder, theft, arms smuggling, and purported affiliations with extremist and terrorist groups. These representations do not arise in isolation; rather, they signify a broader evolution in the conceptualization, construction, and mobilization of security within modern political and media discourse. To comprehend these narratives, it is essential to contextualize them within the dynamic conceptual framework of security studies.

Historically, security was predominantly conceptualized through a state-centric and militaristic framework grounded in realist international relations theory. In this conventional paradigm, the state served as the principal referent object of security, with threats delineated in terms of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and military survival (Buzan et al., 1998). It is important to note that security is neither an objective nor a self-evident state. Securitization theory holds that an issue becomes a "security threat" when powerful actors successfully frame it as a threat to life that requires extraordinary measures beyond normal democratic processes. In this regard, security constitutes a political and discursive construct rather than an impartial evaluation of danger.

This reasoning has been increasingly applied to human mobility. Academics contend that when refugees and migrants are perceived as risks to social order, economic stability, or national identity, they become vulnerable to securitization processes that validate monitoring, restriction, and exclusion (Huysmans, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Ibrahim, 2005). People often see the Rohingya in this way, where their presence is not seen as a humanitarian issue but as a threat to stability that needs to be controlled. This kind of framing indicates that they don't understand security well and that they prioritize protecting the state over people's well-being.

Critical scholars have contested this narrow perspective by broadening the definitions of violence and threat. Johan Galtung's (1972, 1990) framework delineates three interconnected forms of violence: direct violence, characterized by observable physical harm; structural violence, stemming from inequitable social, economic, and political systems; and cultural violence, which legitimizes and normalizes harm through ideology, language, and symbolism. In the context of refugees, this framework shows how securitized narratives can be a form of cultural violence that supports policies and practices that push displaced people to the edges of society while hiding the structural injustices that cause both displacement and insecurity in host communities.

The idea of human security arose because traditional security models didn't work well enough. The UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report is a prime example of this idea. Human security changes the focus of security from the state to the person and stresses "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want." This paradigm expands the concept of security to encompass economic, nutritional, health, environmental, personal, communal, and political aspects. From a human security standpoint, the portrayal of refugees as dangers signifies a conceptual inversion: those escaping insecurity are redefined as causes of insecurity, while their inherent vulnerabilities are obscured.

Recent research on the Rohingya regularly illustrates how securitized representations prevail in public discourse across various national contexts. Research indicates persistent motifs of criminality, extremism, environmental damage, and demographic peril in portrayals of the Rohingya (Rahman, 2010; Ashraf, 2021; Rana & Riaz, 2023; Rabbani & Panday, 2024). Kironska and Peng (2021) demonstrate that Myanmar's official media systematically depicted the Rohingya as "terrorists" to rationalize military killings, a narrative that has been replicated in nations receiving refugees. Studies in Bangladesh indicate ongoing links between Rohingya refugees and drug trafficking, human smuggling, arms selling, and environmental degradation (Rahman & Dodul, 2020; Hosen, 2022; Islam, 2025). International studies show that the Rohingya are seen as possible sources of religious extremism, which strengthens Islamophobic and security-focused narratives around the world (Wolf, 2014; Al-Rawi, 2019; Rashid & Al-Zaman, 2023).

The media plays a significant role in amplifying these security stories more frequently and loudly. Both traditional and social media continuously depict Rohingya refugees as complex

dangers in health, economic, cultural, and security contexts (Aldamen & Jaleel, 2024). Comparative studies reveal significant parallels in visual and narrative framing across nations, highlighting themes of victimhood, dependency, and overwhelming numbers, while concurrently eliciting terror (Irom et al., 2022). Dinco (2023) demonstrates that, despite the facade of pluralism, media coverage predominantly depends on official government sources, engendering what he describes as an "illusion of independence" in public debate. This combination of state narratives, media framing, and algorithm-driven amplification fortifies securitized perceptions of refugees while sidelining opposing human security viewpoints.

These conceptual and empirical insights collectively highlight the evolving nature of security, shifting from a limited focus on state survival to a contentious arena in which human mobility, identity, and belonging are politicized. The portrayal of the Rohingya as security dangers does not stem from an objective evaluation of risk; rather, it emerges from a comprehensive discursive process that constructs, displaces, and manages insecurity. Placing the Rohingya crisis within this changing security framework enables a more rigorous examination of the production of fear, the prioritization of security, and the systematic marginalization of alternative, human-centered alternatives.

7.3 Findings: Portrayal of Rohingyas as "Security Threat" in Social Media

7.3.1 Portrayal of Rohingyas as Security Threat in Media

This section presents findings on the framing of Rohingya refugees as a security risk to Bangladesh. The data shows that Rohingyas are consistently shown as criminals and threats in some mainstream media like Prothom Alo, Shomoy TV's Facebook page and YouTube channel, as well as the government body MOFA's Facebook page. These depictions highlight the Rohingyas' alleged participation in violent crimes, organized illegal networks, and actions characterized as threatening to national security.

It's important to highlight the distinction between Rohingya-led social media pages and those that label Rohingya individuals as criminals. For instance, the Rohingya Youth Association's (RYA) Facebook page and the personal page of Rohingya activist and historian Mr. Aman Ullah focus on campaigning, preserving culture, and building community resilience. This contrast demonstrates the political and selective nature of threat framing. In total, 348 posts were analyzed from six different social media pages. Detailed data on the depiction of Rohingyas as security threats can be found in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: The percentage of content portraying the Rohingya as Security Threats across various social media platforms

Platform	Security Threats	Total Posts	Percentage
Prothom Alo	13	143	9.09%
UNHCR FB	0	64	0.00%
Shomoy TV	5	37	13.51%
Aman Ullah	0	66	0.00%
RYA	0	31	0.00%
MOFA	1	5	20.00%

Source: Social Media Monitoring of Rohingya-related content, 2017-2023.

Table 7.1 clearly shows a divergence in narrative construction based on the sources' identities and agendas. Mainstream media outlets and government bodies are heavily involved in spreading securitized portrayals. In stark contrast, Rohingya-led pages and the UNHCR presented no narratives framing the situation as a security threat (0%). This significant difference highlights a fundamental clash between externally imposed securitizing narratives and self-representations focused on rights and resilience. Although the table provides important quantitative insights, several limitations should be considered. First, there are significant disparities in sample size: MOFA's estimate of 20% is based on only 1 out of 5 posts, which limits its statistical reliability (Krippendorff, 2018). Second, the temporal distribution of data from 2017 to 2023 may obscure variations that occurred during specific crisis moments (Entman, 2004). Third, the higher security framing in mainstream media may reflect journalistic newsworthiness conventions rather than intentional stigmatization (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Fourth, the coding methodology conflates neutral crime reporting with editorialized threat construction (van Dijk, 1988). Finally, the specific characteristics of different platforms may lead YouTube to favor dramatic content, whereas Facebook emphasizes different engagement patterns (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). Despite these limitations, the complete absence of security framing on Rohingya-led pages (0%) in contrast to its presence in governmental and mainstream media sources indicates a significant divergence in representational priorities.

7.3.2 Specific Media Portrayals and Criminal Activities

The following section examines how different media platforms portray the Rohingya, with particular attention to narratives linking them to criminal activities. It highlights variations in

framing across media outlets and examines how these portrayals shape public understanding of security concerns related to the Rohingya.

7.3.2.1 Prothom Alo's Securitization of the Rohingya

Prothom Alo has consistently portrayed Rohingya refugees through a perspective of criminality and risk. An article from September 4, 2019, titled *"Two Rohingya Killed in 'Gunfight," depicted individuals as part of a "robber gang."* A subsequent post on November 16, 2019, named *"Helicopter Operation to Search for Rohingya Robbers,"* linked Rohingyas with significant threats to public safety. On September 7, 2017, the article *"Are Drugs and Weapons Entering the Rohingya Stream?"* explicitly connected the influx of refugees to smuggling activities. Furthermore, an October 4, 2021, article titled *"108 Murders in Rohingya Camps in Four Years"* attributed the violence in the camps to groups such as ARSA and RSO. This coverage reflects and amplifies broader security-focused narratives discussed by Rahman and Kabir (2023) and Hossain et al. (2021). Additionally, studies by Rahman (2010), O'Driscoll (2017), and Mohajan (2020) indicate that the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) has allegedly been involved in training Islamic militants throughout Bangladesh while expanding its operational presence within the country. Furthermore, Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar have reportedly been exploited by arms and drug trafficking networks, with smugglers utilizing the large population movements to avoid detection during cross-border operations.

7.3.2.2 Shomoy TV and the Mediated Construction of Security Threats

Shomoy TV has established a strong narrative surrounding securitization by utilizing a tripartite framing strategy. This strategy focuses on three main aspects: the sophistication of criminal networks, evidence of community involvement, and the documentation of widespread criminal activity. A report published on September 9, 2021, titled *"Rohingya Child's Stomach Found Wrapped Like a Yaba Carrier,"* highlighted the advanced methods used in smuggling operations. Another post from September 29, 2021, revealed that *"12 out of 14 individuals caught with Yaba were Rohingyas from the Kutupalong camp."* Furthermore, a report on May 10, 2023, called *"Increasing Stockpile of Weapons,"* noted that abduction, murder, robbery, and extortion are rampant.

These claims are supported by the findings of Khan and Yousuf (2022), who documented 2,441 criminal cases involving 5,226 Rohingya individuals. Their analysis revealed 1,644 drug-related offenses, 185 firearms charges, 115 murders, 88 rapes, and 39 abductions, substantiating the criminal activities highlighted in Shomoy TV's coverage and reinforcing the securitization narrative surrounding the Rohingya community.

7.3.2.3 MOFA and the Institutionalization of Threat Narratives

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs formalizes the threat narrative at the institutional level. It officially expressed concerns about the Rohingyas' involvement in criminal activities. For example, in a Facebook post on October 2, 2021, MOFA noted, *"Bangladesh is concerned by increased crimes, human and drug trafficking, and unrest in the Rohingya camps as their stay in Bangladesh prolongs,"* highlighting the rise in these issues as a significant challenge to national security. This governmental framing demonstrates that prolonged displacement is officially framed as a security concern rather than solely as a humanitarian issue. This portrayal aligns with Ullah et al.'s (2020) analysis, which emphasizes refugee securitization processes, and with Hosen's (2022) documentation, which demonstrates how prolonged repatriation delays create multifaceted security issues for Bangladesh through interconnected non-traditional threats that intensify over time.

Figure 7.1 presents a representative example of MOFA's securitization discourse, demonstrating how the government frames the prolonged Rohingya presence as a source of security concerns requiring international attention and action.

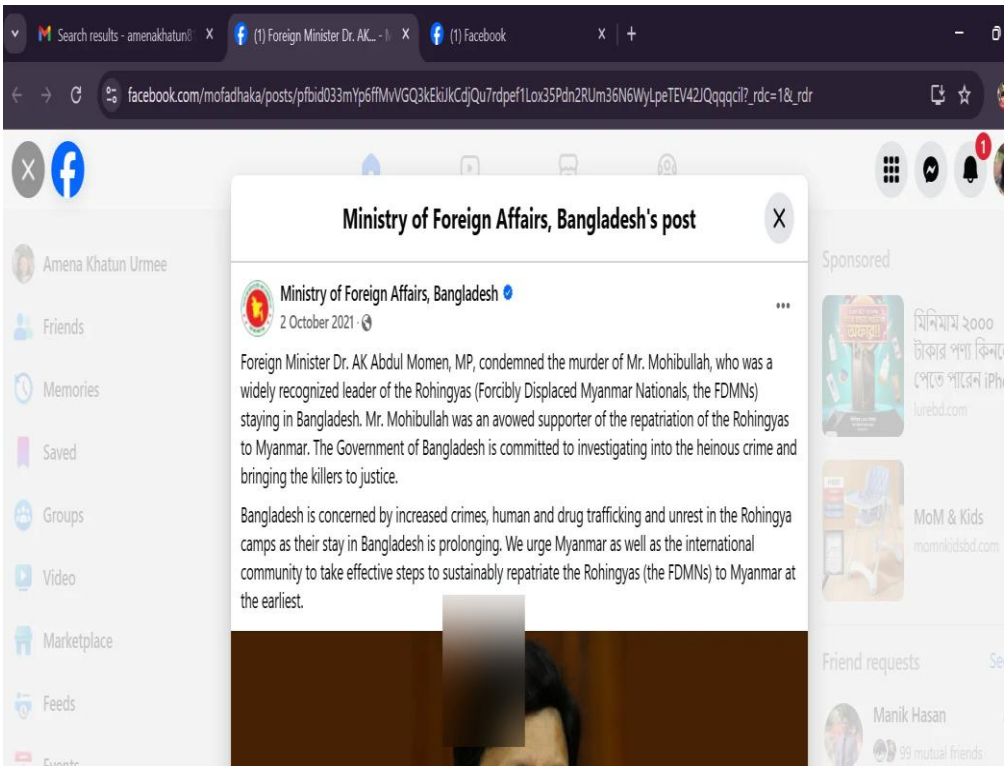


Figure 7.1: Screenshot Example of Security Threat Framing on MOFA Facebook Page

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Facebook page (October 2, 2021). Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

As illustrated in Figure 7.1, on October 2, 2021, MOFA stated: *"Bangladesh is concerned by increased crimes, human and drug trafficking, and unrest in the Rohingya camps as their stay in Bangladesh is prolonging."* This declaration connects prolonged displacement to criminal escalation, legitimizing public anxieties and providing a discursive foundation for stricter security measures. The post also condemns the murder of Rohingya leader Mr. Mohib Ullah while simultaneously framing the broader Rohingya presence as a security burden requiring international intervention. As Ullah et al. (2020) argue, the securitization of refugees is a process whereby displaced populations are re-imagined as risks when durable solutions remain elusive.

7.3.2.4 Synthesis of Securitization and Representation

Securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998) and representation theory (Hall, 1997) are the most useful frameworks for understanding this process. Shomoy TV and Prothom Alo serve as ideological instruments that actively shape reality through deliberate linguistic selections. These news sources create a way of talking about Rohingya identity as criminality by always

using words like "robber gang," "gunfight," and "rape." When MOFA securitizes, it elevates the matter to the level of high politics, thereby legitimizing extreme measures (Bigo, 2002). This three-step process, media framing, data confirmation, and institutional endorsement, effectively makes the Rohingya community all the same, turning them from people who need protection into people who need security management.

The investigations of Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV demonstrate persistent securitization tendencies that correspond to Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation Theory. These channels actively construct meaning through selective framing and linguistic choices, producing what Hall describes as a 'regime of representation' that anchors Rohingya identity within a framework of threat. The statistics corroborate Kelman's (1958) Social Influence Theory: The interplay between media reporting and official statistics cultivates a worldview in which people regard securitized interpretations as objective facts rather than crafted narratives. Nonetheless, the absence of security framing on Rohingya-led pages indicates that excluded communities may sustain alternative representational spaces, suggesting that Hall's concept of 'negotiated readings' applies to content production as well. The Rohingya use what Spivak (1988) refers to as 'strategic essentialism,' opposing securitized portrayals with narratives that highlight rights and resilience.

7.3.3 Social Media Users' Comments towards Rohingya as ‘Security Threats’.

Public perception of Rohingya refugees has changed notably over time on social media platforms. While the 2017 exodus was met with widespread sympathy, this support gradually gave way to frustration, fear, and hostility. This section draws on 33,918 comments from 348 posts across six platforms, which show how people reacted to seven significant events between 2017 and 2023 (See Table 7.2).

In this study, Security Threat Framing denotes discursive techniques that portray Rohingya refugees as threats to the host nation's safety, stability, and social order. Drawing on the Copenhagen School's securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998), this category comprises assertions that characterize the Rohingya issue as an existential threat. Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) contend that the securitization of migration recontextualizes refugees from humanitarian subjects to entities linked with crime, terrorism, and social instability. This measure merges two discursive categories: xenophobic content that conveys fear or rejection of Rohingyas as perceived threats to national security, economy, and society; and genocidal

threats or incitements to violence (GT/IV), which signify extreme securitization through calls for violence, removal, or eradication.

This study employs the Copenhagen School's securitization framework to operationalize security threat framing in two categories: explicitly portraying Rohingyas as existential threats necessitating exceptional measures, a fundamental principle of securitization theory. Xenophobic discourse overtly delineates Rohingyas as perilous to Bangladesh's national security, economy, and social order, termed the "securitarian axis" by Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002). GT/IV exemplifies the pinnacle of securitization, whereby feelings of threat intensify into demands for violence or eradication. Other negative categories in the dataset, such as victim-blaming, dehumanization, or religious intolerance, are excluded from this metric because they don't explicitly employ security logic. (See Table 7.2 for the breakdown of security threat comments by event and period)

Table 7.2: Percentage of Comments Portraying Rohingya as "Security Threats" by Event and Period

Event	SS/HA	%	Xenophobic	%	GT/IV	%	Total
Rohingya Exodus (2017)	6474	34.51%	2893	15.42%	821	4.38%	18760
2 Years Anniversary (2019)	311	5.70%	1923	35.24%	171	3.13%	5457
ICJ Case: Gambia (2019)	45	9.13%	82	16.63%	33	6.69%	493
Bhasan Char Relocation	376	8.03%	2013	42.97%	30	0.64%	4685
Cox's Bazar Fire (March 2021)	575	26.02%	337	15.25%	62	2.81%	2210
Rohingya Leader Muhibbullah Killed	130	7.39%	514	29.22%	37	2.10%	1759
Rohingya Repatriation (2023)	95	17.15%	194	35.02%	27	4.87%	554
Total	8006	23.60%	7956	23.45%	1181	3.48%	33918

Source: Social Media Monitoring of Rohingya-related Content, 2017-2023.

Note: SS/HA = Social Support/ Humanitarian Advocacy; GT/IV = Genocidal Threats / Incitements to Violence. The dataset also includes conspiracy theories suggesting external actors conspired to displace the Rohingya or that the government sought international

recognition. These are excluded from Security Threat Framing as they target external actors rather than the Rohingyas directly.

The findings in Table 7.2 require careful interpretation. Comment volume varies dramatically across events (18,760 for the 2017 exodus vs. 493 for the ICJ case), meaning percentages represent different absolute magnitudes of discourse. Self-selection bias affects who comments on social media; hostile users may be disproportionately motivated to engage, potentially inflating xenophobic percentages (Wojcieszak, 2010).

The classification of comments involves interpretive judgment; comments expressing legitimate policy concerns may be coded alongside explicitly hateful content. Despite these limitations, the precise trajectory from 34.51% support in 2017 to 17.15% in 2023, alongside the rise of xenophobic content from 15.42% to peaks of 42.97%, represents a significant shift warranting serious analytical attention.

7.3.3.1 The Humanitarian Phase (2017): Conditional Solidarity

The 2017 exodus initially generated strong humanitarian support, with 34.51% of comments expressing solidarity, 15.42% showing xenophobia, and 4.38% containing genocidal threats or incitements to violence. Users invoked religious brotherhood, calling Rohingyas "oppressed Muslim brothers." Comments emphasized moral responsibility: *"Our government needs to take good steps; we need to extend a helping hand to them."* This aligns with theories of proximal compassion (Sontag, 2003).

7.3.3.2 The Securitization Shift (2019-2021): From Victims to Threats

By 2019, xenophobic comments had surged to 35.24%, while support had collapsed to 5.70%. Users reframed Rohingyas from victims to burdens, expressing frustration: *"Millions of people in the country are unemployed and suffering from problems, and on top of that, the Bangladesh government is providing three meals a day, healthcare, education - everything for the Rohingyas... Rest assured... a time will come when the Rohingyas themselves will take up arms against Bangladesh (User Comment, Prothom Alo, FB post on "Helicopter operation in search of Rohingya dacoit gang," November 6, 2019).* Comments about high birth rates, such as "*Give them condoms. The way these bastards are eating comfortably and spawning children, it won't be long before Bangladesh becomes another Palestine!"* (User Comment, Prothom Alo Facebook post, on *"Locals worried, Rohingyas happy,"* August 24,

2019), exemplify how biopolitical anxieties (Foucault, 1978) become central to securitization. The Bhasan Char relocation generated the highest xenophobic response at 42.97%, with users characterizing refugees as 'drug addicts,' 'hot-headed,' 'illiterate,' and predicting they would become a 'poisonous boil.' For example, *'Rohingyas are well known as drug addicts and drug suppliers; they will destroy the youth of Sandwip with drugs. I request the government to stop Rohingyas from going to Bhasan Char and arrange to send them back to their country, Myanmar' (User Comment, Prothom Alo Facebook post, "First group of Rohingyas sets foot on Bhasan Char,"* December 4, 2020). while supporting isolation: *"By keeping them in an isolated area, crime can be brought under control." Political fears manifested in predictions: "If nine lakh Rohingyas are relocated to Bhasan Char, they will demand to declare it as a separate upazila. Then they will demand a parliamentary seat... they will one day become a 'poisonous boil' for us."* Such criminalization aligns with securitization narratives, where refugees are framed as a dehumanized, uncontrollable mass threatening national security. Similar patterns appear in representations of Syrian refugees in the UK, where they are associated with crime, fraud, and cultural threats, shifting focus from their suffering to fears of instability (Langdon & Karakoulaki, 2018). These securitization discourses erase personal stories and reduce refugees to threatening stereotypes, ignoring their individual experiences and humanity (Panagiotopoulou, 2025).

Similarly, the ICJ Case showed 16.63% xenophobic framing, with commenters criticizing Rohingyas for perceived dependency, arguing "*They do not do anything by themselves, and always rely on others, even for legal action like Gambia's genocide case against Myanmar,"*. The killing of Rohingya leader Muhib Ullah in 2021 further intensified securitization, with 29.22% xenophobic comments framing him as an *"Arakan terrorist"* and attributing violence to refugees' nature: *"Violence is in their nature. This incident confirms our fears."* Users employed victim-blaming: *"They created this problem themselves with their criminal activities."* This demonstrates how threat-focused depictions of refugees "foster prejudicial attitudes as such depictions stimulate outgroup dehumanization processes" and create self-reinforcing cycles of hostility.

7.3.3.3 Fluctuating Sentiment and Compassion Fatigue

The Cox's Bazar fire temporarily restored humanitarian sentiment to 26.02%, demonstrating that acute crises could reactivate empathy, aligning with Boltanski's (1999) concept of *Distant Suffering*. Notably, xenophobic comments dropped to 15.25% the lowest since

2017, suggesting humanitarian crises can momentarily pierce securitized frames. By 2023, public engagement had declined drastically to just 554 comments. Although xenophobia remained high at 35.02%, the overall pattern reflected what Aldamen (2023) terms 'compassion fatigue', not merely reduced hostility but broader disengagement altogether. Users expressed resignation and empathy exhaustion: *"People have stopped caring about this issue and 'Due to Western flattery and servitude, China has turned its face away from Bangladesh. Now I think nothing is possible anymore regarding the Rohingya issue," (User Comment, Prothom Alo Facebook post, "Rohingya representatives going to observe the Rakhine situation,"* May 3, 2023).*'* This trend aligns with Aldamen's (2023) study on Syrian refugees in Jordan, which found that repeated exposure to dominant media portrayals diminishes audience empathy over time. Even powerful images of suffering lose their emotional impact, leading to compassion fatigue fueled by negative representations on social media

Theoretical Implications

The trajectory from 34.51% support in 2017 to 17.15% in 2023, alongside xenophobic framing rising from 15.42% to peaks of 42.97%, powerfully demonstrates Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that meaning is actively constructed through discourse. The Rohingya were not objectively transformed from 'victims' to 'threats'; instead, their identity was discursively reconstructed through repeated securitized framing. Overall, xenophobic comments (23.45%) nearly equal social support (23.60%), while genocidal threats (3.48%) represent the end of securitization, confirming what Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) term the "securitarian axis", hostility articulated through threat narratives rather than overt prejudice. Kelman's (1958) social influence theory explains this shift: initial compliance with humanitarian norms gave way to identification with nationalist security concerns, eventually culminating in internalization, in which threat perceptions became personal beliefs. However, the temporary restoration of empathy during the 2021 fire demonstrates that securitization is not irreversible, acute humanitarian crises can reactivate compassion, suggesting the 'regime of representation' remains contestable (Gray & Franck, 2019). The 2023 disengagement represents a third outcome beyond support or hostility: apathy, extending existing theory by demonstrating that prolonged exposure to securitized narratives may produce not just attitude change but attitude exhaustion.

7.3.4 Field Interviews on Local Perceptions of Rohingya-Related Security Threats

Field interviews with 22 participants in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, confirmed a clear transition from humanitarian empathy to securitized perceptions. Thematic analysis identified five core areas: criminality, physical safety, camp violence, document fraud, and media-amplified anxiety. A local teacher, Md. Abdul Malek (41) explained: "*When the Rohingyas first arrived, there was sympathy for them as fellow Muslims who were persecuted by the Myanmar government. However, over time, it became clear that many Rohingyas are involved in criminal activities such as abductions, killings, drug dealing, and human trafficking. As a result, this shift in behavior has led locals to change their perception, and now 95% of people want them to leave the country" (Field Interview, Md. Abdul Malek (41), Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).* This transformation matches Pope's (2017) findings on Syrian refugee policy narratives, where "othering" processes construct refugees as "villains" rather than victims. The teacher's account demonstrates how host communities develop a "sense of siege" mentality, viewing refugees through a security lens that justifies exclusionary policies.

Residents also expressed concerns about their personal safety: A local youth named Md. Mamun Hossain (25) said, *"Every month, five to six local people are abducted by the Rohingyas. Additionally, many members of the host community become trapped in the Rohingya camps, putting their lives, businesses, and agricultural activities at risk. I avoid interactions with them because I perceive them as a risk to my safety (Field Interview, Md. Mamun Hossain (25), Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023), which illustrates Huysmans'* (2000) concept of fear internalization.

In addition, the refugee camps themselves were characterized as centers of violence and criminal enterprise. A local of the same place described the internal dynamics: *"At night, Rohingya groups clash, sometimes leading to killings as they fight for control and influence within the camps. These camps have also become hotspots for drug trafficking, with large consignments of drugs, gold, and counterfeit currency being smuggled in and out," (Field Interview, Md. Moin Uddin (34), Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).* This view presents the camps not just as refugee settlements but as criminal hubs that threaten regional security through organized illegal activities. This aligns with Khan (2017), who demonstrated that Pakistan experienced similar securitization of Afghan refugee populations through drug and

arms trafficking concerns. The Rohingya context mirrors this pattern, where camps are reconstructed as sources of regional insecurity rather than humanitarian spaces.

Besides, local residents expressed serious concerns about the Rohingyas illegally integrating into Bangladeshi society through document fraud. The lawyer, Md. Moin Uddin (34) also highlighted this security threat: *"Rohingyas are not allowed to go outside their camps, but they are cutting through the barbed wire fences and escaping from the camps. Since Their physical appearance closely resembles ours, they blend in easily with the local people, even with the assistance of some NGOs and vested groups, they are moving to different districts and sub-districts and creating fraudulent documents like, Voter ID, Passport and birth registration, which is not only violating legal frameworks but also disrupting social harmony, fueling insecurity, and deepening local anxieties."* This perspective frames the similarity in physical appearance as a security vulnerability that enables illegal infiltration. reflect what Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) describe as the "migrant as imposter" narrative. In this framing, the refugee is seen not just as an outsider, but as a fraudulent infiltrator eroding national cohesion.

The constant presence of violence was cited as disrupting normal community life and creating an atmosphere of fear. Md. Azizul Haq (21), a student of Chittagong University**,** from Ukhiya, who is also active on social media, observed: *"Negative news about the Rohingya dominates social media. Not a single day passes without reports of fights, harassment, or violence. People can't sleep because of the gunfire in the Rohingya camps. While the media doesn't always portray the full truth, the frequent raids by law enforcement agencies in the camps are real, "(Field Interview, Md. Azizul Haq (21), Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). This* account emphasizes how violence in the camps affects the broader community's quality of life and sense of security.

Residents developed specific statistical beliefs about Rohingya involvement in criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking. *"Not all news about the Rohingya is accurate, but around 70 percent is. For instance, more than 50 percent of Rohingyas may be involved in drug peddling. Still, social media posts often exaggerate this, making it appear as if the entire community is engaged in such activities," (Field Interview, Md. Azizul Haq (21), Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).* This perspective suggests that while acknowledging some media exaggeration, locals still believe a majority of Rohingyas are

involved in drug-related crimes, contributing to their perception of the community as a security threat. The normalization of such beliefs, even when exaggerated, underscores the role of media amplification and rumor culture in constructing refugee narratives. As the local student, Md. Azizul Haq (21) noted, *"About 70% of the news might be true, but social media exaggerates it."* This aligns with the findings of Y. Aldamen (2023), who shows that repeated negative representations of refugees on social media contribute to compassion fatigue and declining public empathy, especially during prolonged crises.

7.3.5 The Journalistic Perspective on Securitization

Kamol Dey (30), a Somoy TV correspondent in Cox's Bazar, provides insights into evolving media narratives. He noted: *"The ARSA group entered Bangladesh alongside the Rohingya, posing a security threat." Regarding crime: "Around 50% of the Rohingya are involved in the drug trade."* This statistical assertion, even if anecdotal, powerfully homogenizes the community, aligning with what Chouliaraki & Zaborowski (2017) term the "migrant as criminal" trope. He described internal factionalism: *"They have split into factions—one wanting to return and the other opposing it, with the latter allegedly killing those who want to leave."* Dey's account demonstrates that securitization is a multi-scalar process involving state institutions, social media, and the authoritative voice of journalism (Bigo, 2002).

7.3.6 Rohingya and Activist Counter-narratives about Security Threats

The Rohingya's counter-narratives deconstruct security threat discourse by highlighting logical fallacies, contextualizing criminality, and exposing the political economy of blame. The Prominent Rohingya activist and historian, Mr. Aman Ullah, addressed drug trafficking accusations: *"Only around 1,000 out of a million are engaged in it... this minor involvement unfairly places a disproportionately large stigma on the entire community." (Field Interview, Aman Ullah (61), Chittagong, September 2023).* This rejects what political scientists call homogenization of guilt (Agamben, 1998). In this context, a Rohingya Majhi from Kutupalong Rohingya camp, Noor Mohammad Shikhder (29), provided a structural analysis: *"Rohingya youth do not have work opportunities here, hence they are easily drawn into drug trafficking."* (Field Interview, Noor Mohammad Shikhder (29), Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). This aligns with criminological theory (Merton, 1938) and research by Ferguson (2023) and the International Crisis Group (2025), which document how protracted encampment creates conditions conducive to illicit economies. A

Rohingya youth, Ro Maung Maung (22), who is also a private Teacher from camp 13, stated: "*If only 2 percent of Rohingyas are involved... why are all of us labeled as criminals?"* Mr. Aman Ullah rejected political allegations: *"When Bangladesh is our last refuge, how could we ever think of such a thing about the nation that has given us shelter?"* He also exposed scapegoating: *"To protect themselves from any blame, they shift all responsibility onto us."* This aligns with theories of othering (Said, 1978) and represents what Fraser (2000) calls a struggle for recognition.

Rohingya Counter-Narratives and Theoretical Implications

The Rohingya counter-narratives significantly enrich and challenge the theoretical frameworks. Hall's (1997) representation theory is validated insofar as the Rohingya clearly recognize that their identity is being constructed rather than reflected, they understand they are being represented as threats, and actively contest this framing. However, their sophisticated counter-arguments demonstrate what Hall termed 'oppositional reading': rather than passively accepting dominant representations, they produce alternative meanings from positions of lived experience. The structural critique offered by Rohingya voices, emphasizing enforced precarity, aid shortages, and denied livelihoods, directly challenges the securitization narrative's causal logic. This aligns with Merton's (1938) theory of anomie and Ferguson's (2023) analysis of how containment policies generate the very criminality they purport to address. Their counter-narratives exemplify Foucault's concept of 'reverse discourse,' in which oppressed groups appropriate the terms of their oppression to articulate resistance. This demonstrates that even comprehensive securitization processes are contested by those most directly affected.

7.4 Discussion: A Clash of Narratives and Realities

The Rohingya displacement represents one of the most profound humanitarian crises of the 21st century, yet it has increasingly been framed as a national security threat. This discussion synthesizes findings from social media analysis, field interviews, journalistic accounts, and Rohingya counter-narratives to argue that the Rohingya have been subjected to comprehensive securitization, a systematic discursive and political effort to reconstruct their identity from vulnerable refugees into existential threats. This process, however, is actively contested.

The data reveal that securitization is not spontaneous but constructed by multiple actors. MOFA officially framed prolonged presence as a source of "increased crimes, human and drug trafficking, and unrest," moving the issue into high politics (Buzan et al., 1998). National media outlets acted as crucial securitizing actors through consistent selection of crime stories and specific linguistic frames. Social media data and field interviews show how the host community internalized these narratives. Initial empathy (34.51% in 2017) rapidly eroded into widespread xenophobia (peaking at 42.97%), aligning with Huysmans' (2000) concept of "fear internalization."Crucially, this securitization has not gone unchallenged. The Rohingya articulated sophisticated counter-narratives challenging evidence, providing structural critique, rejecting the "threat" label, and exposing the political economy of blame. At the heart of this clash lies an irreconcilable tension: the host country experiences the Rohingya's presence through its symptoms (crime, competition, violence), while the Rohingya experience it through its root causes (statelessness, persecution, structural violence of camp life). The securitized response, which homogenizes the entire community while ignoring contextual drivers, is not only ethically problematic but also practically counterproductive.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter reveals a profound transformation in the representation of Rohingya refugees within Bangladesh's social media landscape. While initial responses to the 2017 influx were rooted in humanitarian sympathy, these sentiments have been replaced by increasingly hostile narratives portraying Rohingyas as security threats, economic burdens, and dependent populations. Different platforms produce distinct narratives: mainstream media emphasize criminal incidents; government platforms focus on burden-sharing; humanitarian organizations maintain protective tones; and Rohingya-led pages actively challenge negative stereotypes.

One critical insight is the disconnect between public perception and structural realities. Social media users often blame the Rohingya for dependency, portraying it as laziness or cultural inferiority. However, structural barriers, statelessness, restricted mobility, and denial of work rights severely limit refugees' ability to become self-reliant. The chapter documents counter-narratives and resistance efforts, highlighting the root causes of displacement while asserting rights to dignity, justice, and repatriation.

Grounded in Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory, this chapter demonstrates that refugee identities are not merely reflected in the media but are actively constructed through discourse. The Rohingya case demonstrates that securitization is a choice, not an inevitability. A sustainable way forward requires desecuritization, a conscious political effort to move the Rohingya from security back into politics and human rights. True security will not be achieved through higher fences but through justice, dignified living conditions, and renewed international commitment to a political solution in Myanmar. The Rohingya are not the source of insecurity; they are its most prominent victims.

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Chapter 8

BEYOND HOSPITALITY: ROHINGYAS AS A SOCIAL BURDEN AND DEPENDENCE IN BANGLADESH

8.1 Introduction

The arrival of about a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since 2017 is not just a humanitarian crisis, but also a huge social and digital event. A socio-digital phenomenon is a major social event, behavior, or pattern that is created, altered, or amplified through digital technology and online platforms, particularly social media. It underscores the inextricable interconnection between social processes and digital infrastructures in shaping contemporary human experiences, identities, and connections. In the case of the Rohingyas, initial responses were marked by gestures of kindness and religious solidarity, but public discourse has changed a lot since then. The story has changed from one of sympathy to one of conflict. Now, the Rohingya are seen not as victims of persecution but as a source of economic pressure, security risks, and chronic dependency. This chapter transcends the preliminary discourse of hospitality to analyze how digital platforms have emerged as pivotal spaces for the construction, contestation, and reinforcement of notions of social burden and dependency.

This chapter offers a conceptual framework for analyzing the utilization of the notions 'burden' and 'dependence' within refugee contexts, grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of securitization and representation. These ideas are neither natural nor neutral; they are constructed by society and politics through narratives that weigh the costs of admitting refugees while downplaying their humanity and agency (Betts & Collier, 2017; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). In today's environment, with digital media ubiquitous, this process is heavily influenced by how people perceive things. Social media platforms, due to their ability to rapidly disseminate information and elicit emotional engagement, have become powerful tools for amplifying these stories and reshaping public perceptions in ways that have not previously occurred. For example, the viral spread of Alan Kurdi's image in 2015 shows how even seemingly sympathetic representations can reinforce problematic framings that turn refugees into objects of pity instead of recognizing their political agency and complex subjectivities (Sajir & Aouragh, 2019).

This chapter investigates the mechanisms by which these constructions are generated and mediated in digital environments, thereby providing an analytical framework for examining Rohingya representation. The analysis delineates particular instances from Facebook and YouTube wherein Rohingyas are depicted as security threats, economic liabilities, and dependent demographics, highlighting prevalent narratives, discursive trends, and rhetorical techniques that render these portrayals compelling. After looking at how Rohingyas are seen as a security danger, this chapter turns to the parallel story of how their presence has put real socioeconomic strain on local communities and national resources in Bangladesh. Importantly, the chapter extends beyond top-down representations. It also looks at the Rohingya community's own agency and resistance by looking at how people see and react to these negative images. Through their own digital and face-to-face channels, Rohingya voices tell stories that go against claims of criminality and dependency. They do this by framing their situation as one of forced precarity instead of moral failure (Ferguson, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2025; Aziz, 2024). Additionally, the analysis investigates the mechanics of public reception, scrutinizing how Bangladeshi social media users interact with these representations, via comments, shares, and reactions, and how these interactions either reinforce or occasionally contest the prevailing discourse. This is framed within current studies on refugee representation and the impact of social media on public opinion (Aldamen, 2023; Eberl et al., 2018).

Lastly, the chapter synthesizes these data using two key theoretical frameworks. Stuart Hall's representation theory (1997) elucidates the production of meaning through language and imagery, demonstrating how the Rohingya are symbolically framed as a "problem" community. Herbert Kelman's social influence theory (1958) offers a psychosocial framework for understanding how audiences progress through stages of compliance, identification, and internalization of these identities, thereby influencing public views and policy preferences.

8.2 Conceptual Understanding: Burden and Dependence

8.2.1 Concept of Burden

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the word "burden" typically denotes a task or responsibility that makes things more difficult. In refugee discourse, it symbolically reifies displaced individuals as high costs that states are compelled to bear, thereby transforming the

narrative from a humanitarian obligation to an economic and political liability (Inder, 2017). The 1951 Refugee Convention recognizes that refugees may impose "unduly heavy burdens" on specific host nations, therefore institutionalizing the principle of burden-sharing.

Recent studies underscore various aspects of the burden narrative. Refugees are frequently characterized as welfare dependents rather than contributors (Eberl et al., 2018). The "economisation" of refugee discourse promotes the notion that hosting refugees harms the economy, with attention primarily focused on costs (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). Research has shown that large numbers of refugees can place significant stress on housing, healthcare, education, public utilities, and infrastructure (Ryan et al., 2008). Suhrke (1998) contends that the perception of migrants as burdens stems not from their presence but from the absence of effective international burden-sharing mechanisms.

In the instance of the Rohingya designated as a Burden, it is clear that Bangladesh has taken on too much of the burden since the Rohingya started coming in, without enough help from other countries. Bangladesh has had to allocate $112 million in domestic funds to meet its needs, which are expected to exceed $5 billion in the future. This is a big financial burden (Finnigan, 2018).

Local economies, particularly in Cox's Bazar, have been profoundly impacted. Food costs in Ukhiya, for instance, went up by 8–13% when the refugees came, which hurt the host population even more because they were already poor and malnourished (Alam et al., 2022). This price increase, together with dropping earnings and competition for employment and help, has made locals even more angry, making it harder for refugees to fit in.

Khatun and Kamruzzaman (2018) found that costs exceeded $517 million over six months and that an additional $951 million was required in 2018. Faye (2021) notes that Bangladesh has continued to assist refugees, despite limited support from other countries. However, the burden remains excessive for them. Ansar and Khaled (2021) observe a significant transformation in local sentiments, shifting from early sympathy to growing anti-Rohingya sentiment, driven by economic hardship, inequitable aid distribution, and disrupted livelihoods.

8.2.2 Understanding Dependency

Dependency denotes a condition of reliance on others for fundamental needs, resources, or support, in which individuals or organizations lack the capacity or opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency. In the context of refugees, dependency specifically denotes the state in which displaced individuals must rely on external aid for survival, security, and the satisfaction of their fundamental human necessities (Harrell-Bond, 2022; Chambers, 1986; Crisp, 2003; Jacobsen, 2005). Dependency is often vaguely defined; however, it is generally understood as the continual reliance on others for sustenance, decision-making, and action to address obstacles (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018).

Dependence, particularly welfare dependence, is profoundly stigmatized and linked to moral decline, personal deficiencies, societal issues, and the intergenerational perpetuation of detrimental behaviors (Fineman, 2006). In refugee systems, relying on charity is typically seen as a bad thing, especially for people living in camps, and it is seen as a sign that they have not been able to become self-sufficient. Some officials argue that providing refugees with long-term assistance makes them overly dependent and discourages them from improving their lives (Siyoum et al., 2012). Being financially dependent has effects that go beyond just money. When migrants can't afford to take care of themselves, they have to rely on help and lose their dignity. The longer they remain in camps and rely on assistance, the more difficult it is for them to integrate into society later, which harms them both socially and mentally (Stein, 1981).

But dependency doesn't have to be seen as a bad thing all the time. Dependency should not be construed as a sign of weakness or a deficiency in autonomy; rather, it can be perceived as a strategic and significant means of cultivating relationships, identity, and support networks. In modern society, characterized by growing instability in work and social positions, dependence on assistance, including aid and cash transfers, has emerged as a pragmatic survival strategy and a means of sustaining social relationships (Ferguson, 2013).

Researchers contend that refugee dependency is not intrinsic but rather generated by institutional configurations and policy frameworks. Harrell-Bond (2022) asserts that aid systems consistently regard refugees as passive victims rather than engaged participants, hence sustaining their reliance on assistance. Institutional mechanisms that benefit from portraying refugees as helpless victims establish and maintain this dependency. In

competitive aid environments, refugees have to act passively and dependently to survive. Hoyer (2005) elucidates that refugee dependency is structurally generated rather than inherently occurring, arising from restrictive policies and insufficient permanent solutions. An extended temporary status compels refugees to depend systematically on external agencies for fundamental survival, shifting their ability for self-sufficiency from individuals and groups to institutional support structures. This arrangement entails portraying refugees as essentially helpless to justify ongoing assistance, so perpetuating perceptions of vulnerability that obscure the reality of policy-induced dependency (Harrell-Bond, 2002).

The predicament of the Rohingya illustrates how narratives of dependency are grounded in systemic limitations. Their dependence is intrinsically linked to their statelessness and the absence of access to formal education, legal employment, and mobility rights in Bangladesh (Ullah, 2011; Rahman, 2010). Because they can't work legally or fit into society, they rely almost entirely on humanitarian help for food, shelter, healthcare, and other basic needs (Guglielmi et al., 2019). This lengthy refugee status, coupled with economic fragility and assistance need, establishes structural conditions that cultivate the image that refugees, such as the Rohingyas, are not just an economic burden but also perpetual dependents on state and international resources (Moses & Kengatharan, 2018).

This kind of framing of dependency has big effects on policy since it often justifies taking away refugees' rights, makes it harder for them to integrate, and makes people in host communities angry. Friedmann's analysis shows that labeling people as burdensome makes them dependent on others, which benefits both donor and recipient countries (Friedmann, 2014). This framing could dehumanize refugees by casting them as passive recipients of help rather than as people with their own talents, agency, and potential contributions (Harrell-Bond, 2022). The conversation about refugee dependency shows how structural constraints, policy frameworks, and public perceptions of displaced populations interact in complex ways. While reliance is frequently vilified and regarded as an individual shortcoming, careful examination demonstrates that it is fundamentally a consequence of restrictive laws and institutional frameworks that constrain refugees' prospects for self-sufficiency and integration. Recognizing dependency as a structurally generated phenomenon rather than an inherent characteristic is essential for formulating more effective and compassionate refugee policies that acknowledge the agency and potential of displaced individuals.

8.3 Contemporary Studies on Rohingya Characterization: "Burden" and "Dependency" Narratives

The long-term presence of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has led to a lot of academic and policy-oriented research that looks at their situation through the lenses of economic burden and aid dependency. This literature frequently connects with and bolsters securitization discourses, forming a compelling narrative that characterizes the Rohingya as a complex burden on the host state.

A prevalent issue in modern literature examines the macroeconomic and localized economic effects of accommodating a substantial refugee population. Ahmad and Naeem (2020) provide a mathematical basis for this story, estimating that Bangladesh spends more than 712,600 trillion Taka per year to support displaced Rohingya, or about 6,000 Taka per refugee. The funds spent on this are said to constitute a significant drain on the country's resources, diverting funds from programs that would help the country grow. Their research also shows that the Cox's Bazar and Chittagong regions exhibit market distortions, with increased demand for basic goods causing prices to rise sharply. This has made life more expensive for people in those areas and caused discontent. This corresponds to the notion of resource rivalry, a prevalent paradigm in refugee studies in which hosts regard immigrants as threats to their economic welfare (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006).

In addition to short-term economic costs, researchers have constructed a narrative of long-term dependence. Moses and Kengatharan (2018) describe the Rohingya as a group that has been dependent on international humanitarian aid for a long time. They argue that this dependence limits Bangladesh's ability to develop independently. Their framing indicates an untenable scenario wherein the host nation is seen as perpetually subsidizing a nonproductive populace. This viewpoint frequently neglects the institutional limitations placed on refugees, including legal obstacles to employment and migration, instead ascribing dependency to an intrinsic trait of the refugee group. This resonates with overarching discussions in refugee studies that challenge the "dependency syndrome" narrative, contending it overlooks the agency and potential of displaced communities (Betts et al., 2017).

Studies have also examined how certain economic sectors are affected by this. Khuda (2020) discusses how the local job market and the tourism industry have been affected. The study observes a transformation in the local workforce, with individuals leaving conventional

sectors such as agriculture to pursue higher-paying positions with international assistance agencies, thereby creating labor shortages for local farmers. Additionally, perceptions that the Cox's Bazar area, including Saint Martin Island, is unstable have led to a decline in visitor arrivals. This has caused big economic losses for a community that depends largely on tourism for income. This data supports the idea that the Rohingya presence is a disruptive influence that makes the local economy less stable.

The scholarly portrayal of the Rohingya as a burden is significantly intensified and propagated through media discourse. Research in this field examines how news organizations and social media platforms disseminate and normalize narratives of economic hardship and dependency. This way of framing things in the media often makes people think the prices are higher than they really are. Often cites numbers, such as those from Ahmad & Naeem (2020), without providing critical context, thereby strengthening the claim of unbearable financial hardship. Social media also makes communities more similar and makes them appear to need one another. Most of the media show all Rohingya as being completely dependent on charity, avoiding examples of people starting their own businesses or being self-sufficient in the camps. The media also says that the Rohingyas are a menace to security. The media sometimes mixes stories about the economy with stories about security issues. They say that poverty and inactivity in the camps would always lead to crime and extremism (see, for example, Rashid & Al-Zaman's (2023) work on social media framing).

This mediated discourse is very important for affecting public opinion and policy. It reduces complex socioeconomic problems to a simple narrative about the burden of refugees, shaping how the host society perceives it and justifying policies that limit rights and keep people in one place. For instance, feelings in the host community regarding Rohingya refugees are not only established in villages, but they are also greatly reinforced and intensified in the comments sections of Facebook and YouTube videos. The hashtag campaigns can make people around the world aware of the situation (#SaveRohingya), but they can also propagate false information and hate speech that makes things worse in the area. Truth, reputation, and identity are also increasingly negotiated through likes, shares, comments, and videos. In this scenario, digital visibility is either a tool for getting attention or a weapon for shaming. For instance, the mainstream media calls the Rohingya a "security threat," but activist counter-narratives call them "rights-bearing victims" on the same platforms.

In summation, modern literature and media analysis show a strong and powerful story that paints the Rohingya as a burden on the economy and a group of people who depend on others. This story is supported by quantifiable data on expenditure and resource rivalry, as well as qualitative analyses of market and social upheaval. Nonetheless, this viewpoint is progressively contested by critical scholarship that interrogates the dependency narrative by emphasizing refugees' agency and the political frameworks that perpetuate dependence (Ferguson, 2013). A complete understanding necessitates recognizing the genuine economic challenges faced by Bangladesh while concurrently challenging the simplistic narrative that attributes the refugee crisis solely to the displaced population, thereby obscuring the primary accountability of the international community and the Myanmar government.

8.4 Findings: Constructing the Rohingya as a Burden and Dependent Population

Bangladesh, a highly populated developing country that is home to almost one million forcibly displaced people, faces a serious and complex problem in the long-running Rohingya refugee crisis. This large influx has placed significant strain on the country's resources, causing major problems in the economy, politics, and finances (Khuda, 2020). In this backdrop, a prevailing narrative has developed in public and media discussions that portrays the Rohingya as a cause of economic difficulties, environmental damage, and social upheaval. Prothom Alo, Shomoy TV, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are among the prominent media outlets and official channels that regularly share this story on their social media pages. They discuss issues such as the rising costs of refugee assistance, large-scale deforestation, and tensions between host communities and refugees. These kinds of portrayals make people think of the Rohingya as not only an immediate humanitarian problem, but also a long-term structural problem for the country (see Table 8.1 for more information).

Table 8.1: The percentage of content portraying the Rohingya as a burden across various social media platforms

Platform	Burden Posts	Total Posts	Percentage
Prothom Alo	28	143	19.58%
UNHCR FB	0	64	0.00%
Shomoy TV	2	37	5.41%
Aman Ullah	0	66	0.00%
RYA	0	31	0.00%
MOFA	3	5	60.00%

Source: Data from social media analysis from 2017-2023

Table 8.1, which examines "Burden Posts," shows substantial differences in how platforms handle this type of information. The most surprising finding is the concentration of these posts in some accounts, especially the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) account, which has a very high burden rate of 60% despite only five posts. The main news source, Prothom Alo, also exhibits a strong link, with approximately 20% of its 143 posts classified as burden postings. This is the largest number of posts overall. In stark contrast, a group comprising the UNHCR Facebook page, Aman Ullah, and RYA exhibits a total absence of such content, with a 0.00% burden rate, indicating that their communication methods either eschew this framing or are not connected to it. Shomoy TV is in the center, with a low prevalence of 5.41%. Ultimately, the statistics indicate that the narrative surrounding "burden posts" is largely shaped by a primary news source and an official government channel. On the other hand, it is absent from the outputs of humanitarian and other specific accounts. The story or frame that "burden posts" suggest is mostly based on a major news source and an official government source. Humanitarian groups, on the other hand, don't use this kind of language.

8.4.1 Specific Media Portrayals and Burden Dimensions

The portrayal of Burden appears in various forms across the examined content, including economic, environmental, social, administrative, security, political, and humanitarian burdens. The portrayal of burden is continuous through the description of rising unemployment and fewer job prospects for local workers. This is because the flood of Rohingya refugees has made competition for jobs stronger and pay lower. The cost of living has also gone up a lot since rents are higher in locations that host refugees, and there is more demand for basic goods like fish and meat, which are shipped to Rohingya camps, hurting the environment and causing problems between the locals.

8.4.1.1 Prothom Alo's Posts and Burden Analysis

The quantitative data from the content study show that platforms have a distinct editorial perspective. For example, the well-known national newspaper Prothom Alo portrayed the Rohingya presence as a multi-faceted burden in 19.58% of its coverage. This story was made by focusing on a few distinct stresses on the country. Through targeted coverage, the Prothom Alo consistently stresses that the Rohingyas are a strain on Bangladesh's economy, resources, and social stability.

From the outset of the crisis, it was clear that burden framing was present. On September 6, 2017, Prothom Alo posted on Facebook what Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said to the world:

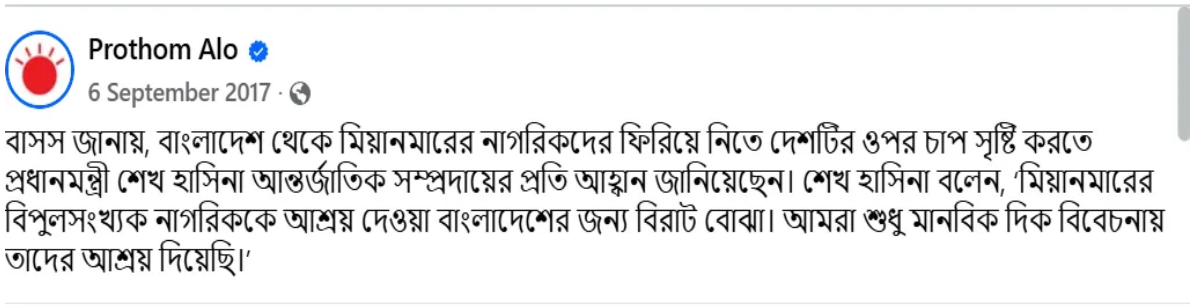

Prothom Alo
6 September 2017 ·
বাসস জানায়, বাংলাদেশ থেকে মিয়ানমারের নাগরিকদের ফিরিয়ে নিতে দেশটির ওপর চাপ সৃষ্টি করতে প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা আন্তর্জাতিক সম্প্রদায়ের প্রতি আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। শেখ হাসিনা বলেন, 'মিয়ানমারের বিপুলসংখ্যক নাগরিককে আশ্রয় দেওয়া বাংলাদেশের জন্য বিরাট বোঝা। আমরা শুধু মানবিক দিক বিবেচনায় তাদের আশ্রয় দিয়েছি।'

Figure 8.1: Screenshot of Prothom Alo Facebook Post identifying Rohingyas as a Burden (September 6, 2017)

Source: Prothom Alo Facebook Page, September 6, 2017

The post quotes the Prime Minister stating, *"Sheltering a huge number of Myanmar citizens is a huge burden for Bangladesh. We have only given them shelter on humanitarian grounds."* This official framing explicitly constructs the Rohingya presence as a national burden requiring international intervention, establishing the burden narrative at the highest levels of government discourse.

In another post on August 4, 2019, titled "Rohingyas will not enjoy such comfort in the future: Foreign Minister," the coverage quoted official concerns about long-term sustainability:

> *"In the future, this comfort will not remain. Right now, many are providing aid. However, if they remain for a long time, we would already be spending approximately 25-30 billion takas from our own funds. That amount may not be available in the future. Then there will be problems".*

This representation frames the Rohingya presence as creating unsustainable economic strain on Bangladesh's resources while emphasizing the urgency of repatriation as the preferred solution to alleviate the perceived burden. In a subsequent post on August 23, 2019, titled *"More Suffering, Less Aid for Locals Due to Rohingya Influx,"* the coverage documented multiple burden dimensions:

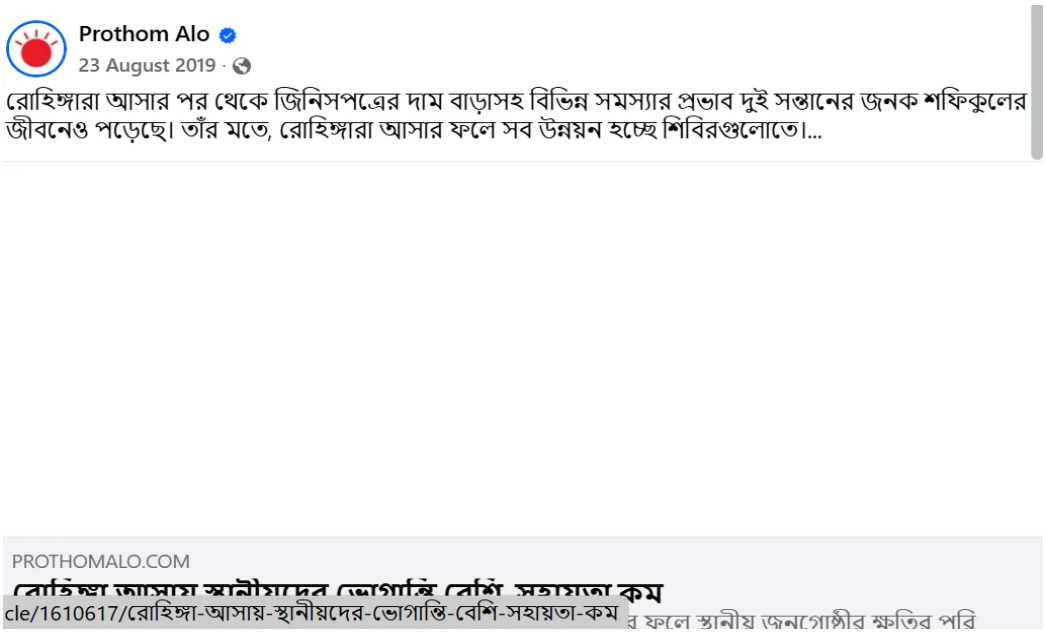


Figure 8.2: Screenshot of Prothom Alo Facebook Post identifying Rohingyas as Local Economic Strain (August 23, 2019)

Source: Prothom Alo Facebook Page, August 23, 2019

The post documents the economic strain on local communities, highlighting rising commodity prices and the perception that development resources are being diverted to Rohingya camps. The headline *"More Suffering for Locals, Less Aid Due to Rohingya Arrival"* explicitly frames the refugee presence as causing local hardship, reinforcing the burden narrative through testimonies of affected residents. The coverage further documented:

> *"Due to sheltering the Rohingya, approximately 6,000 acres of forest land have been destroyed. House rents have increased. Fish and meat are being diverted to various Rohingya camps. Local administration and relevant officials spend 50% of their time on Rohingya-related matters".*

This representation illustrates both environmental burdens, through forest destruction, and social burdens, through resource diversion, housing market disruption, and administrative capacity strain that affect service delivery to local communities. The platform constructs economic burden through employment competition, as documented in a March 15, 2019, post, *"Locals Losing Jobs to Rohingyas."* The coverage includes testimonies from affected locals illustrating economic displacement:

> *The shop owner, Fazlur Rahman, said, 'Currently, we only make around 500 taka in sales throughout the day. However, before the arrival of the Rohingya, we used to have 4 to 5 thousand taka in hand per day.*'

The post further highlights wage depression and employment challenges:

> *It is also tricky for Nurul or his sons to find other work because the Rohingya can be employed for 150 to 200 takas. So, everyone prefers to employ them*.

This representation frames how the influx of Rohingya laborers creates employment competition and wage suppression, generating economic tensions and resentment among host populations who perceive themselves as displaced from traditional livelihood opportunities. The representations of the Rohingya as an economic burden by Prothom Alo align closely with Ahmad and Naeem's (2020) empirical findings, which highlight rising living costs, wage depression, and increased government spending on health and security due to the refugee influx. Both sources emphasize repatriation as a necessary measure to mitigate the financial burden, indicating a convergence between scholarly analysis and public discourse.

8.4.1.2 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

The quantitative data reveal that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) employed a "burden framework" most intensively, with 60% of its analyzed posts framing the Rohingya presence as a severe strain on the nation, a narrative designed to compel international responsibility and burden-sharing. This official discourse consistently framed Bangladesh as overwhelmed by the crisis and in urgent need of global support. This portrait of MOFA's strategic communication closely aligns with the findings of Shuvo, Uddin, and Ali (2024), who argue that the Rohingya crisis poses an unprecedented and overwhelming challenge for Bangladesh due to its massive scale, failed repatriation efforts, and the absence of a formal legal refugee framework. MOFA's messaging meticulously detailed this burden across multiple dimensions. For instance, in a post on September 23, 2021, former Foreign Minister Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen stated that *"Sheltering 1.1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh has been putting enormous social, economic, and environmental costs for Bangladesh,"* a direct quote that exemplifies the government's framing of the issue as a comprehensive national sacrifice. This was further elaborated in another post on October 2, 2021, in which the former Foreign Minister highlighted the compound nature of the strain.

> *The risky conditions of a large number of Rohingyas in a limited space, the uncertainty of their livelihoods, the severe disruption of local socio-economic and environmental conditions, and the increasing security risks*.

This representation demonstrates how official discourse constructed the Rohingya presence as not only an economic and environmental burden but also a pressing security concern, encompassing overcrowding, livelihood uncertainties, and threats to stability.

This focus on the unsustainable nature of long-term refugee management is supported by scholars who highlight how security threats, policy gaps, and economic strain have created an untenable situation. Furthermore, McMillan and Petcharamesree (2021) and Atar (2019) provide a regional context, explaining that mechanisms for regional cooperation, such as ASEAN's approach, are crucial for distributing responsibilities among nations. Their studies underscore that host nations such as Bangladesh contribute significantly to refugee support despite their own limited resources. Together, these academic findings substantiate the core of MOFA's diplomatic narrative: a call for equitable international burden-sharing to manage a global crisis effectively. This strategic use of the burden framework stands in contrast to the humanitarian discourse of organizations like UNHCR (0.00% burden posts), highlighting a clear divergence between a state's diplomatic appeals and an international body's protection-oriented messaging.

8.4.1.3 Shomoy TV and Burden Narrative

The quantitative data show that Shomoy TV, while having a lower rate of burden posts (5.41%) than Prothom Alo or MOFA, consistently framed the Rohingya crisis as a multi-dimensional challenge for Bangladesh across its coverage. This framing aligns with the analyses of Khuda (2020) and Obaidullah et al. (2024), who argue that the Rohingya presence creates a complex strain on Bangladesh, impacting social, political, environmental, and economic sectors. Shomoy TV's reporting gave significant airtime to the political and diplomatic burden, exemplified in a May 5, 2023, post, which highlighted diplomatic stagnation and frustration, stating:

> *The Bangladesh-Myanmar agreement on Rohingya repatriation was signed almost five years ago. However, Myanmar has not taken back a single Rohingya so far.*

This representation frames the crisis as an unresolved political issue consuming state diplomatic resource. Furthermore, the platform amplified the official narrative of an unsustainable humanitarian burden, often channeled through high-level statements. A report from May 12, 2023, titled "*Can't Bear the Burden of Rohingyas Anymore: Prime Minister*," directly quoted the Prime Minister's appeal to the international community:

> *Despite many challenges, we have temporarily sheltered over 1.1 million forcibly displaced citizens of Myanmar… Now, we seek the support of the international community. This is because bearing this burden has become extremely difficult for us.*

This positions Bangladesh's assistance as a temporary act that has reached its limit, necessitating global intervention. Beyond the political and humanitarian angles, Shomoy TV also documented the crisis as a security burden. A November 5, 2018, report titled "*Rohingya Camps Becoming a Security Concern*" discussed how the camps raised law enforcement challenges and became associated with crime and drug trafficking, thereby framing them as a source of strain on public safety resources. Finally, the platform highlighted the social burden, detailing how the presence of refugees frayed community relations. A July 28, 2021, report, "*Tensions Rise Between Locals and Rohingyas Over Aid Distribution*," revealed growing resentment among the host community over perceived inequities in aid allocation, illustrating how the crisis generated social friction and undermined local cohesion. Through this comprehensive coverage, Shomoy TV constructed a narrative of a nation grappling with a pervasive and multifaceted crisis.

The analysis of content from Prothom Alo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and Shomoy TV reveals a coherent, multidimensional narrative that systematically frames the Rohingya presence in Bangladesh as a significant and unsustainable burden across economic, environmental, security, and social domains. While each source emphasizes different aspects, MOFA focuses on macro-level costs and diplomatic appeals for international burden-sharing, Prothom Alo provides granular, empirical examples of economic displacement and resource strain, and Shomoy TV offers comprehensive coverage of political, security, and social tensions, together they construct a powerful consensus that legitimizes repatriation as the essential solution. This narrative is not developed in isolation but is strongly reinforced by academic research, including studies by Ahmad and Naeem (2020) on economic impacts,

Shuvo, Uddin, and Ali (2024) on security and policy challenges, and Khuda (2020) and Obaidullah et al. (2024) on multi-sectoral strains, all of which provide empirical support for the media's portrayal. Ultimately, this consistent "burden framework" functions as a strategic tool to justify Bangladesh's policy stance, underscore the limitations of national capacity, and urge greater international responsibility and cooperation in resolving the crisis.

The consistent use of language across these platforms, terms such as "wage depression," "forest destruction," "security risks," and "can't bear the burden anymore", actively constructs a specific reality for the Rohingya in Bangladesh, perfectly exemplifying Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation. This theory posits that meaning is not inherent but is created through language and discourse; here, the media's systematic framing constructs the Rohingya not as rights-bearing refugees but primarily as a multi-faceted burden on the nation's economy, environment, and security. This process of representation, as Hall argued, is deeply tied to power, serving to legitimize specific policy responses, namely repatriation and international aid, while simultaneously marginalizing alternative narratives, such as local integration or a focus on the refugees' own rights and agency. This application aligns with similar analyses of media discourse, such as Richardson & Poole (2010), who demonstrated how media stereotyping constructs refugee identities in ways that serve dominant political interests, and Zuo (2019), who showed how the representation of marginalized groups in media reinforces existing power structures and shapes public perception and policy. Thus, the Bangladeshi media's portrayal is not a neutral reflection of reality but a powerful act of constructing meaning that naturalizes a particular, state-preferred understanding of the crisis and its solutions.

8.5 Social Media Users' Perception of the Rohingya as a Burden

The analysis of user reactions across social media platforms, including Prothom Alo's Facebook page, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), UNHCR, the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA), Aman Ullah's page, and Shomoy TV's YouTube channel, reveals that perceptions of the Rohingya as a burden are actively constructed through interconnected narratives emphasizing economic strain, demographic threats, environmental damage, and administrative challenges. While many users echo and amplify media-framed representations that portray Rohingyas as economic, social, and security burdens, significant counter-narratives also emerge, reframing their presence through a lens of shared humanitarian

responsibility or even potential societal contribution. These sharply divergent reactions reflect underlying tensions concerning resource distribution, national identity, international accountability, and the ethical boundaries of hospitality toward forcibly displaced communities (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3: Social Media Users' Comments Analysis on the Burden Perspective

Event	Total Comments	Xenophobic Comments	Xenophobic %
Rohingya Exodus	33,918	2,893	8.53%
2 Years Anniversary	5,457	1,921	35.21%
ICJ Case: Gambia 2019	493	82	16.63%
Bhashan Char Relocation	4,685	2,013	42.97%
Cox's Bazar Fire: March 2021	2,210	337	15.25%
Rohingya Leader Muhibbullah Killed	1,759	514	29.22%
Rohingya Repatriation: 2023	554	194	35.02%
GRAND TOTAL	**33,918**	**7,956**	**23.46%**

Source: Data from social media analysis from 2017-2023

Table 8.3 reveals that nearly one in four comments (23.46%) frame the Rohingyas as a burden on Bangladesh. This perception intensifies significantly during policy-focused events. The Bhashan Char Relocation generated the highest burden framing at 42.97%, with comments such as *"Taxpayers' money for outsiders while our people suffer."* The 2nd Anniversary event produced 35.21% xenophobic content, exemplified by expressions like *"How much longer can we bear this burden?"* Similarly, discussions around Rohingya Repatriation in 2023 triggered 35.02% burden-focused comments, with users stating, *"Draining our resources with no end in sight."* Security-related events also activated burden narratives, as evidenced by the Muhibbullah killing incident generating 29.22% xenophobic responses, including statements such as *"They have become a threat to our security."* These findings demonstrate that xenophobic content reliably indicates burden perception, with the intensity of such framing directly correlated with event characteristics that foreground economic costs, administrative responsibilities, or security concerns.

8.5.1 Justification for Selecting the Xenophobic Category to Measure Burden Perception

Selecting xenophobic content as the main sign of how people see "burden" is methodologically sound since it fits directly with how people talk about burden. Xenophobic sentiment, constituting 23.46% of all examined remarks (refer to Table 8.3), fundamentally characterizes refugee populations as economic burdens, resource rivals, and unwelcome outsiders that deplete host community resources. This framing is evident in user comments that discuss how taxpayer money is being spent, how resources are being shared unfairly, and how the economy is being strained—three main components of burden discourse. The research shows that xenophobic feelings rise during events that focus on policies that have economic costs and administrative obligations. This shows that xenophobic content is a good way to measure how people feel about their burden. This method aligns with the ideas of Rashid and Al-Zaman (2023), who argue that burden narratives are based on perceptions of refugees and place undue stress on scarce national resources.

8.5.2 Conceptual Alignment: Xenophobia and Burden Discourse

Xenophobic content creates refugees as an economic and social burden in a number of ways that are all connected. First, it shows refugees as a drain on the resources of the host country, making them look like consumers instead of people who help the economy. Second, xenophobic language makes it sound like refugees are undesirable outsiders who put pressure on public services, infrastructure, and social welfare systems. Third, it tells a story about how citizens and refugees compete for resources, implying that limited national resources are being taken from deserving residents and given to undeserving outsiders. Fourth, xenophobic framing shows refugees as a burden on taxpayers' wallets by focusing on the costs of housing, healthcare, and other services for them. These four aspects, economic drain, unwanted presence, resource competition, and financial liability, collectively constitute the core structure of burden discourse in refugee situations.

8.5.3 Empirical Evidence: Burden Themes in Xenophobic Comments

The empirical data strongly support the use of xenophobic content as a measure of burden perception. Analysis of user comments reveals distinct burden-related themes embedded within xenophobic discourse. The theme of resource competition is evident in comments such *as* Anwar Hossain Shamim*,*

> "Millions of people in Bangladesh are living inhumane lives on footpaths, railway stations, and under flyovers, yet no one pays attention to them. On the other hand, arrangements are being made to rehabilitate the world's largest rogues in Bangladesh, even though they are not Bangladeshi nationals. Is this not shameful for Bangladesh?" (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, "11 Buses Carrying Rohingyas Heading Towards Bhashan Char," December 3, 2020)

This directly articulates the perception that refugees consume resources that should be allocated to citizens, reinforcing the burden narrative through competitive framing. The taxpayer burden theme emerges in comments like

> *"As Hossain Zakaria commented: "It would have been right to establish settlements for Bangladesh's landless people in Bhashan Char, which was built with taxpayers' money, and to send the Rohingyas back to Myanmar by any means necessary. I hope the Honorable Prime Minister will consider this" (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, "First Group of Rohingyas Sets Foot on Bhashan Char," December 4, 2020)*

This explicitly frames refugee assistance as a misallocation of citizen-funded resources and constructs the Rohingyas as a direct financial burden on the national treasury.

The economic strain theme manifests in comments such as, "*We can't help others when we can't help ourselves. These Rohingyas have created so many problems in our country. The money and resources being spent on them could have been used to eliminate unemployment in our country"* (Mst. Happy Akhter, comment on "Rohingya repatriation may start today 8 vehicles have been kept ready," *Shomoy TV*, YouTube, August 22, 2019) that directly articulates the perception of economic burden by linking refugee presence to national economic deterioration. Permanence anxiety represents another significant burden theme, with expressions such as "*They came as temporary refugees, but now it is permanent - we have been deceived"* revealing anxieties about the indefinite nature of refugee presence, transforming a temporary humanitarian obligation into a permanent economic burden. Finally, the theme of unfair allocation is captured in comments about "free food and accommodation (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, 2nd Anniversary event, August 2019). At the same time, citizens struggle, framing refugee assistance as creating inequitable

resource distribution and reinforcing perceptions of refugees as privileged burdens on the state.

8.5.4 Theoretical Framework Supporting Category Selection

The choice of xenophobic material as a measure of burden perception is substantiated by existing theoretical frameworks in refugee studies and media discourse analysis. Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation proposes that xenophobic rhetoric generates 'otherness' through economic burden framing, portraying refugees as fundamentally different from and threatening to the host population's economic interests. Rashid and Al-Zaman (2023) contend that the burden narrative within the Rohingya context originates from perceptions of refugees exerting strain on scarce national resources, hence rendering xenophobic content a natural repository for such sentiments. Harrell-Bond (2002) and Crisp (2003) elucidate the escalation of host community animosity, manifested through xenophobic attitudes, as displacement endures, transitioning from initial compassion to load fatigue. Esses et al. (2001) offer a theoretical foundation in intergroup competition theory, elucidating how refugees are regarded as rivals for resources, thereby eliciting xenophobic reactions. Finally, Szczepanik (2016) shows that people today are more likely to see refugees as an economic threat, which is mostly shown through xenophobic content.

8.5.5 Event-Based Analysis of Burden Perception

The analysis of social media comments across key Rohingya-related events reveals that xenophobic sentiment, averaging 23.46% overall (See Table 8.3), varies significantly by event type, directly reflecting and reinforcing the "burden" narrative prevalent in media discourse. Events perceived as exacerbating Bangladesh's long-term economic or administrative responsibilities, such as the Bhashan Char relocation (42.97% xenophobic comments) and the second anniversary of the crisis (35.21%), triggered the strongest xenophobic responses, highlighting public anxieties over resource strain and perceived permanence of the refugee presence. Similarly, incidents linked to security concerns, like the killing of Rohingya leader Muhibbullah (29.22%), amplified framings of the community as a source of instability. In contrast, acute humanitarian emergencies, such as the Cox's Bazar fire (15.25%), temporarily suppressed xenophobic rhetoric, shifting focus toward empathy. This pattern demonstrates that public perception on social media is not static but is dynamically shaped by event-specific narratives, reinforcing Stuart Hall's theory that

meaning is constructed through representation: dominant discourses of burden and threat are galvanized during policy-focused or security-related events, whereas humanitarian cues evoke counter-narratives of solidarity. Thus, xenophobic sentiment functions as a barometer of perceived burden, intensifying when events highlight costs, risks, or frustrations while receding in moments of shared human vulnerability.

The event-based analysis of social media reactions offers a compelling window into the fluctuating public sentiment surrounding the Rohingya crisis, directly reflecting underlying anxieties and the pervasive perception of burden among social media users. The data reveal that public discourse is not monolithic but is powerfully shaped by specific triggers, with different events activating distinct dimensions of the burden narrative—whether economic, security-related, or humanitarian. The following sections present a detailed examination of these event-based reactions and their direct correlation to the construction of burden.

8.6 Bhashan Char Relocation, Reactions, and Burden Analysis

The Bhashan Char relocation event produced the highest xenophobic response at 42.97% (See Table 8.3), with users expressing deep concerns about resource allocation and permanence. Economic burden anxieties dominated user responses, as evidenced by comments questioning government priorities. One user wrote:

> *"Whatever it may be, I want to inform the government with sadness that they should be killed by brushfire [mass shooting], or otherwise be annihilated with atomic bombs, because how much burden will the government carry, how many billions of taka will be spent? In our Bangladesh, there are still many people who cannot eat properly three times a day. Yet the Rohingyas are being fed beef three times a day. How many more years will these Rohingyas stay?"(YouTube comment on "Rohingyas began their journey to Bhashan Char after eating traditional Mejban," Shomoy TV, December 4, 2020)*

The intensity of economic resentment frequently escalated to hostile and dehumanizing language. Another user stated:

> *"Bastard's children, bastards from where? People in our own country are dying without food and shelter, and on this side the government has built luxurious houses for these idiots."(Facebook comment, Prothom Alo, December 6, 2020)*

This framing aligns with the findings of Rashid and Al-Zaman (2023), Ansar and Khaled (2021), and Sakif et al. (2024), who argue that the burden narrative is rooted in the belief that refugees place pressure on limited national resources, leading to perceptions of competition and growing resentment within host communities.

Beyond immediate economic concerns, the policy announcement triggered deeper fears about permanent refugee settlement and future territorial claims. Users expressed anxieties about long-term demographic consequences, with one commenter predicting,

> Bhashan Char will become the permanent settlement of the Rohingyas. Rohingyas will never return to Myanmar! And one day the Rohingyas will demand Bhashan Char as a separate state for themselves. Mark my words (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Bhashan Char Relocation event, December 4, 2020).

Beyond territorial concerns, users expressed specific anxieties about population growth and demographic change. One user voiced concern about reproductive patterns and their perceived strategic implications, commenting, *"Now they will produce dozens of babies there in an unplanned manner. Then they will occupy Bangladesh,"* (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Bhashan Char Relocation event, December 2020). This response reflects deeper fears about demographic transformation, with natural population growth framed as a form of territorial conquest. These responses demonstrate how infrastructure development decisions activate dormant anxieties about demographic change, sovereignty concerns, and long-term financial obligations that extend far beyond immediate humanitarian assistance costs. This aligns with studies by Harrell-Bond (2002) and Crisp (2003), which document that prolonged displacement without visible progress leads to resentment among host communities. Over time, compassion fatigue replaces initial sympathy, especially when no end to the crisis is in sight.

8.6.1 The Event of 2nd Anniversary

The second anniversary of the Rohingya exodus generated 35.21% xenophobic content, revealing significant "compassion fatigue" and "burden fatigue" as users expressed intense frustration over the prolonged nature of the crisis. Comments like *"Two years and they are still here, draining our resources with no end in sight" and "How much longer can we bear*

this burden? Our economy is suffering" (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, 2nd Anniversary event, August 2019) illustrate how temporal distance from the initial humanitarian emergency increases resentment rather than compassion. This phenomenon aligns directly with the work of Harrell-Bond (2002) and Crisp (2003), who documented that host community solidarity often erodes over time when displacement appears intractable, and solutions such as repatriation remain elusive. Users frequently expressed a sense of deception regarding the temporary nature of the refugee presence, with one noting, *"They came as temporary refugees, but now it is permanent - we have been deceived," (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, 2nd Anniversary event, August 2019)."* The statement reflects a profound sense of frustration and betrayal among local communities, rooted in the growing perception of the Rohingya presence as an indefinite burden. This sentiment is intensified by the everyday economic struggles faced by host communities in Cox's Bazar, one of Bangladesh's most economically disadvantaged regions. For many locals who themselves contend with poverty, limited access to resources, and inadequate public services, the prolonged allocation of aid, land, and infrastructure toward refugees reinforces feelings of relative deprivation. The initial narrative of temporary sanctuary has given way to a reality of seemingly permanent settlement, amplifying grievances among residents who perceive their needs as overlooked, even as national and international attention remains focused on refugee support. This aligns with theories of intergroup competition and relative deprivation, as explored by Esses et al. (2001) and Stephan et al. (2015), suggesting that host communities may develop resentment when they perceive refugees as receiving preferential treatment or as consuming scarce resources that could otherwise be used to address their own systemic socioeconomic challenges. Repatriation frustrations emerged prominently, with comments such as

> *"Rohingyas will never want to leave this country after getting free food and accommodation. Myanmar will not take them back. We should allow those Rohingyas who want to go to Malaysia or elsewhere by sea route to go. This way if they decrease, and "The United Nations should be slapped in the face because they are not saying anything against those who expelled them from their country, but are showing concern here," (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, 2nd Anniversary event, August 2019).*

These statements reveal a deep-seated frustration with the international community, which is perceived as failing to address the root causes of the crisis or to facilitate a durable solution, thereby leaving Bangladesh to bear an indefinite burden. The anniversary thus served as a focal point for expressing accumulated grievances regarding broken promises, ongoing economic costs, and the perception of an open-ended responsibility for refugee support. This public sentiment, as Szczepanik (2016) argues, reflects a broader global pattern in which host populations increasingly view protracted refugee situations through the lens of economic and security threats rather than that of humanitarian protection.

8.6.2 The Events of Killing Mohib Ullah

The killing of Rohingya leader Mohibbullah generated 29.22% xenophobic content, with users framing the incident as clear evidence of the security burdens imposed by the refugee presence. Comments revealed how this act of political violence reinforced and validated pre-existing negative stereotypes. Users expressed virulent hostility, with one stating, *"We should distribute sweets when these ungrateful ones die! Listen, Mr. Journalist, if the Rohingyas were actually good people, then they could have stayed in their own country. They are animals in human form...!* (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Muhibbullah Killing event, September 2021)." Another user added, *"They are killing each other themselves, now they will make a lot of drama about this issue and complain to the outside world that Bangladesh is oppressing them,"* (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Muhibbullah Killing event, September 2021)." This rhetoric exemplifies what Baker et al. (2008) identify as the process of 'othering', where a group is dehumanized and portrayed as inherently violent or untrustworthy, thereby justifying exclusion and hostility. Security burden concerns extended far beyond the immediate incident, with users expressing broader, more existential anxieties. One comment articulated a deep sense of betrayal and fear:

> *"Those whom we have provided with food, shelter, healthcare, and complete security in all social aspects in the name of humanity for so long, today they have become a threat to our security. Furthermore, now for our safety, we have to show them respect out of fear and live in anxiety about our life security," (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Muhibbullah Killing event, September 2021).*

This response demonstrates how isolated incidents of violence are rapidly generalized as evidence for overarching 'burden' arguments, fueling perceptions of ongoing security costs and administrative complications. As Schuster (2003) argues, such security-based framing is a powerful tool in public discourse, often used to legitimize stricter control measures and justify policies centered on containment rather than integration. The incident, therefore, acted as a catalyst, transforming a specific crime into a sweeping metaphor for the entire refugee community's perceived threat to the host nation's stability and social order.

8.6.3 Disaster and Public Reaction

In stark contrast, the fire in the Cox's Bazar camps produced the lowest xenophobic response at just 15.25%, demonstrating that acute humanitarian disasters can temporarily suppress burden discourse and activate powerful narratives of empathy and shared humanity. User comments were overwhelmingly compassionate, with expressions of shock and solidarity such as “Very Shocking news. Very Pathetic. I am feeling shocked. May the Almighty bless those affected Human beings with their dwellings to overcome these types of horrible situations.” The sudden, visual nature of the crisis effectively reframed the Rohingya from a protracted administrative 'problem' to immediate victims of tragedy, as evidenced by comments emphasizing brotherhood and shared vulnerability*:*

> *“They are our brothers and sisters. In this temporary world, they were expelled from their own country and took shelter in our country hoping for a little peace. But by accident, their small shelter was burnt to ashes. I pray for the forgiveness of the souls of those who died and wish for the recovery of those who were injured”, (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Muhibbullah Killing event, September 2021).*

This shift in public perception aligns with Chouliaraki's (2006) identification of the "politics of pity" in media discourse, in which spectacular suffering can create a momentary space for cosmopolitan empathy and universal moral concern, thereby overriding more pragmatic or hostile political narratives. The immediate, apolitical nature of the disaster temporarily suspended deeper anxieties about economic cost and permanence, allowing a humanitarian identity to come to the fore. However, as Moeller (1999) discusses in the context of "compassion fatigue," such empathetic responses are often short-lived and specific to high-visibility crises, rather than indicative of a sustained shift in public opinion. This pattern

clearly demonstrates how the framing of an event—whether as a political policy issue or an acute human tragedy—plays a decisive role in influencing whether social media users perceive refugees primarily as a burden to be managed or as fellow human beings deserving of support and protection.

Based on the event-based analysis of social media reactions, it becomes evident that public perception of the Rohingya is highly dynamic and directly influenced by the framing of specific incidents, oscillating between expressions of profound burden and empathetic solidarity. The dramatic variation in user language across different events reveals that burden perception is highly context-dependent rather than fixed. During policy discussions, users consistently employed economic framing with comments focused on resource competition and unfair allocation. However, during humanitarian emergencies, the same social media platforms generated supportive discourse emphasizing shared humanity and national values of hospitality. Comments such as *"taxpayer money wasted on outsiders"* (User comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Bhashan Char Relocation event, December 2020) during policy events transformed into *"we must help these disaster victims (User comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook, Cox's Bazar Fire event, March, 2021)"* during crises, illustrating how event characteristics fundamentally shape public discourse about the presence of refugees. This pattern suggests that burden anxieties are not constant but are instead triggered by specific factors related to permanence, policy decisions, and perceived threats to resource allocation or security.

8.7 Burden narrative and host community views

Based on the event-based analysis of social media reactions and the testimonies from Ukhiya residents, it is evident that the Rohingya presence is predominantly framed through a lens of multidimensional burden, deeply impacting host community perceptions. As Afrin (2025) and Ansar & Khaled (2021) observe, initial humanitarian goodwill has eroded into resentment due to sustained economic and social pressures. This sentiment is quantitatively reinforced in social media discourse, where policy-driven events such as the Bhashan Char relocation elicited the highest xenophobic response (42.97%), reflecting acute economic anxieties about resource allocation and permanence (See Table 8.3). Local narratives from Ukhiya directly mirror this, with residents reporting sharp rises in prices of essential goods, unemployment among educated youth due to perceived preferential hiring of Rohingyas by NGOs, and

significant land loss over 100 acres of farmland—due to pollution and camp expansion (Interview, Local Union Parishad Chairman, Md. Gafur Uddin Choudhury (50) and small businessman Md. Anowar (44) Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September, 2023). These economic strains are compounded by profound demographic anxieties, as highlighted by a local small businessman's fear that host communities are being overwhelmed.

Local communities also view the Rohingya presence as a significant economic strain. A local small businessman from Palongkhali, Ukhiya, in an interview, noted that

> *"The presence of the Rohingya has led to a sharp rise in the prices of essential goods, including food, vegetables, and transportation fares. Additionally, unemployment among educated youth is increasing, as NGOs prioritize hiring Rohingyas at minimal wages," (Md. Anowar (44), Local grocery shop owner, Field Interview, Palongkhali Bazar Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This concern is being exacerbated by perceptions that aid policies incentivize higher birth rates. This demographic framing aligns with social media reactions to events like the two-year anniversary of the crisis (35.21% xenophobic content), where users expressed "burden fatigue" and frustration over the prolonged nature of the crisis. Yet, as seen during the Cox's Bazar fire (15.25% xenophobic content), acute humanitarian crises can temporarily suppress resentment, invoking empathetic responses (See Table 8.3)

Land loss compounds these concerns, with a local chairman in an interview stating that *"Over 100 acres of farmland have been lost due to waste pollution. Rohingya camps have taken over our grazing lands, forests, gardens, and betel leaf plantations (Md. Gafur Uddin Chudhury,* Union Parishad Chairman, Interview, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023*).* The quotes from local stakeholders in Ukhiya vividly illustrate the concrete economic dimensions of the burden narrative, demonstrating how macro-level crises translate into daily hardships for host communities. The local small businessman's observation that *"The presence of the Rohingya has led to a sharp rise in the prices of essential goods, including food, vegetables, and transportation fares (Md. Anowar (44), Local grocery shop owner, Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)* reflects inflationary pressures driven by sudden demand surges and disrupted local markets, a phenomenon well documented in refugee-hosting economies worldwide. His added concern that *"unemployment among educated youth is increasing, as NGOs prioritize hiring*

Rohingyas at minimal wages" points to perceived distortions in the labor market, where humanitarian hiring practices are seen to exacerbate local unemployment and foster resentment.

Overall, these narratives collectively construct the Rohingya as a structural threat to local resources, economic stability, and demographic balance, reinforcing what Stuart Hall's representation theory would identify as a deliberate framing of the community as a perpetual burden to justify specific political solutions, such as repatriation, while marginalizing alternative humanitarian or integrative approaches. Comments such *as "taxpayer money wasted on outsiders" during policy events transformed into,* we must help these disaster *victims*" during crises, illustrating how event characteristics fundamentally shape public discourse about the presence of refugees. This pattern suggests that burden anxieties are not constant but instead are activated by specific triggers related to permanence, policy decisions, and perceived threats to resource allocation or security.

8.7.1 Journalists' views on the burden discourse

The testimonies from journalists in Cox's Bazar reveal a clear and consequential evolution in how the Rohingya are perceived and portrayed, moving from subjects of humanitarian concern to figures framed primarily through an economic and social burden narrative. As a Prothom Alo journalist, Md. Gias Uddin (58) observed, *"Initially, the local population viewed the arrival of Rohingya refugees as a temporary situation, anticipating eventual repatriation. However, with no repatriation occurring, the host community has faced challenges,"* a prolonged presence that *"led to frustration and resentment among locals, altering their perceptions of the Rohingya presence (Md. Gias Uddin (58), local correspondent, Prothom Alo, Interview, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)* This shift aligns directly with Bari's (2020) findings, which documented that prolonged displacement without resolution erodes initial sympathy and reframes refugees as enduring economic liabilities. The economic dimension is further emphasized by journalist Kamol Dey's highlighting of the adverse impact on local livelihoods following the influx, a perception that resonates with Maystadt and Salemi (2024), whose work shows that host communities often perceive refugees as labor-market competitors rather than potential contributors, thereby fueling anti-refugee sentiment.

Critically, both journalists note a parallel transformation in media narratives, stating that while coverage initially *"highlighted human rights violations, fostering sympathy for the refugees,"* it has increasingly "*focused on negative aspects"* such as criminal activities, which are noted to *"reflect actual events affecting the host community, leading to changing perceptions among locals" (*Md. Gias Uddin (58) and Kamol Dey (30), Local correspondents, Prothom Alo, and Shomoy TV, Interviews, Cox's Bazar, September 2023*).* This journalistic shift exemplifies a broader pattern, noted in studies of refugee representation worldwide, in which media narratives progressively emphasize themes of resource depletion, security risks, and passivity, thereby shaping public opinion to view refugees not as rights-bearing individuals but as burdens on state resources and social stability. This reinforces Stuart Hall's theory of representation, whereby media discourse does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs it, in this case, legitimizing policies focused on containment and repatriation while marginalizing narratives of integration or shared humanity.

8.8 Rohingya perspectives on being seen as a burden

The Rohingya community offers a powerful counter-narrative that directly challenges the dominant 'burden' framing, attributing it to misinformation, media bias, and systemic restrictions that prevent them from becoming self-reliant contributors. Their perspective reframes the discourse from passive dependency to constrained agency and unmet potential. Rohingya youth Osama Ibrahim (30), a freelance photographer from Kutupalong Camp, 14 articulates the frustration with collective blame and criminalization, stating:

> *"Rohingya people are honest. If you spend time with us, you will realize that most of us are innocent and hardworking, but we have limited opportunities for self-reliance... If only 2 percent of Rohingyas are involved in drug peddling or illegal activities, why are all of us labeled as criminals? That is unfair," (*Osama Ibrahim (30), a freelance photographer from Kutupalong Refugee Camp, 14, *Interview, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

This plea highlights how the actions of a minority are used to stigmatize the entire community, a typical pattern in the representation of marginalized groups. Furthermore, Rohingya participants strongly dispute the prevalent myth that they live comfortably on international aid. Another Rohingya Youth clarifies:

> *"There is this common misconception that we are living off international aid, but the reality is far different. Many of us are still living in poverty, struggling to access proper education or healthcare,"* (Md. Taher (22), a content creator, Interview, Kutupalong Rohigya Refugee Camp 13, Cox's Bazar, 2023)

This assertion aligns with Parsons' (2016) research, which argues that "the notion of refugees as an economic burden appears to be a myth," and emphasizes that refugees themselves express a strong desire to work and contribute economically rather than remain perpetually dependent. This challenges the very foundation of the burden narrative by suggesting that dependency is not a choice but a condition imposed by legal and policy constraints that deny them the right to work and formal education.

Regarding their potential economic role, Rohingya activist Mr. Aman Ullah (61), provides an alternative view of the crisis's impact: *"Ukhiya's economic situation was poor before the Rohingya arrived, but their presence contributed to local economic growth."* This perspective aligns with empirical studies showing that refugee influxes can stimulate local economies by increasing demand and labor supply. This view is strongly supported by Gündüz's (2017) study of Syrian refugees in Turkey, which challenges narratives of economic burden by demonstrating refugees' "self-made agency in employment" despite significant legal barriers. Using Barsky's (1994) concept of the "Productive Other," Gündüz reveals how media and political discourse systematically construct refugees as economic threats while ignoring their potential contributions. The study shows that refugees are capable economic actors whose contributions are actively suppressed by restrictive policies, not by any inherent tendency toward dependency. In essence, the Rohingya counter-narrative argues that they are not a burden but a marginalized population whose capacity for productivity is being squandered, and whose identity is being unfairly shaped by media and political narratives that focus on their costs while systematically ignoring their potential value.

8.9 The Portrayal of Rohingyas as Dependent

The Rohingyas are one of the most mistreated and stateless groups in the world. They are dependent on many different things because of systemic discrimination, brutality, and forced displacement. Van den Heuvel (1976) characterized 'Dependency' as a frequently pejorative term for individuals who necessitate assistance, regardless of the reasonableness and necessity of that aid. Harvey and Lind (2005) argue that "dependency" in the context of emergency aid

refers to the possibility that providing food and other assistance over an extended period can make people dependent in ways that are harmful or unproductive. In the context of the Rohingya, dependency is a complex condition caused by their lack of citizenship and legal rights, which makes them financially dependent on international humanitarian aid (Hughes, 2025; Noor, 2025), healthcare dependent on limited access to medical services (Jesmin, 2024), economically dependent on irregular day labor as wages fall and opportunities for self-reliance are limited (Myat, 2018), and legally dependent on their ongoing search for justice, recognition, and hopes of returning home (Faısal, & Ullah, 2020).

8.9.1 Findings: Portrayals of Rohingya as Dependent

The Rohingya crisis has profoundly turned the displaced population into subjects of systematic dependency, as over one million stateless individuals remain fully dependent on external support systems for their basic survival and legal existence (Hughes, 2025; Noor, 2025). Without citizenship rights, legal status, or opportunities to be self-sufficient, the Rohingyas have been placed in a situation in which they will always require humanitarian assistance, resources from the host government, and international advocacy (Harrell-Bond, 2022; Chambers, 1986). In this context, the Rohingyas are depicted as fundamentally incapable of autonomy, necessitating ongoing external assistance for sustenance, shelter, healthcare, legal protection, and even basic decision-making regarding their future, thereby reinforcing perceptions of inherent helplessness rather than acknowledging policy-induced constraints. Media platforms and humanitarian organizations, like UNHCR, Prothom Alo, and activist groups like RYA, and Aman Ullah's advocacy, always stress these dependency relationships in their social media posts by showing how much they need international support, how much they rely on donor funding, how grateful they are for help from outside sources, and how repatriation depends on global intervention rather than community action. This portrayal systematically builds the Rohingya identity around stories of dependence, hiding their ability to be independent and making constant dependence on outside actors the main way to understand their lives (See Table 8.4 for more information).

Table 8.4: The content portraying the Rohingya as dependent

Platform	Dependent post	Total Posts	Percentage
Prothom Alo	8	143	5.59%
UNHCR FB	9	64	14.06%
Shomoy TV	2	37	5.41%
Aman Ullah	3	66	4.55%
RYA	1	31	3.23%
MOFA	1	5	20.00%

Source: Data from social media analysis from 2017-2023

Table 8.4 shows data on "Dependent Posts," revealing a significant divergence in how different platforms frame the Rohingya, challenging the monolithic "burden" narrative and highlighting how institutional mandates shape representation. Contrary to expectations, the official government platform, MOFA, had the highest percentage of dependency-focused content (20.00%). This framing aligns with its diplomatic strategy of emphasizing the strain on national resources to advocate for international burden-sharing and repatriation. Similarly, the UNHCR Facebook page featured a high proportion of such posts (14.06%), likely reflecting its operational need to highlight humanitarian needs and justify ongoing donor support for aid programs. In stark contrast, platforms directly associated with the Rohingya community itself, such as the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) and activist Aman Ullah, had the lowest percentages of dependency narratives (3.23% and 4.55% respectively). This suggests a deliberate effort by the community to counter the passive-victim stereotype and project an image of agency and resilience. Meanwhile, major media outlets like Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV occupied a middle ground (5.59% and 5.41%), indicating a more mixed narrative that, while still containing elements of dependency, is not dominated by it. This analysis demonstrates that the theme of dependency is not a simple reflection of reality but a strategically constructed narrative: used by states to highlight costs, by aid agencies to mobilize funds, and actively resisted by refugee voices seeking to assert their dignity and potential beyond humanitarian need.

8.9.2 Specific Media Portrayals of Dependency

The Rohingya are consistently portrayed as dependent across key areas of survival and security through media representations that highlight their multifaceted reliance on external support systems. This construction of dependency spans humanitarian, economic, legal, and

political spheres, reflecting their systemic lack of rights and autonomy. As Stuart Hall's representation theory (1997) argues, the media does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs meaning through language and discourse, a process clearly demonstrated in these portrayals. For instance, Daily Prothom Alo's Facebook page frequently emphasizes immediate survival needs through posts like its September 6, 2017 entry titled *"UN Urges Saving 'Hungry and Sick' Rohingyas,"* which states:

> *"Many have crossed jungles, hills, and rivers from their village homes. They are hungry, weak, and sick… the Rohingyas who have taken refuge in schools, community centers, and madrasas due to the lack of shelters" (Prothom Alo Facebook Post, "UN Urges Saving 'Hungry and Sick' Rohingyas," September 6, 2027)*

This portrayal employs phrases such as "urgent relief," "hungry, weak, and sick," and "lack of shelters" to underscore critical dependence on emergency aid, employing what Ma et al. (2018) identify as linguistic markers of vulnerability that reinforce passive subject positioning. Similarly, an August 23, 2019, Prothom Alo post titled *"Locals Suffer More, Less Aid for Rohingya*" highlights environmental and economic dependency:

> *"Due to giving shelter to Rohingyas coming from Myanmar, nearly 6 thousand acres of forest land have been destroyed. House rents have increased. Fish and meat are being sold in various Rohingya camps" (Prothom Ao, Facebook Post, 'Locals Suffer More, Less Aid for Rohingya' August 23, 2019).*

This framing reflects dependence on host-country resources while simultaneously constructing a narrative of burden on local communities. Other platforms emphasize different dimensions of this dependency framework: Shomoy TV's April 26, 2019 post *"UN Delegation Visits Rohingya Camp"* notes how "The Rohingyas informed the UN delegation about the current situation and expressed their desire to return to Myanmar as soon as possible, but they emphasized the need for citizenship," demonstrating reliance on international bodies for legal advocacy and repatriation facilitation. UNHCR's December 8, 2020, post *"Swedish and Dutch Ambassadors Visit Rohingya Refugee Camps"* expresses "*We are grateful for the ongoing support from Sweden and the Netherlands in Bangladesh and worldwide. These two countries are among our major donors."* This statement underscores the critical dependence on sustained international funding. Even Rohingya-led platforms

acknowledge this dependent status through appeals to international solidarity, as seen in the Rohingya Youth Association's March 24, 2021 post declaring *"New life, new world for Rohingya genocide survivors in Bangladesh. They need your prayer*," and activist Aman Ullah's November 16, 2019 post about *"The Republic of The Gambia instituted proceedings against the Republic of the Union of Myanmar before the International Court of Justice,"* which underscores reliance on other nations for legal representation. This systematic construction of dependency across platforms—using repeated linguistic choices that emphasize vulnerability and need—ultimately produces the Rohingya as dependent subjects whose agency is constrained by their representation as perpetual recipients of aid rather than active agents of their own futures.

The portrayal of Rohingya dependency can be analyzed powerfully through Stuart Hall's representation theory by examining how language and discourse systematically construct a specific reality rather than simply reflecting objective truth. According to Hall (1997), meaning is produced through representational systems, particularly language, which operates within broader power structures to establish particular understandings of social groups as "common sense." The consistent use of phrases like "hungry, weak, and sick," "need your prayer," and "urgent relief" across media platforms does not merely describe circumstances. However, it actively produces the Rohingya as fundamentally dependent subjects. This linguistic patterning, what Ma et al. (2018) would term a "discourse of vulnerability," reinforces a power dynamic where the Rohingya are positioned as passive recipients of aid rather than active agents of their own lives.

This representation has significant material consequences. By continually framing the Rohingya through a lens of humanitarian need ("UN Urges Saving 'Hungry and Sick' Rohingyas"), environmental burden ("nearly 6 thousand acres of forest land has been destroyed"), and legal helplessness ("The Republic of The Gambia instituted proceedings"), media discourse naturalizes their dependency. It becomes an unchallenged "truth" that they require external saviors—whether states, international organizations, or donors—to survive and secure justice. This obscures their agency, resilience, and aspirations, while simultaneously justifying specific policy responses (such as containment and humanitarian management) and foreclosing others (such as granting autonomy, rights, or integration). Thus, under Hall's framework, this representation is not neutral; it is an act of power that shapes both perceptions and policies, maintaining the Rohingya in a state of perpetual dependency

that serves various institutional interests, from states advocating for burden-sharing to aid agencies securing funding, while systematically silencing Rohingya voices and their own constructions of identity and need.

8.10 Social Media Community Responses to Rohingya Dependency Portrayals

The examination of user discourse across social media platforms, encompassing the Facebook pages of Daily Prothom Alo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNHCR, the Rohingya Youth Association, Aman Ullah, and Shomoy TV's YouTube Channel, elucidates how dependency narratives are systematically constructed and contested by online communities. This analysis of 33,918 social media comments illustrates that user reactions to depictions of Rohingya dependency vary from perpetuating dependency stereotypes to actively contesting these representations.

The choice of classist content and counter-narratives as analytical categories for assessing perceptions of dependence is methodologically sound, as they directly correspond to the discursive construction and contestation of dependency. This two-category method shows both the creation and the pushback against dependency discourse, providing a comprehensive picture of how the Rohingya are perceived on social media.

Classist content is a key sign of how dependency is built since it explicitly links the situation of refugees to their cultural and class traits, not to structural issues. Malkki (1996), in her seminal article "Speechless Emissaries," published in Cultural Anthropology, contends that humanitarian rhetoric routinely portrays refugees as passive, voiceless entities whose situations are attributed to intrinsic traits rather than to political dynamics. She notes that refugees are reduced to a "miserable sea of humanity" where "helpless victims need protection, need someone to speak for them" (Malkki, 1996, p. 390). Classist framing in social media comments—calling Rohingyas "illiterate," "uncivilized," or "jungle-dwellers"—is a clear example of this process of dehistoricization. It takes away the political context of refugees and makes dependency seem like a natural result of cultural inferiority.

Zetter's (1991) seminal work, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity," published in the Journal of Refugee Studies and recognized by Oxford University Press as one of the 100 most influential papers, offers a theoretical framework for understanding how classist labeling engenders dependency. He illustrates that labeling

procedures transform migrants into "objects of policy discourses and agendas," portraying them through "convenient images" where "stereotyped identities are translated into bureaucratically assumed needs" (Zetter, 1991, pp. 39, 44). This theoretical perspective elucidates the necessity of classist content in assessing reliance: such remarks actively construct dependency as an identity category by ascribing refugee situations to intrinsic inadequacies rather than systemic persecution.

Counter-narratives are also vital as they demonstrate that dependency discourse is contested rather than hegemonic. Kibreab's (1993) study, "The Myth of Dependency among Camp Refugees in Somalia 1979–1989," published in the Journal of Refugee Studies, directly contests dependency stereotypes, illustrating that despite adverse camp conditions, refugees "were found to be imaginative, resourceful, and industrious" and "succeeded in maintaining their independence and cultural identity" (Kibreab, 1993, p. 321, 346). His research indicates that perceived dependency is a manifestation of structural constraints and labeling processes, rather than an intrinsic trait. Counter-narrative comments on social media that call Rohingyas "industrious" and "hardworking" while also recognizing structural limits fit with Kibreab's theoretical challenge to dependence myths. This indicates that people are actively opposing classist ideas.

Harrell-Bond's (2002) significant piece "Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees Be Humane?" in Human Rights Quarterly further substantiates this dual-category framework. She shows how paternalistic aid systems treat refugees as "passive recipients," which keeps them dependent on others without giving them any power. She contends that refugees "do not undergo a miraculous reverse maturation upon leaving their country of origin, abruptly transforming into children incapable of self-care"; instead, "individuals are perpetually adults, consistently able to account for themselves and to organize their own distributions of aid" (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 56). This theoretical framework facilitates the examination of both classist narratives (which portray migrants as inept) and counter-narratives (which acknowledge refugee agency), thereby encompassing the full spectrum of dependence discourse.

Stuart Hall's (1997) representation theory serves as the foundational underpinning for this analytical methodology. Hall contends that meaning is actively generated through discourse rather than merely reflected, asserting that representations serve as arenas of contestation in which prevailing meanings may be challenged. This study examines both classist content (dominant dependency discourse) and counter-narratives (resistance discourse), encapsulating what Hall refers to as the "politics of representation", the contestation of meaning that influences the perception and treatment of refugee communities. This dual approach elucidates reliance not as an objective state but as a discursive construct that is actively generated, perpetuated, and challenged through social media discourse (See Table 8.5 for details).

8.11 Quantitative Analysis of Discourse Patterns

Table 8.5: Social Media Classist Content and Counter-Narrative Analysis: User Perceptions of Rohingya Dependency

Event	Total Comments	Classist Comments	Classist %	Counter-Narrative Comments	Counter-Narrative %
Rohingya Exodus	18,760	8	0.04%	49	0.26%
2 Years Anniversary	5,457	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
ICJ Case: Gambia 2019	493	5	1.01%	7	1.42%
Bhashan Char Relocation	4,685	31	0.66%	18	0.38%
Cox's Bazar Fire: March 2021	2,210	2	0.09%	26	1.18%
Rohingya Leader Muhibbullah Killed	1,759	6	0.34%	10	0.57%
Rohingya Repatriation: 2023	554	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
GRAND TOTAL	33,918	52	0.15%	108	0.32%

Source: Data from social media analysis from 2017-2023

Table 8.5 shows a clear pattern: discussions about occurrences involving the Rohingya are often split and strongly affected by both the event itself and stories of dependency that were already out there. Classist material accounts for 0.15% of all comments we examined, whereas counter-narratives account for 0.32%. This indicates that resistant discourse is slightly more common than dependency-constructing discourse across the entire dataset. However, these percentages vary substantially across events, indicating that different stimuli elicit different discursive reactions. The ICJ Case: Gambia 2019 had the most classist material (1.01%), with comments saying that the Rohingya were "unable to seek justice without outside help." However, it also contained numerous counter-narratives (1.42%), indicating that the space for discussion was contested. The Bhashan Char Relocation generated 0.66% classist content and 0.38% counter-narratives, with discussions focusing on the perceived "deservingness" of Rohingya refugees for enhanced living conditions. The Cox's Bazar Fire produced very little classist material (0.09%) but the most counter-narratives (1.18%). This shows that humanitarian emergencies can reduce dependence talk while fostering empathy.

8.11.1 Classist Construction of Dependency

Social media users employ classist language to construct Rohingya dependency as an inevitable outcome of perceived cultural inferiority rather than structural persecution. This pattern directly exemplifies what Malkki (1996, p. 378) describes as the "dehistoricization" of refugees—the stripping of political context that reduces complex individuals to ahistorical humanitarian subjects defined solely by need and inadequacy. Comments labeling Rohingyas as *"illiterate and uncivilized"* and portraying them as *"jungle-dwellers from Myanmar"* establish a causal relationship between supposed class status and dependency circumstances. Users characterize them as *"a barbaric nation with no identity,"* constructing dependency as a natural consequence of perceived primitive status while denying the role of genocide, statelessness, and legal restrictions in creating their circumstances.

Classist comments reveal how users establish hierarchies of deservingness based on perceived class status. As Zetter (1991, p. 44) argues, labeling processes render refugees "objects of policy discourses" depicted in "convenient images" that serve institutional rather than refugee interests. This theoretical insight is reflected in user comments mockingly suggesting Rohingyas *"should move to areas like Gulshan, Banani, or the Prime Minister's house, insinuating they are not VIPs," (User Comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook, Bhashan Char*

event, December 3, 2020), demonstrating how class prejudice shapes expectations about what dependent people merit. Comments questioning *"why they should receive brick-built houses in Bangladesh" (User Comment, Prothom Alo, Bhashan Char Relocation event, December 3, 2020)* reveal assumptions that people from lower perceived classes naturally deserve inferior living conditions, transforming dependency from temporary need into permanent justification for minimal assistance.

Classist attitudes frame Rohingya dependency as illegitimate competition with local populations. Harrell-Bond (2002, p. 56) documents how aid systems perpetuate dependency by treating refugees as "passive recipients" incapable of self-organization, despite evidence that "people are always adults, always capable of counting themselves." This paternalistic framing is echoed in comments questioning *"why attention is given to Rohingya refugees when there are numerous distressed or impoverished citizens lacking necessities," (User comment, Prothom Alo, Facebook, Bhashan Char Relocation Event, December 4, 2020),* reflecting class-based resentment that positions dependency as zero-sum resource competition. This framing delegitimizes Rohingya dependency claims while reinforcing assumptions about which populations deserve priority in resource allocation.

8.11.2 Counter-Narratives and Agency Recognition

However, counter-narratives challenge classist dependency constructions by recognizing Rohingya agency and structural constraints. These resistant discourses align with Kibreab's (1993) empirical challenge to dependency stereotypes, demonstrating that refugees possess an inherent capacity for self-reliance, constrained by structural conditions rather than by character flaws. His research found that despite camp conditions, refugees "were found to be imaginative, resourceful and industrious" and "succeeded in maintaining their independence and cultural identity" (Kibreab, 1993, p. 321, 346). Counter-narrative comments in social media echo this recognition, emphasizing that *"Rohingyas are industrious and humanistic individuals who, due to their helpless conditions in refugee camps, have limited means to improve their situation" (User Comment, UNHCR Facebook, Cox's Bazar Fire event, March 2021),* directly contradicting classist assumptions about inherent inadequacy.

These users acknowledge dependency as structurally imposed rather than reflecting character flaws, noting that *"Rohingyas are hardworking and not inclined to habits like drinking,*

gambling, or opium-smoking" (User Comment, UNHCR Facebook, Cox's Bazar Fire event, March 2021). Such counter-narratives recognize that legal restrictions on employment, education, and movement, not cultural inferiority, create conditions of dependency. This recognition aligns with Harrell-Bond's (2002) argument that refugees maintain adult capacities for self-organization despite being systematically excluded from "decision-making processes in the structuring of programs" that affect their lives. The presence of counter-narratives, comprising 0.32% of all comments, demonstrates that dependency discourse is contested rather than hegemonic, creating discursive openings for alternative framings that acknowledge the imposed rather than inherent nature of refugee dependency.

8.11.3 Event-Based Analysis of Dependency Discourse

The ICJ Case: Gambia 2019 had the most classist content (1.01%), with classist language framing Rohingyas as unable to seek justice without help from outside sources. This reinforced what Malkki (1996) calls the idea of refugees as "speechless emissaries" who have no political power. This gathering, which was about international legal action on behalf of the Rohingyas, gave people a chance to talk about how powerless and dependent the Rohingyas were on outside actors. However, this event also led to numerous counter-narratives (1.42%), which illustrate what Stuart Hall (1997) calls the contested nature of representation. In this discourse, intense prejudice encountered equally strong opposition, acknowledging the Rohingya's ability to pursue justice.

The Bhashan Char Relocation generated moderate classist criticism (0.66%) and counter-narratives (0.38%), with user conversations focused on the perceived "deservingness" of Rohingya refugees for enhanced living conditions (See Table number 8.5). This episode revealed latent class-based evaluations on merit and resource distribution, which Zetter (1991) characterizes as the political aspects of refugee tagging. The Cox's Bazar Fire produced negligible classist content (0.09%) and the largest percentage of counter-narratives (1.18%), illustrating that severe humanitarian emergencies can inhibit discourse on dependence while eliciting empathic reactions (See Table 8.5). This trend corresponds with Chouliaraki's (2006) notion of the "politics of pity," wherein extraordinary pain fosters a transient realm for global empathy, therefore superseding more pragmatic or antagonistic political discourses.

The Mohib Ullah killing incident produced 0.34% classist content and 0.57% counter-narratives, suggesting that violent acts against prominent figures may temporarily redirect discourse towards enhanced acknowledgment of Rohingya political organization and leadership, thereby undermining narratives of intrinsic helplessness. The Rohingya Exodus led to 0.04% classist content and 0.26% counter-narratives. Labels like "illiterate," "uncivilized," and "jungle-dwellers" helped create core dependency narratives, but they were met with discourse that recognized Rohingya autonomy. The 2-Year Anniversary and Rohingya Repatriation 2023 events were mostly free of classist framing and counter-narratives (0.00%). This indicates that the conversation was more impartial and focused on policy, avoiding overtly dependent discourse.

An examination of social media discourse reveals that dependence narratives are systematically framed through classist lenses (0.15%) and actively challenged by counter-narratives (0.32%) (Refer to Table 8.5). This dual pattern shows that dependency is not an objective state but a discursive construction that is produced, reinforced, and resisted through social media discourse. Stuart Hall (1997) posits that representations serve as arenas of contestation in which prevailing meanings may be challenged, a phenomenon clearly evident in the data, where classist interpretations of intrinsic inadequacy are confronted by counter-narratives that acknowledge structural limitations and refugee agency.

Comments calling Rohingyas *"illiterate and uncivilized," "jungle-dwellers from Myanmar," and "a barbaric nation with no identity"* (User Comment, Prothom Alo Facebook, Rohingya Exodus event, 2017) establish causal linkages between perceived primitive status and dependency, while negating the influence of genocide, statelessness, and legal limits in shaping their circumstances (Malkki, 1996; Zetter, 1991). However, counter-narratives asserting that *"Rohingyas are industrious and humanistic individuals,"* limited by structural conditions rather than personal deficiencies, contest these constructions, resonating with Kibreab's (1993) empirical evidence that dependency signifies imposed constraints rather than intrinsic traits.

These findings illustrate that the characterization of Rohingyas as inherently dependent due to cultural inferiority fulfills specific political objectives, rationalizing limited assistance and containment while sidelining alternative strategies such as integration, employment access, and self-reliance initiatives. Nonetheless, the existence of counter-narratives indicates that

this framing is contested, creating discursive space for alternative representations that recognize both refugee agency and structural limitations. It is crucial to understand how dependency is both constructed through classist discourse and contested through counter-narratives, thereby informing interventions that promote refugee self-sufficiency and dignity, while acknowledging, as Harrell-Bond (2002) posits, that refugees possess intrinsic capacities for self-organization when structural obstacles are mitigated.

8.11.4 Host Community Attitudes toward Rohingya Dependency Narratives

The analysis of local community perspectives in Ukhiya reveals complex and evolving attitudes toward Rohingya dependency, with initial humanitarian sympathy gradually transforming into resentment over perceived unequal resource distribution and economic burden.

Residents express significant concerns about the Rohingya's dependency on humanitarian aid, viewing it as creating unfair advantages over the host community. A local small businessman from Ukhiya articulated economic frustrations, stating:

> *"The presence of the Rohingya has led to a sharp rise in the prices of essential goods, including food, vegetables, and transportation fares. Additionally, unemployment among educated youth is increasing, as NGOs prioritize hiring Rohingyas at minimal wages while engaging in nepotism" (Md. Anowar (44), a local grocery shop owner, Interview, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This perspective reflects local perceptions that Rohingya dependency on international support creates economic distortions that disadvantage the host population. Community leaders view Rohingya dependency on host country resources as directly threatening local livelihoods. A local chairman from Ukhiya expressed territorial concerns:

> *"Locals feel antagonized by the Rohingya's presence, as they have occupied lands previously used for farming, grazing, and gardens. Over 100 acres of farmland have been lost due to waste pollution. Our grazing lands, forests, gardens, and betel leaf plantations have been taken over by Rohingya camps, and trees are being cut down. As a result, we are struggling to survive," (Md. Gafur Uddin Choudhury (50), Union Parishad Chairman, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

This sentiment demonstrates how locals interpret Rohingya dependency on land and resources as existential threats to their own survival. Local officials express alarm about how humanitarian aid systems create incentives for dependency, particularly in relation to demographic growth. The Chairman stated:

> "The Rohingya population is vast... Their population has been steadily growing since 2017. According to an independent survey, approximately 60,000 Rohingya children are born each year. Many believe they are having children in competition with one another, driven by the incentive of receiving rations" (*Md. Gafur Uddin Choudhury (50), Union Parishad Chairman, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023*)

This perspective constructs Rohingya dependency on aid as strategically manipulative rather than genuinely need-based. Locals express deep resentment about perceived inequalities in support systems, viewing Rohingya dependency as providing better living standards than those available to host communities. The local chairman also articulated this disparity:

> *"They are healthier than us. They are smarter than we are. They speak English. They shop at supermarkets and buy fish, meat, eggs, milk, and lentils. Each month, foreign NGOs deposit funds into their bank accounts. Even their wedding ceremonies sometimes take place in a five-star hotel in Cox's Bazar. This is a serious warning sign for us", (Md. Gafur Uddin Choudhury (50), Union Parishad Chairman, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

This statement reveals how locals interpret successful adaptation within dependency relationships as evidence of undeserved privilege.

8.11.5 Rohingya Counter-Narratives to Dependency Representations

The Rohingya community actively challenges their portrayal as dependent subjects through various counter-narratives that emphasize their agency, misrepresented circumstances, and desire for self-reliance rather than permanent dependency on external support. Rohingya participants in an interview strongly contest the widespread perception that they receive preferential treatment and live comfortably off international aid. One Rohingya participant directly addressed this misconception:

> *There is a common misconception that we are living on international aid, but the reality is very different. Many of us are still living in poverty, struggling to access proper education or healthcare. While aid organizations provide necessary support, it's not enough to overcome the challenges we face daily. The idea that we are privileged just because we get some help from NGOs creates tension between the local community, who feel we are receiving more than we deserve (Ro Maung Shwe, (27), a Freelance writer, Interview, Kutupalong Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

This counter-narrative reframes dependency as an ongoing struggle rather than as a matter of privilege, emphasizing inadequacy rather than the abundance of support. Rohingyas actively contest the perception that they prefer dependency in Bangladesh over returning to Myanmar. Another Rohingya youth in an interview from Kutupalong Camp in Cox'sBazar clarified:

> *We have always been ready to return to Myanmar. But many Bangladeshis think we want to stay in Bangladesh. No, everything I have is in Myanmar; Myanmar is my identity and my country. Why would I want to remain in Bangladesh? But I have no choice, I am compelled to stay here (Ro Maung Maung (22), a private teacher, Interview, Kutupalong Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Cox's Bazar, 2023)*

This counter-narrative reframes their presence as involuntary rather than preferential, challenging assumptions about their desire to maintain dependency relationships. Rohingya activist and historian Mr. Aman Ullah (61) 's advocacy directly challenges dependency narratives by emphasizing the Rohingya's potential for self-sufficiency. His statement: *"My aim is to educate them on our circumstances. Many people like my posts, and they help the younger generation understand our situation"* positions education as a mechanism for informed self-advocacy, enabling Rohingyas to articulate their own experiences rather than being defined through external dependency frameworks.

Ullah's call for *"policies allowing Rohingyas to contribute economically through skills-based industries, which could benefit both them and host countries"* reframes the relationship from one-sided dependency to mutual benefit. His emphasis on *"leveraging their hidden talents such as sports or technical skills"* challenges dependency constructions by recognizing existing capabilities that remain underutilized due to structural constraints rather than inherent

inadequacy. This advocacy reveals that current dependency conditions stem from policy restrictions rather than community incapacity, presenting an alternative model in which temporary support enables eventual self-sufficiency and a transition from aid recipients to economic participants.

8.11.6 Journalists' Observations Toward Rohingya Dependency Portrayals

Journalists, from Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV, have observed that the Rohingya population has become increasingly dependent on external support. This dependency is not only economic but also institutional, as the community relies heavily on humanitarian aid, international organizations, and media attention to voice its grievances. *"The Rohingya people do not work to improve their situation on their own; they are used to receiving everything from food to shelter from external sources," (Kamol Dey (30), local correspondent, Shomoy TV, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)* noted. This perception of dependency is reinforced by their prolonged reliance on aid agencies, which some local voices interpret as a lack of initiative or willingness to integrate or contribute productively to the host society.

Additionally, Kamol Dey (30) highlighted how this dependency is sometimes strategically used. *"They do not directly complain to us,"* he remarked, *"they complain to Al Jazeera, CNN. They speak to international media for their benefit."* This indicates a pattern where the Rohingya community tends to bypass local media and authority structures, opting instead to seek external validation and support, further emphasizing their reliance on international platforms rather than developing local engagement strategies. From the journalist's perspective, this behavior reflects a community accustomed to external advocacy rather than self-sustained agency.

This perception has contributed to the broader media framing of the Rohingya not just as victims but also as passive recipients of aid, which in turn influences public opinion and policy discourse in the host country. It complicates the understanding of humanitarian assistance, blurring the line between necessary support and long-term dependence, a blurring that some believe undermines integration or self-reliance.

8.12 Conclusion

The conversation around the Rohingya crisis, as shown by how the media and social media talk about it, shows a complicated mix of humanitarian concern, anger over social and economic issues, and politically tinged stories. The Rohingya are regularly portrayed via a dual lens of burden and dependency across many platforms, with media outlets, government agencies, and social media users emphasizing themes of economic pressure, resource rivalry, and security threats. This framing aligns with Stuart Hall's idea of representation, which holds that language and discourse actively shape realities that support larger power structures. In this case, it legitimizes policies of containment, repatriation, and international burden-sharing while pushing aside other stories of Rohingya agency, resilience, and rights.

The Rohingya Exodus, the move to Bhashan Char, and the ICJ lawsuit all made people more classist and xenophobic, usually because they were worried about how resources would be shared and what it meant to be a citizen of the country. On the other hand, short-lived, context-dependent moments of empathy and solidarity were elicited by acute humanitarian catastrophes, such as the fire in Cox's Bazar. The lack of counter-narratives at events, especially those led by Rohingya voices, shows how deeply ingrained ideas of dependency and threat are in people's minds. The Rohingya themselves contest these homogenizing representations, underscoring their aspiration for autonomy, fairness, and dignity rather than continuous dependence. However, their points of view are often lost amid prevailing discourses that treat their existence as a management issue rather than a human rights concern.

To address these representational imbalances, we need to make a conscious effort to ensure that Rohingya voices are heard in the media and public discourse. This will help combat one-dimensional portrayals of dependency or threat and ensure that their stories of agency, resilience, and hope are at the center. It is equally important to put talks about resource strain and security in the perspective of larger historical, political, and institutional causes, like Myanmar's persecution, the lack of action by the international community, and global refugee policy, instead of just blaming the Rohingya for the problems. Additionally, telling stories about common humanity and resilience can help combat dehumanization and bring people together by shifting the focus from burden to shared duty and dignity. Finally, ensuring that data are collected and represented accurately is important for understanding how discourse

works, identifying patterns in public opinion, and developing tailored actions that address both misinformation and strongly held biases.

Ultimately, the Rohingya crisis is not merely a political or humanitarian matter; it is also a struggle over meaning and representation. The way the Rohingya are seen, as burdens or as people with rights, agency, and hopes, will continue to affect how the public feels, how the government responds, and the chances of finding a fair and long-lasting solution to their problems.

8.13 References

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Chapter 9

AGENTS OF CHANGE AND RESILIENCE: THE PROACTIVE SPIRIT OF THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

9.1 Introduction

A prevailing narrative in both scholarly research and public media has historically portrayed refugees through a framework of deficiency and peril. They are often portrayed as a uniform group of weak, needy victims or as a threat to the safety of host communities. These depictions take away their uniqueness, agency, and humanity (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Krause & Schmidt, 2020; Leurs & Smets, 2018; Schweitzer et al., 2011). This ongoing representation produces a simple dichotomy that ignores the complicated realities of displaced people, hiding their strength, ingenuity, and ability to actively contribute to the host culture.

This misconception is most conspicuous in the context of the Rohingya (Ahmed & Hassan, 2024). The stories that most people tell about them often make them seem powerless, docile, and dependent on others for support, which often suggests that they don't want to influence their own destiny. But these pictures only tell a small part of the narrative (Uddin, 2022). A rising amount of evidence shows that the Rohingya are very active people, even though they have been through a lot of persecution and have been stateless for a long time. They do this by preserving their culture, organizing their communities, and speaking out against injustice (Bose, 2023). Their perseverance is evident in storytelling, art, and grassroots activities that demonstrate a formidable determination to restore dignity and reconstruct their lives.

This chapter aims to challenge the simplistic narrative by analyzing how social media platforms function as a contentious arena for depicting Rohingya agency. This study conducts a qualitative thematic content analysis of 348 Facebook and YouTube posts, alongside 22 in-depth interviews, to examine the representation of displaced Rohingya in Bangladeshi digital media. Instead of focusing on the ideas of being a victim or a threat, we ask: How is the strength of the Rohingya people built and shared on social media? How can these platforms show that they are actively working to influence decisions, advocate for people, and establish communities?

This analysis looks at the power of digital tales using Hall's Representation Theory, which looks at how language and images create meaning, and Kelman's Social Influence Theory, which looks at how communication shapes and changes attitudes. Through a meticulous thematic analysis, we discern eight main motifs in their representation. A primary finding, and the emphasis of this chapter, is the emerging notion of the Rohingya as "Proactive and Resilient." This theme encompasses their proactive engagement in camp governance, courteous social behavior, strong work ethic, artistic expression, steadfast optimism, and growing awareness of their rights. This study posits that social media, despite its complexities, can serve as a transformative platform through which the Rohingya establish their identity not merely as passive recipients of humanitarian relief but as proactive architects of their own future.

9.2 Conceptualizing Proactivity and Resilience

9.2.1 Proactivity: Challenging the Status Quo through Digital Agency

Crant (2000) defines proactivity as a forward-looking behavioral pattern marked by self-initiated, change-oriented actions intended to enhance one's circumstances and environment. It is distinct from passive adaptation, as it entails a conscious effort to alter circumstances and create new opportunities. Crant et al. (2016) further assert that proactive individuals are generally driven to contest and transform the status quo, operating in anticipation of forthcoming challenges or requirements rather than passively responding to events as they transpire.

This theoretical framework serves as a robust lens for examining the digital habits of the Rohingya community. Although they are sometimes portrayed as helpless victims, a large portion of the population is highly active on social media. They use modern means to speak out about their shared problems, share their stories of being forced to leave their homes and to fight back, and continue to advocate for their political and human rights. This is a planned, self-initiated endeavor to change how the world perceives them and to shape the conversation about their situation. They actively seek to offset their marginalization by producing content, mobilizing transnational networks, and engaging directly with global audiences. This corresponds with Crant et al.'s (2016) definition of proactivity as a challenge to established systems; in this instance, the Rohingya are contesting both the humanitarian narrative that portrays them as docile and the political mechanisms that aim to suppress their voices.

In this study, Rohingya proactivity is defined as ongoing, self-directed initiatives to improve their circumstances and assert their rights despite significant challenges. This takes many forms: from participating in campaigns and complex discussions on repatriation to keeping cultural traditions alive through digital archives and creating informal jobs, even when the law and economy are highly stringent. Their proactive behavior is evident in their participation in camp culture, disciplined and courteous conduct, hard work, creative problem-solving, positivity, and growing awareness of and assertion of their basic rights.

9.2.2 Resilience: Dynamic Adaptation in the Face of Sustained Adversity

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is the capacity to adapt to significant adversity or trauma through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility (Newman, 2005). Ecological and social frameworks, such as that proposed by Adger et al. (2002), view resilience as a community's capacity to withstand external shocks and pressures while continuing to perform its core functions and sustain livelihoods. This is different from an individualistic view. Contemporary scholarship redefines resilience not as a fixed, inherent personality feature, but as a dynamic, continuous process of positive adaptation in the face of considerable hardship (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

For the Rohingya population in Bangladesh, resilience is exactly this ever-changing process of survival and adaptation. It means that, even though they are living in a state of prolonged relocation, systemic violence, and deep insecurity, they are nonetheless able to keep important skills, stay healthy, and reach a certain level of financial stability. In the Cox's Bazar camps, they face a constant stream of problems, such as not having enough food and water, not being able to find formal jobs, having social difficulties with the host communities, and stringent limits on their freedom of movement. In this situation, resilience doesn't mean going back to how things were before the crisis, which is impossible. Instead, it means developing ways to address a crisis that never ends.

Their experience might be envisioned as occurring within a magnetic field of conflicting forces, continually contending with power structures that aim to confine them. The essence of their resilience lies in their everyday coping mechanisms, including the creation of informal economies, the establishment of networks of social solidarity, the use of digital tools for connectivity, and the engagement in cultural rituals (Afrin, 2025). This resilience enables individuals and the community as a whole to navigate difficult times by drawing on both

internal and external resources (Islam et al., 2022). It is evidence of their enduring capacity not only to survive but also to rebuild a sense of purpose, identity, and optimism in the face of inconceivable challenges.

9.3 Findings: Proactivity and Resilience

The analysis examined 348 Facebook and YouTube posts and 22 interviews, revealing varying degrees of positive portrayal. These findings demonstrate significant variations in how different platforms represent Rohingya agency and resilience: **(See Table 9.1)**

Table 9.1: The percentage of content portraying the Rohingya as Proactive and Resilient across various social media platforms

Platform	Total Posts	Proactive & Resilient Posts	Percentage
Prothom Alo (FB)	143	18	12.59%
UNHCR Bangladesh (FB)	64	14	21.88%
Shomoy TV (YouTube)	37	20	54.05%
Aman Ullah (FB)	66	5	7.58%
RYA (FB)	31	7	22.58%
MOFA (FB)	5	1	20.00%

Table 9.1 shows that the six platforms have quite different levels of proactive and resilient messaging. Shomoy TV's YouTube channel shines out among them. More than half (54.05%) of its 37 postings are proactive and resilient, more than twice the percentage of any other platform. This means that Shomoy TV is the best at disseminating stories of perseverance and looking ahead, which is likely because it focuses on timely, news-driven content that demonstrates constructive ways to address problems. On the other hand, Prothom Alo's Facebook page had the most posts overall (143), but only 18 of them (12.59%) were proactive or resilient. This indicates that the page prioritized broader coverage over posts focused on resilience. Aman Ullah's Facebook page, which is a community-based platform, also had the lowest percentage of proactive material (7.58%). This could indicate that the page focuses on reporting problems or lacks sufficient resources to communicate solutions.

UNHCR Bangladesh is one of the best institutional actors, with 21.88% of its posts being proactive. This fits with its humanitarian mission to promote refugee protection and resilience. The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) has a slightly higher rate (22.58%), indicating that young people are working to share uplifting stories.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) posted only five times, yet it still had a moderate engagement rate of 20.00%. This shows that even a small amount of engagement can convey a message of resilience when carefully planned. The analysis indicates that post volume does not inherently correspond with the existence of resilience-oriented material. Even though Shomoy TV and RYA have fewer total posts, they are more committed to proactive storylines. On the other hand, high-output platforms such as Prothom Alo remain rather careful in how they frame content on resilience and proactive solutions. This variation aligns with Al-Zaman and Rashid's (2024) Global Media Sentiment analysis of the Rohingya Crisis, which indicates that media discourse on Rohingya issues primarily exhibits negative sentiment patterns that evolve significantly across national reporting contexts.

9.3.1 Portal Specific Representation of Proactive and Resilient

The Rohingya community's proactive nature manifests clearly in their active participation in repatriation processes in various media outlets, as has been presented below:

9.3.1.1 The Prothom Alo

Prothom Alo's May 5, 2023, report documented a 20-member delegation, including women, traveling to Myanmar to assess the conditions for return. Delegate Mohammad Farukh stated: *"If everything is fine, then all Rohingyas will return without any problem."* While this demonstrates autonomous decision-making, such choices occur within what research identifies as constrained circumstances where refugee decisions are made *'under oppressive government policies'* (Gerver, 2015), illustrating agency exercised within structural limitations rather than complete freedom of choice."

Likewise, Mohib Ullah's tragic case, documented in Prothom Alo's October 2, 2021, article *"Muhibullah killed for wanting to return to Myanmar,"* illustrates community assertiveness. His advocacy exemplified the community's refusal to remain silent about their rights. This contradicts the account Betts and Jones (2016) identify as a misconception of refugee passivity. In their book "Mobilising the Diaspora," the authors argue that, rather than

passively waiting for external assistance, refugees actively mobilize in political struggles, including Rwandans resisting repatriation and Zimbabweans engaging in advocacy. As they note, *"refugees engage actively in political struggle"* with diverse aims, revealing *"the precarious agency of refugees."* Muhibullah's case mirrors this pattern of active engagement despite structural constraints and personal risks. Prothom Alo's September 7, 2017, report documented organized rallies where Rohingyas demanded *"the right to reside in their own country safely."* These demonstrations represent the community's ability to organize, articulate demands, and engage in constructive advocacy rooted in shared values.

Prothom Alo's commentary on August 27, 2019, emphasized: *"Not all Rohingya are illiterate; those who came since '91 have studied in Madrasas and schools and are earning their livelihood."* This challenges stereotypes of refugee passivity, highlighting their active pursuit of education and skills. It reinforces that refugees' struggle is not due to a lack of ability, but instead to educational systems that focus on deficits instead of valuing their experiences and knowledge. With supportive opportunities, refugees can develop and demonstrate significant skills (Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018).

9.3.1.2 UNHCR presentation

UNHCR's December 2, 2020, statement highlighted *"the right of Rohingya refugees to make a free and informed decision about relocating to Bhasan Char."* This positions the community as an active agent rather than a passive recipient of humanitarian intervention. UNHCR's portrayal of women like Sahera, who *"smiles as she sees green sprouts emerging from the soil in her garden,"* symbolizes refugee resilience through productive engagement. This aligns with findings from northern Iraq's refugee camps, where displaced Syrians utilize home gardening and urban agriculture as coping mechanisms for trauma. According to Tomkins et al. (2019), these gardens serve multiple functions beyond food production: they create therapeutic spaces, reduce psychological stress, and foster a sense of place and stability that support emotional recovery while enhancing daily living conditions.

9.3.1.3 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the *"voluntary basis"* for Bhasan Char relocation, stating that *"More than 1600 Rohingyas, who expressed their willingness voluntarily for relocation, have been shifted" (*MOFA Facebook Post, December 4, 2020). This reflects what

Mistry (2024) emphasizes: the need to recognize refugees' 'hidden agency' and analytical capabilities while examining power structures in forced migration research. The Rohingya case demonstrates that refugees possess analytical capabilities but face structural constraints on their exercise.

9.3.1.4 RYA (FB)

The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) exemplifies forward-thinking approaches through their mission: *"Our mission is to promote work together, to promote equal opportunities and fight against discrimination."* (Ro Khin Maung, RYA Facebook Post, November 4, 2019). Their community initiatives, including friendship football matches and blood donation campaigns, demonstrate what Walther, L. et al. (2021) identify as "cognitive as well as behavioral strategies for facing adversity" and "the role of volunteering, work, and activism for refugee causes." Figure 9.1 illustrates one such initiative, a friendship football match organized by RYA to promote social cohesion between host and Rohingya communities.

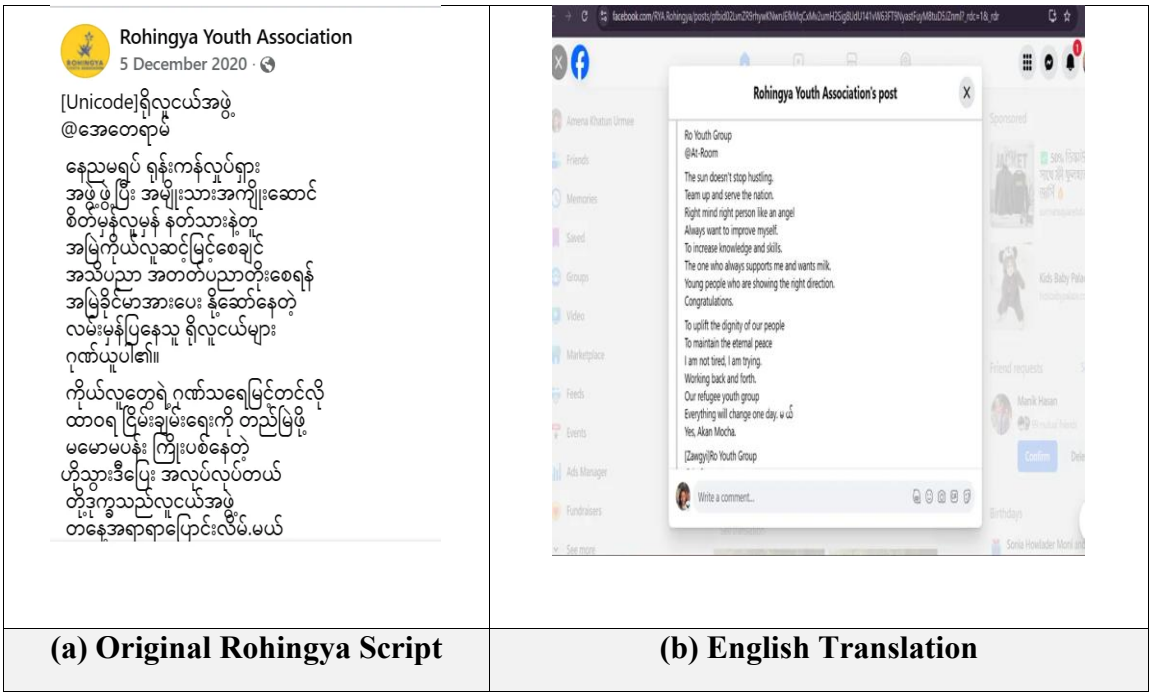


Figure 9.1: Screenshot Example of Agency Framing on Rohingya Youth Association Facebook Page

Source: Rohingya Youth Association Facebook page (November 4, 2019). Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

As illustrated in Figure 9.1, the RYA organized a friendship football match between the host and Rohingya communities in Thaying Khali, Cox's Bazar, Camp-13. The post describes how *"RYA started social Cohesion, peace education between the host Community and the Rohingya by playing football as an example."* Ro Khin Maung, founder of RYA, served as referee for both teams, symbolizing the organization's role in bridging communities. These activities create vital social support networks while embodying the cognitive strategies identified in the resilience literature as essential to refugee well-being and successful adaptation to adversity.

Similarly, the establishment of Art Garden Rohingya by writer Mayyu Ali represents a significant cultural achievement that demonstrates refugees' creative coping strategies. Since March 2019, this platform has published works by more than 150 young poets, culminating in *"I Am a Rohingya,"* the first English-language collection of Rohingya poetry. This initiative exemplifies what Dieterich-Hartwell (2017) identifies as refugees' use of creative arts to cope with trauma and displacement. Young poet Hasan's perspective exemplifies this phenomenon: *"I see poetry as a powerful way to express these feelings and amplify the voices of the Rohingya."* Figure 9.2 presents an example of such creative expression: a poem shared on the RYA platform, presented in both the original Rohingya language and an English translation.



(a) Original Rohingya Script | **(b) English Translation**

Figure 9.2: Rohingya Youth Poetry Expressing Resilience and Hope

Source: Rohingya Youth Association Facebook page (December 5, 2020).
Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

Figure 9.2 depicts the poetic voice of Rohingya youth in the "Ro Youth Group" post, presented in both the original Rohingya script and an English translation. The poem articulates themes of perseverance ("The sun does not stop hustling"), collective purpose ("Team up and serve the nation"), self-improvement ("Always want to improve myself, to increase knowledge and skills"), and unwavering hope ("Everything will change one day"). Particularly significant is the line "To uplift the dignity of our people," which encapsulates the community's determination to reclaim their identity and rights. The bilingual presentation demonstrates both cultural preservation through the Rohingya script and the community's efforts to communicate their message to international audiences. This creative expression demonstrates what Bourlet and Lorin (2018) describe as "moments of ecological crisis and population displacement" becoming "periods of intense linguistic activism and literary creativity," where refugee literature serves as "a mode of resistance and resilience."

9.3.1.5 Shomoy TV coverage

Shomoy TV's coverage of Bhasan Char relocation captured community members showing *"smiles on their faces and enthusiasm for the opportunities available (Shomoy TV YouTube, 'Rohingyas are pleased receiving government facilities,' December 5, 2020).* Their participation in traditional feasts created a *"somewhat festive atmosphere" (Shomoy TV YouTube, December 4, 2020), demonstrating their ability to derive* meaning even in challenging circumstances. Shomoy TV's excomoeptionally high positive portrayal rate (54.05%) (See Table 9.1) suggests successful movement beyond victimization narratives. This aligns with Mohanty's (2022) research on how *"the image of the refugee as the 'other' is constructed, which is produced, reproduced, and circulated institutionally."*

9.3.1.6 Aman Ullah's Facebook

Lower percentages on activist platforms, such as Aman Ullah's Facebook page (7.58%), may reflect strategic choices. As Lee (2021) notes, media coverage serves as *"a motivator for foreign policy action,"* suggesting that advocacy platforms prioritize highlighting injustices to mobilize support, whereas community-led initiatives focus on demonstrating positive capabilities. This evidence challenges persistent stereotypes by demonstrating Rohingya

active engagement in decision-making processes from repatriation assessments to relocation choices, community leadership through figures like Muhibullah and organizations like RYA, cultural preservation while adapting to circumstances, economic productivity through agriculture, fishing, and skills development, creative expression using art and poetry for advocacy and cultural continuity, and rights advocacy by understanding legal frameworks and asserting legitimate claims.

Recognizing Rohingya agency suggests policies should emphasize participation by ensuring meaningful involvement in decisions affecting their lives, support capacity building through investing in education, skills development, and leadership training, facilitate cultural expression by providing platforms for creative and cultural activities, recognize expertise by acknowledging their understanding of their own situations and needs, and enable advocacy by protecting rights to assembly, expression, and peaceful demonstration.

9.3.1.7 Analysis on media portal

The analysis illustrates advanced manifestations of agency, resilience, and cultural preservation that contest prevailing narratives of victimization. Differences in how refugees are represented across platforms underscore the importance of examining a range of institutional contexts to understand how refugee stories are produced and disseminated. This supports the academic trend toward strengths-based, agency-centered approaches to refugee studies.

This paragraph clearly shows Stuart Hall's representation theory, which says that the media doesn't just show us what's real; it also shapes how we see the world. Hall's fundamental thesis is that meaning is formed by representation rather than only reflected by it (Campbell, 2016; Hall, 1997). The Rohingya case exemplifies this phenomenon, illustrating how various media outlets and institutions generate significantly divergent perceptions of the same population (Ahmed & Hassan, 2024).

The production of meaning through representation is evident in the stark disparities among media portrayals. Shomoy TV featured 54.05% positive images of the Rohingya, whereas activist sites, such as Aman Ullah's Facebook page, showed only 7.58% positive content. These are not merely different ways of reporting; they also generate diverse ideas about who the Rohingya are. One version portrays them as strong and capable, whereas the other portrays them as facing a difficult situation and requiring substantial support. This illustrates Hall's

assertion that representation actively influences public comprehension rather than merely mirroring facts (Hall, 1997).

Hall's idea of "the other" is obvious in the way that migrants are often seen as weak victims who need care from others. The article illustrates how this image is "produced, reproduced, and circulated institutionally" (Hall, 1997), establishing a dominant narrative that depicts refugees as powerless. The Rohingya are still one of the most powerless and outcast groups in the world, stuck in a loop of not having a country, being forced to move, and having their rights taken away (Human Rights Watch, 2020; UNHCR, 2018). However, the evidence of Rohingya agency—from community leadership to cultural initiatives, directly contests these preconceptions, exposing them as constructed representations rather than inherent realities.

The intricacy of representation is evident when analyzing the inadequacy of merely substituting negative pictures with positive ones. Hall argued that this method was too simple, and the text explains why (Hall, 1997). Some news organizations seek to counter stereotypes by focusing on positive aspects. Activist groups, by contrast, focus on problems and injustices. This is not because activists intend to be unpleasant, but because publicizing hardships can stimulate public support and political action. This strategic use of representation illustrates that decisions about the portrayal of communities are inherently political and contextual.

The creation of counter-hegemonic representations is the most promising aspect of Hall's theory of encoding/decoding in media and cultural studies. According to Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, media messages are "encoded" with dominant (hegemonic) meanings by producers, but audiences can "decode" these messages in multiple ways (Hall, 1980). The potential for counter-hegemonic readings, where audiences reject prevailing ideology and generate alternative meanings, constitutes the most optimistic aspect of his theory, as it underscores marginalized groups' ability to contest cultural hegemony and formulate transformative, resistant interpretations (Pillai, 1992). The Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) and other groups use poetry, cultural events, and community organizing to tell different stories. These activities not only counter negative stereotypes but also actively forge new interpretations of refugee identity that highlight creativity, resilience, and agency (Zine, 2016). Hasan, a young poet, said, "I see poetry as a powerful way to express these feelings and amplify the voices of the Rohingya." This demonstrates how communities can take charge of their representation.

Lastly, the example of the Rohingya supports Hall's claim that representation is a site where competing meanings struggle for control (Hall, 1997). The differences among media outlets, activist groups, and institutional settings indicate that there is no single "true" portrayal. Instead, diverse people use representation strategically to achieve their aims, such as challenging stereotypes, gaining support, or asserting their cultural identity. This ongoing struggle over meaning demonstrates that representation is never neutral; it always serves specific interests and goals.

9.3.2 Social Media Users' Views on Rohingya Agency and Resilience

This section examines how social media users perceive and discuss the Rohingya's strength and agency in their comments and interactions across various platforms. Social media, unlike traditional media, allows a wide range of voices and perspectives to come to light, including those that recognize the Rohingya community's capacity to act.

This section demonstrates how digital discourse can challenge dominant narratives by highlighting the Rohingya people's strength, adaptability, and agency in shaping their own lives, as evidenced by user-generated content and comments. Social media discourse presents a complex picture in which user responses vary substantially depending on the platform and the framing of the content. When people read or hear positive news reports or projects about the Rohingya, they often praise traits such as hard work, honesty, resilience, and adaptability in their comments. These user answers offer alternative narratives to dominant assumptions of refugee passivity, acknowledging the community's agency and resolve in surmounting obstacles.

The study of how people use social media shows big differences between types of platforms. Community-led platforms, for example, have much higher rates of agency recognition. Mainstream media channels, on the other hand, have lower percentages even though they get more absolute supportive comments. This trend indicates that the platform's control and the audience's composition shape users' interactions with content about refugees (See Table 2 for a full comparison of platforms).

Table 9.2: Platform-Based Community Support Analysis

Platform	**Support Comments**	**Total Comments**	**Support Rate**
Rohingya Youth Association (RYA)	277	280	98.93%
Aman Ullah	21	24	87.50%
UNHCR Bangladesh	289	428	67.52%
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	22	99	22.22%
Shomoy TV	289	2,106	13.72%
Prothom Alo	7,108	30,981	22.94%
TOTAL	8,006	33,918	23.60%

Table 9.2 presents findings from an analysis of social media engagement data, indicating that the digital landscape surrounding the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh is highly polarized. Rohingya-led groups like the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) and the activist Aman Ullah have very high support rates (98.93% and 87.50%, respectively). This indicates that their community and allies are highly supportive, and that self-representation and advocacy narratives are the most common types of stories they tell. On the other hand, Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV, two mainstream national news outlets, have much lower support rates (22.94% and 13.72%, respectively). This is despite receiving the most comments, indicating mixed feelings about their coverage, which may focus on security, economic, or social issues. International and governmental organizations like UNHCR Bangladesh and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are in the middle, with moderate support (67.52% and 22.22%). However, there is still considerable criticism from both sides of the debate, with some arguing that they don't do enough to protect refugees and others arguing that they are prolonging the humanitarian and logistical crisis. The substantial difference in support rates indicates the importance of narrative framing and source reliability. Also, 76.40% of the comments that were not positive show how deep the sociopolitical tensions are and how acrimonious the public debate is about the Rohingya presence in Bangladesh.

9.3.2.1 Rohingya Youth Association Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	**Number**	**Percentage**
Community Support/Social Support	277	98.93%
Counter Narrative	2	0.71%

Mis/Disinformation	1	0.36%

The Rohingya Youth Association platform has a high recognition rate, with 277 of 280 comments expressing support for the community (98.93% of all interactions). These platforms are places where people from marginalized groups may tell their own stories without anyone else controlling what they say. Comments on the RYA platform indicate that users recognize the Rohingya organization's capabilities. For example, people praised the group's work to empower others with comments such as "wonderful job" and "congratulations," which indicate that they are actively developing the community rather than merely relying on it. Users show respect for the crisis response efforts undertaken by Rohingya volunteers, particularly their work distributing food and clothing and donating blood. This indicates that they recognize the importance of proactive community service and mutual aid networks. People also appreciate environmental projects, sending notes of congratulations for planting trees and keeping camps eco-friendly, which shows that they care about their community and want to make it better.

The community had a positive reaction to a post that highlighted the social efforts of the RYA operations team. A Facebook user named Eanyet Khan stated, "Great people always stand up for the weak when they are in trouble," demonstrating their concern. My darling Ro. brother, I'm proud of you. This comment recognizes the Rohingya community as kind and hardworking and highlights how they support one another during difficult times. Another commenter, Shomsu Alom, thanked the people who helped by saying, "Oh, Emergency facilities have been provided to homeless beneficiaries for that, thank u two million." These remarks indicate that the Rohingya respond to humanitarian crises with strong solidarity and mutual support. They highlight their strong commitment to aiding the most vulnerable members of their community.

9.3.2.2 Mr. Aman Ullah's FB Platform Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Community Support	21	87.50%
Counter Narrative	2	8.33%
Irrelevant	1	4.17%

Aman Ullah's platform also has a high support rate of 87.50%, with 21 of 24 comments encouraging. This consistency across many community-led venues indicates that when the Rohingya people manage their own representation, the acknowledgment of agency emerges as the prevailing discourse rather than a mere exception. Comments show that users know about the good things about the Rohingya people and their willingness to fight back. User Engr Idris praised their work ethic by adding, "Ma Shaa Allah!" May God accept your hard work? "JajakAllah Khair," which shows the Rohingya as devoted workers. Noor Mohammed stressed the importance of intellectual contributions by saying, "Praise to Almighty Allah that this man, Mr. Amanullah, is a critic and historian in the Rohingya community... all of these people are jewels in the crown of the Rohingya community." This statement makes the Rohingya seem kind, honest, and valuable to the community. Users explicitly challenge unfavorable perceptions by saying that Rohingyas are dedicated workers and don't have hobbies like drinking, gambling, or using opium, which is how some Buddhists see them.

This candid denial of discriminatory characterizations shows that users recognize that unfavorable portrayals are made up rather than real, while also recognizing the Rohingya's strong work ethic and moral character. The remarks also reveal that the Rohingya are politically active and are against the National Verification Card, which would make their stateless status official. Users perceive this strong attitude as evidence of political awareness and self-determination, rather than merely as acceptance of imposed identification categories. Users also propose that the Rohingya people should unite and empower themselves to return to their home country. This shows that they believe the community can plan and organize itself to reach long-term goals.

9.3.2.3 UNHCR Bangladesh Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy	289	67.52%
Irrelevant	84	19.63%
Xenophobic	45	10.51%
Religious Intolerance	10	2.34%

UNHCR Bangladesh has a high support rate of 67.52%, with 289 positive comments out of 428. This suggests that international humanitarian agencies may be moving toward more agency-centered methods, maybe in reaction to criticism of traditional charity-model narratives.

Most comments express appreciation for and support of UNHCR's work, including the deployment of Rohingya volunteers to support relief operations during incidents such as arson in refugee camps and storms, and the planting of trees to maintain environmental sustainability. A Rohingya photographer wrote, "I hope that my photography can give meaning to the collective Rohingya voice." This is a good example. The post discussed how much he enjoyed teaching at a school in Myanmar, where he taught English, physics, and chemistry until he had to leave in 2017. He now uses photography to depict what life is like in his community. All 50 comments on this post were positive. MD Osman NC said, "Keep up such kind of hard work or go ahead," and another commenter said, "I am overwhelmed and happy to see you here. Congratulations on this amazing accomplishment." These comments showed how hardworking, resilient, and positive they were.

9.3.2.4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy	22	22.22%
Xenophobic	35	35.35%
Irrelevant	28	28.28%
Conspiracy Theory	8	8.08%
Questionable Media	6	6.06%

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs platform has a lower support rate of 22.22%, which means that only 22 of the 99 replies were positive. This meticulous approach demonstrates the complexity of official discourse, as state actors must carefully balance humanitarian support with political factors, including domestic public opinion and diplomatic relations with other countries in the region. Comments on posts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that people have divided and complex views about the Rohingya agency and situation. Users show that they know that Rohingyas in Bangladesh no longer need help with basic needs like food and shelter, and they want to go back to their own country as soon as possible. This framing shows that the Rohingyas have defined goals and are actively trying to return home, rather than just accepting their refugee status indefinitely. The conversation shows that people recognize that the Rohingya community still has hope and determination to return, not just giving up on being permanently displaced.

Several commenters show a lot of historical knowledge by pointing out that Rohingyas have been in Myanmar since the 18th century. This acknowledgment runs counter to prevailing narratives about recent immigration and strengthens their claims to citizenship and ties to the region through their ancestors. Users often praise Bangladesh's humanitarian response, appreciating the government's efforts to provide shelter and assistance during this catastrophe.

Users' comments present strong personal perspectives that make the Rohingya experience more real. One commentator stressed the need to stand together, saying, "They are being persecuted." We should help the Rohingya, together with hashtags that defend human rights. Another offered personal experience, saying, "I can see them on the road; it makes me feel so bad for them." We let a few folks stay at our house, and they are quite grateful to us. Please help them when you see them come, and if you can't, at least show them the way. This testimonial demonstrates both the immediate needs of the Rohingya and their gratitude to those who assist them. One commentator gave important historical context by saying that the Rohingyas are not strangers. This may be the most important thing. They had long roots in Rakhine that predate the Burmese takeover. They contributed to trade, farming, and cultural exchange and demonstrated themselves to be hardworking, positive, and strong people.

This point of view stresses the historical legitimacy of the Rohingya group and their good contributions to the area, which goes against stories that say they are new arrivals or undesirable immigrants. All of these statements portray the Rohingya as a friendly, thankful, hardworking, and resilient group of people with real historical ties to their homeland and clear hopes for a dignified return. The conversation reveals that the public sees the Rohingya crisis as more than just a humanitarian issue. They see it as a situation involving a group of people who have been forced to leave their homes, have strong ties to their homeland, and have good reasons to wish to return.

9.3.2.5 Prothom Alo Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy	7,108	22.94%
Xenophobic	6,651	21.47%
Irrelevant	5,373	17.34%
Genocidal Threats and Incitement to Violence	1,106	3.57%
Victim-Blaming/Dehumanization	580	1.87%
Sexist and Misogynist Content	384	1.24%
Racist	308	0.99%
Religious Intolerance	254	0.82%

Questionable Media	261	0.84%
Counter Narrative	97	0.31%
Mis/Disinformation	35	0.11%
Classist	52	0.17%
Intensive Dismissive	30	0.10%

The media platforms show troubling trends in how people recognize agency. Prothom Alo has the most supportive comments, accounting for 7,108 (22.94%) of all comments on the platform. For every comment that supports the Rohingya agency, about three comments express other views, many of which probably reinforce victimization stories or show hostility. There are, nevertheless, some favorable mentions of the Rohingyas in the mostly mixed debate. Some users felt sorry for the Rohingya and praised the government's attempts to help them find shelter because they are all Muslims and saw them as defenseless and being persecuted. These comments made many thinks of how Bangladesh had to flee India in 1971 and how they could help.

A few comments presented alternative perspectives, contending that not all Rohingyas are malevolent and highlighting that Rohingyas are diligent and humanitarian individuals who, due to their dire circumstances in refugee camps, possess restricted resources to enhance their position. This went against most of the negative descriptions on the platform. Comments on the death of Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah reveal that many recognize his leadership skills. One Facebook user said, *"This person's role was good for Bangladesh. He was protesting with the Rohingyas so they might go home. The person who doesn't want the Rohingyas to go back to their country has stopped him".*

In this light, the Rohingyas have been seen to be a good country that is fighting for their rights. Abdul Base said, *"Muhibbullah is a patriot whose work will be recognized by the Rohingya nation."* Some people suggested that the Bangladesh government should give the Rohingya education and training in agriculture and hire them to work in the country's agricultural industry. This would show that the government recognizes their potential economic contribution and ability to learn new skills. Sohel Rana mentioned something else that inspired me: "Rohingyas should follow Bangladesh because Bangladesh was once like the Rohingyas." We have taken our rights by fighting the valiant Bangladeshi nation, and we have brought freedom. You also fight to protect the honor of your mothers and sisters and to defend Bangladesh. You will realize that, insha'Allah, triumph is guaranteed. Why would you

leave? That's where you were born; cowards flee away from where they were born. Are you scared?

This remark said that the Rohingyas were a valiant people who should fight for their rights, just like Bangladesh did.

9.3.2.6 Shomoy TV Comments Breakdown

Comment Type	Number	Percentage
Xenophobic	1,225	58.17%
Irrelevant	373	17.71%
Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy	289	13.72%
Genocidal Threats and Incitement to Violence	75	3.56%
Conspiracy Theory	45	2.14%
Counter Narrative	47	2.23%
Victim-Blaming/Dehumanization	21	1.00%
Sexist and Misogynist Content	20	0.95%
Racist	10	0.47%
Intensive Dismissive	1	0.05%

Shomoy TV follows a similar pattern with a 13.72% support rate, showing 289 supportive comments out of 2,106 total. This suggests that mainstream media platforms, regardless of their editorial stance, struggle to maintain agency-centered discourse when engaging broader public audiences. Under a post about Myanmar's military floating corpses in the Naf River to create terror among Rohingya, commenter Raju Ahmed expressed solidarity and resistance, stating:

> *No more persecution, now stand up and resist. Everyone, young and old, should receive weapons training and be deployed to Rakhine. They will claim their rights, let Rakhine be independent. We request that our government not be afraid of Myanmar anymore. We are Bengalis, we are Muslims, we can die. Have faith in the brave sons of Bengal, we will liberate Rakhine and return home. We will teach them what happens when the weak stand up and resist (User Comment, Shomoy TV YouTube, 'Rohingyas are being killed and their*

bodies dumped in the Naf River to force them towards Bangladesh', September 3, 2017).

This quote portrays the Rohingya as capable of liberation through proper training, emphasizing their hardworking, struggling nature. Another commenter, Shahriar Shakib, declared, *"Long live the Rohingya. They are Muslim brothers. They are angels. They are good. They are fighters. Please pray for the Rohingya people,"* which expressed that Rohingyas are presented positively as good human beings with the power to struggle to get their rights.

9.4 Discussion with theory and Literature

When viewed on a larger scale, the overall support rate of 23.60% across all platforms paints a complex picture of how the refugee organization is perceived online. This outcome is consistent with overarching theoretical frameworks in refugee studies and media representation theory. Community-led platforms show that agency-centered narratives can thrive when refugees manage their own depiction; yet these spaces are comparatively small compared with mainstream media, which are dominated by more problematic discourses. This pattern corroborates Stuart Hall's (1997) representation theory, which posits that meaning is constructed by representation rather than merely reflected by it. The substantial differences across platforms show how different institutional settings shape how people perceive the same group.

9.4.1 Stuart Hall's Representation Theory in Digital Spaces

Hall's theoretical framework on representation offers a robust lens to comprehend the pronounced disparity in the portrayal of the Rohingya across various media platforms. The significantly disparate support rates, 98.93% on Rohingya-led (RYA) platforms versus 22.94% on mainstream media outlets like Prothom Alo, exceed mere audience preference. This difference illustrates Hall's main point that representation is an active, constitutive process that creates reality rather than merely showing it (Hall, 1997). Mainstream media, typically in line with the goals of the government and other institutions, often do what Hall calls the "spectacle of the Other," portraying the Rohingya as outsiders who are weak, dependent, and always need to be managed. This dominant portrayal strengthens a power

dynamic that supports policies of containment and repatriation, while making the refugee seem like a burden.

Conversely, community-led forums such as the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) serve as essential venues for "counter-hegemonic" meaning-making. Here, the Rohingya assert their identity, transforming the narrative from one of dependency to one of agency, competence, and ambition. This is not just a different message; it is a direct attack on the dominant code. Gillespie et al. (2018) assert that these platforms enable marginalized groups to regain narrative sovereignty, presenting themselves as "productive others" (Barsky, 1994) rather than passive victims.

But Hall's model isn't just a two-way street. Even a small number (22.94%) of favorable comments on popular sites like Prothom Alo is important. It shows what Hall calls the "contested nature of representation" and the existence of "negotiated" or "oppositional readings." When people on these forums see the Rohingya's organizational skills or cultural contributions, they are not just going along with the mainstream (hegemonic) story. They are either actively contesting its meaning or completely resisting it, which is breaking down the monolithic "burden" framing and making room for other readings.

Lastly, Hall's concept that meaning is never permanent but is continually renegotiated through cultural practice is evident in the deliberate editorial choices made across platforms. A platform like activist Aman Ullah's, which concentrates on chronicling abuses and legal battles, creates a specific meaning: the Rohingya as a people who have been wronged and are asking for justice and political restoration. On the other hand, RYA's focus on community successes sends a different message: that the Rohingya are a strong group that can contribute and make its own decisions. Neither is "the truth"; Hall would say they are strategic constructions of meaning that serve certain political ends, such as securing international legal support or demonstrating that the community is ready for autonomy and rights. This difference shows that the fight over the Rohingya's identity is really a fight over meaning and power that takes place in the media.

9.4.2 Kelman's Social Influence Theory and User Engagement Patterns

Herbert Kelman's (1958) social influence theory offers an essential framework for analyzing the varied user responses to Rohingya-related content across different media. The very high

support rate (98.93%) on the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) platforms suggests that users are identifying with and internalizing the community's values. This is shown by comments praising their volunteer work and environmental efforts. Mainstream media like Prothom Alo, on the other hand, has a lower support rate (22.94%), which may lead to compliance—superficial agreement with humanitarian norms without any real change in attitude. However, some users still show identification when they see evidence of Rohingya abilities. Institutional platforms like UNHCR (67.52% support) benefit from a perception of competence, which leads people to accept their stories without questioning them. However, these platforms don't always lead to the deeper understanding that is shown in community-controlled venues.

This aligns with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which holds that who owns a platform affects whether a story is hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. The mainstream media generally portrays the Rohingya as "the Other," docile and dependent, which supports power systems that justify measures that keep them in check. But the presence of positive comments there shows what Hall calls "negotiated readings," in which users selectively push back against dominant framings. On the other hand, Rohingya-led platforms create real, agentic identities that go against negative stereotypes. This shows Hall's point that representation is a place where people fight for meaning.

The research further contradicts uniform depictions of refugee inactivity. User acknowledgment of the Rohingya's work ethic, cultural preservation (such as Art Garden poetry), and environmental stewardship exemplifies what Mistry (2024) refers to as 'hidden agency' and corresponds with empirical studies: Tomkins et al. (2019) on gardening as a means of coping with trauma, and Dieterich-Hartwell (2017) on creative arts as a form of resistance. This indicates that when consumers are exposed to narratives of competence and resilience—particularly from reliable, community-based sources—they can respond with sophistication that surpasses dominant burden narratives. Thus, differences in support rates indicate not only what people want but also how platform framing may sustain hegemonic othering or enable people to recognize refugees' agency in new ways.

9.5 Positive Self-Representation: Rohingya Voices on Resilience and Capability

This section examines how members of the Rohingya community articulate empowering narratives about themselves, drawing on interviews with 10 Rohingya participants who

demonstrate proactive approaches to challenges and inherent resilience. The findings reveal how Rohingyas construct narratives that emphasize capability, determination, and constructive engagement rather than victimhood. This counter-narrative challenges dominant deficit-based representations often found in humanitarian discourse.

Interview participants demonstrate remarkable proactivity in community education and empowerment, positioning themselves as educators and knowledge facilitators. Rohingya activist Ro Khin Maung, founder of the Rohingya Youth Association, exemplifies this educational leadership:

> *"I am running a leadership course called 'Introduction to Leadership Theory and Practice.' I am training young people because, due to persecution in Myanmar, we have been denied political rights and voting access," (Ro Khin Maung, Field Interview, Rohingya Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This educational approach extends to digital platforms, where community members serve as informal teachers, as the Rohingya activist Mr Aman Ullah noted: *"I create posts to inform the younger generation about our issues, much like a teacher providing notes to students. I aim to educate them on our circumstances." (*Mr Aman Ullah, *Field Interview, Chittagong*, September 2023) reflects what Freire (1970) termed "critical pedagogy"—education as a practice of freedom that enables marginalized communities to develop critical consciousness about their conditions. Khin Maung's leadership training addresses a critical gap in political education: *"Our community does not understand leadership qualities or what makes a good leader, so sometimes people follow the wrong leaders. That is why this leadership education is essential for our youth."* This recognition of vulnerability, coupled with action to address it, demonstrates agency and a forward-thinking approach to community development.

The Rohingya participants reveal a sophisticated understanding of communication strategies and risk assessment in their digital engagement. Md. Rumman Khan, a Rohingya youth, articulates this careful consideration: *"Before posting anything on social media, we think – how useful will this be for our community? I think about whether what I am going to share is correct, whether it will be acceptable to my community, (Field Interview of Md. Rumman Khan, a Rohingya Youth, Camp 14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)."* This strategic approach acknowledges the complex security environment they

navigate: *"Many times various sensitive incidents happen in the camp, which we want to share, but due to our own security or government restrictions, we cannot post."* The participants demonstrate what Scott (1990) describes as "hidden transcripts", the ability to navigate between public and private discourse while managing power dynamics and potential repercussions. Despite these constraints, they maintain their commitment to community awareness. Rohingya Youth Rumman explained their approach to addressing human trafficking:

> *"Initially, I focus on sharing community challenges, especially human trafficking. Many Rohingyas from our camp are being trafficked and undertaking perilous sea voyages to reach Indonesia and Malaysia. I produce awareness content on this topic to warn people against choosing these life-threatening paths (Md. Rumman Khan, Field Interview, Camp 14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

Multiple interviewees emphasized the community's inherent resilience and capabilities, challenging narratives that focus solely on vulnerability. Rohingya Activist Mr. Aman Ullah identified "untapped abilities of Rohingya individuals, such as in sports or technical skills," that could be nurtured to enhance their economic contributions. Community leaders expressed confidence that *"with education and the right opportunities, they can overcome challenges and achieve their dreams,"* positioning youth as *"the hope of our community."* This perspective aligns with resilience theory, which emphasizes communities' adaptive capacities and strengths rather than focusing exclusively on deficits (Norris et al., 2002). The emphasis on *"hidden talents such as sports or technical skills"* that *"could benefit them and host communities"* demonstrates a collaborative rather than dependent approach to integration and development.

The participants demonstrate sophisticated understanding of digital communication strategies, utilizing multiple platforms to reach diverse audiences. Khin Maung's approach illustrates this strategic thinking: *"I use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, and Viber. I check these apps regularly throughout the day."* His use of Viber, specifically to "stay connected with Myanmar, where it is very popular," demonstrates cultural and contextual awareness in platform selection. His audience segmentation strategy reflects a nuanced understanding of stakeholder engagement: *"My audiences are: first,*

Rohingya youth and leaders in our community; second, local Bangladeshi people around Cox's Bazar; third, the international community, including journalists and media." This multi-tiered approach enables targeted messaging while building bridges across different communities. The impact of this strategic communication is evident in the reach achieved:

> "Last year, I was the first to publish news about repatriation when no other media had covered it. Within a short time, over 25,000 people viewed this clip. People were very eager to know about repatriation, and it spread to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and many other countries (Ro Khin Maung, Founder of RYA, *Field Interview, Rohingya Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023)*

Perhaps most significantly, interviewed Rohingyas assert their agency in narrative construction and challenge external representations. The Rohingya activist Ro Khin Maung declared, *"Our story is ours to tell. If we do not speak up, others will define us,*" exemplifying their proactive stance in shaping their own representation through autonomous digital platforms. This assertion of narrative sovereignty aligns with Indigenous and decolonial scholarship that emphasizes the importance of communities telling their own stories (Tuck, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Khin Maung's recognition of community characteristics demonstrates this balanced self-representation: *"Rohingya people are sincere and innocent – we tend to believe what others say",* acknowledging both strengths and vulnerabilities while taking action to address the latter through education.

The interviews reveal a strong work ethic and constructive mindset among participants, advocating for "leveraging their hidden talents" in ways that "could benefit them and host communities." The commitment to balanced communication reflects this constructive ethic: "My goal is to bring understanding, not conflict." Despite prolonged displacement, participants maintain a future-oriented and determined outlook. Ro Khin Maung, Founder and Director of the Rohingya Youth Association (RYA), said, "*We are doing awareness work about repatriation – Bangladesh is not our country, we want to return to our own country"* (Field Interview, Kutupalong Rohingya Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). As another Rohingya youth, Zayadul Ahsan from Camp 14, shared: *"We have always been ready to return to Myanmar. Everything I have is in Myanmar; Myanmar is my identity and my country. Why*

would I want to remain in Bangladesh? Nevertheless, I have no choice; I am compelled to stay here" (Field Interview, Kutupalong Rohingya Camp, September 2023).

This future orientation, combined with present-focused action, demonstrates what participants describe as widespread youth engagement: *"Youth are very aware of their future, but we do not know how to solve this issue. That is our main problem. We are trying our best, and the youth community is very engaged"* (Ro Khin Maung, Field Interview, Kutupalong Rohingya Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).

The positive self-representations articulated by Rohingya participants reveal a community that, while acknowledging challenges and constraints, actively constructs empowering narratives emphasizing resilience, capability, and agency. Their strategic use of digital platforms for education, awareness-raising, and community building demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of communication, risk management, and stakeholder engagement. These voices challenge deficit-based representations and assert the community's right to narrative sovereignty while working constructively toward solutions and community empowerment.

9.6 Conclusion

The data in this chapter strongly show that the Rohingya agency is complex and changing, which goes against humanitarian and media stories that focus too much on victimhood, vulnerability, and dependency. A systematic analysis of social media representations across various digital platforms—such as Facebook, YouTube, and advocacy pages—reveals a more nuanced and empowering image: that of a community actively engaging in meaning-making, resistance, and future-building, despite significant structural constraints.

The Rohingya are not just passive recipients of aid or victims of geopolitical events; they are very proactive. They are involved in discussions about repatriation, make informed decisions about moving to Bhasan Char, and keep up organized efforts to fight for citizenship and justice. Their resilience is also shown by how they maintain strong social ties and behave well even when things are very hard; how they all work hard to get an education and make a living; how they create art, poetry, and digital stories; and how well they know their rights under international law.

These results show how important it is to change how we do humanitarian work, conduct academic research, and make policies. It is important to move away from a deficit-based model that sees immigrants mainly as people who need help and are weak. Instead, we should use a strength-based approach that takes into account their abilities, resources, and ability to act. This kind of change makes it possible to develop more courteous, long-lasting, and effective solutions that work with displaced populations rather than telling them what to do.

The digital efforts, young leadership, and community-based organizing documented in this study demonstrate that, even in prolonged periods of uncertainty, displaced populations maintain and develop abilities for creativity, mutual assistance, and social contribution. This understanding repositions migrants from being perceived as issues to be resolved to being collaborators in developing solutions, a viewpoint that is both more ethically sound and more pragmatically hopeful.

As global displacement continues to rise, the experience of the Rohingya teaches us important lessons about how important it is to include agency in all parts of humanitarian response, from program design to advocacy. Seeing displaced people as active agents of change who are resilient, creative, and politically aware does more than set the record straight; it also leads to more dignified, inclusive, and long-lasting solutions to one of the most important problems of the century.

The social media narratives analyzed in this study demonstrate that when marginalized communities utilize digital platforms, they express voice, authority, and presence in ways that resist simplistic categorization. These depictions collectively demonstrate that the Rohingya, like all communities facing adversity, embody and exercise significant levels of proactivity, cultural vitality, and awareness of their rights. Focusing on these traits in policy and practice does not ignore the genuine problems that accompany displacement. Instead, it provides a fuller, more humanizing basis for creating answers that respect people's dignity, encourage participation, and restore hope.

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Chapter 10

ROHINGYA RESILIENCE AND INTEGRATION IN BANGLADESHI HOST AND MEDIA NARRATIVES

10.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the complex and often contradictory perspectives of the Rohingya population in Bangladesh, focusing on instances in which their positive characteristics and agency are recognized through qualitative interviews. While dominant narratives in public discourse and media portray refugees as burdens, threats, or passive victims (Haque & Salleh, 2022; Hossain et al., 2021; Jeon & Yoon, 2025), this study seeks to uncover the nuanced and often overlooked perspectives that acknowledge the resilience, adaptability, and contributions of the Rohingya in Bangladeshi society.

This investigation is urgently required due to the extended Rohingya crisis and its considerable socio-economic impacts on host communities in Cox's Bazar. While substantial research has documented negative opinions and conflicts (Sakib, 2025; Islam & Wara, 2022, 2024), few studies fully explore the contexts that produce positive impressions or the media's role in fostering such recognition. This chapter examines perceptions of desirable attributes in areas such as education, social integration, cultural preservation, and communication skills, employing qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, including residents, members of the Rohingya population, and journalists.

The analysis is guided by four interrelated theoretical frameworks: Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) elucidates how pleasant interpersonal contacts alleviate prejudice and conflict; Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios, 2015) explains why acceptance of refugee capacities can sometimes heighten perceived dangers; Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), especially the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Banker, Ward, Houlette, & Loux, 2000), explains how having a shared religious identity can make people feel sympathy at first; and Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) gives important information about how the media shapes refugee identities as either burdens or active agents.

This chapter aims to deepen understanding of the Rohingya presence in Bangladesh by situating lived experiences and professional observations within relevant theoretical frameworks. It highlights the challenges and conflicts while also offering chances for empathy, unity, and the redefinition of refugee-host dynamics in prolonged displacement situations.

10.2 Theories and Methods

This chapter has yielded a conceptually robust and empirically validated analysis of host community and media perceptions of the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, highlighting the coexistence of positive acknowledgment and persistent discrimination. This study adheres to ethical guidelines established by the American Anthropological Association (2012) and follows qualitative research protocols outlined by Bryman (2016) and Creswell and Poth (2018). Ethical considerations in social science research were guided by Israel and Hay (2006). The analysis draws on Kitzinger's (2007) approach to framing and frame analysis, as well as Pandir's (2020) work on media portrayals of refugees.

This chapter employs four synergistic theoretical frameworks, Contact Theory, Integrated Threat Theory, Social Identity Theory (including the Common Ingroup Identity Model), and Representation Theory, to conduct a multilevel analysis of the construction, negotiation, and contestation of Rohingya identities across interpersonal, intergroup, and discursive spheres.

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) elucidates how everyday interactions, such as shared religious practices, sports, and informal social encounters, can cultivate empathy, reduce entrenched stereotypes, and promote nuanced perceptions of Rohingya refugees. The findings demonstrate that interactions that resemble collaborative environments, shared goals, and perceived fairness promote social bridging, even within intrinsically unequal refugee-host relationships. However, the theory clarifies the factors contributing to the fragility and contextual variability of these positive impacts, rather than their potential for structural transformation.

Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan et al., 2015) clarifies the intergroup dilemma: recognizing the Rohingya's capabilities, expertise, and adaptability does not automatically yield sustained positive impressions. Instead, perceived talent often heightens both real and symbolic risks, particularly in job-market competition, resource access, and the maintenance of social hierarchy. This study underscores that prejudice is not solely rooted in ignorance or

misinformation but is deeply embedded in perceived material and status-related anxieties within the host group.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), supplemented by the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), clarifies the temporal dynamics of solidarity and exclusion. The shared Muslim identity functioned as a significant overarching category that fostered moral duty and humanitarian compassion. However, over time, this broad framing became weaker as differences between subgroups, citizens versus refugees, hosts versus outsiders—became clearer. This indicates that religious unity is constrained without institutional support and fair resource distribution. This theoretical paradigm clarifies the contingent, reversible, and vulnerable characteristics of identity-based solidarity in relation to dominant political and economic forces.

Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) provides a fundamental framework for understanding how media narratives actively construct Rohingya identities rather than passively mirror reality. The chapter illustrates that journalists fulfill dual roles: they may either perpetuate prevailing categories, such as burden, reliance, or security worry, or they may convey narratives that contest the status quo, emphasizing Rohingya resilience, agency, and cultural continuity. Media representations emerge as a pivotal nexus where power, ideology, and the formulation of meaning intersect, shaping public opinion and influencing policy frameworks.

Methodologically, the chapter's qualitative design, incorporating in-depth interviews with host community members, Rohingya participants, and journalists, and using social media narratives as interview stimuli, enabled a nuanced analysis of the interplay between lived experiences and mediated discourses. This triangulated approach strengthened the link between theory and data, illustrating how macro-level representations are understood, challenged, or embraced at the micro level.

In summary, the chapter presents a philosophically consistent narrative of Rohingya representation that transcends the binary of animosity and sympathy. The research underscores the simultaneous presence of recognition and resentment, empathy and anxiety, as well as inclusion and exclusion, demonstrating that refugee perspectives are best understood as dynamic, relational, and structurally shaped. This chapter contributes to broader conversations in refugee studies, social psychology, and media studies by showing

how interpersonal contact, perceived threat, identity construction, and representational power affect the social status of forcibly displaced people in long-term refugee contexts.

10.3 Results: How the Locals See Rohingyas

This section examines how area residents perceive the Rohingya's strengths and potential for improvement. It examines how area residents perceive the Rohingya's strengths and potential for improvement. The statistics show that most people don't like the Rohingya. But if you look closely at the facts, you may discover that there are a few times when local people show that the Rohingya's behavior and character are good.

10.3.1 Recognition as Resilient and Adaptive to Education and Change

Some local respondents were aware of the educational achievements of the Rohingya, especially those who came earlier. One local teacher in the area said that prior generations were able to adapt:

> *"Rohingya, who came in the 70s, they got the opportunity to educate, and many of them are in different professions" (Field Interview, Md. Abdul Malek, a Local School Teacher, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This acknowledgment indicates local knowledge of the Rohingya's potential for education and professional integration when conditions allow. These findings align with Ager and Strang's (2008) integration approach, which emphasizes that offering refugees authentic educational options not only facilitates their integration but also elevates their perceived status. This indicates that the availability of structural supports, such as access to education, language training, and skills development, can lead to a transformation in local attitudes toward acknowledging refugees' potential and contributions.

Md. Gias Uddin, a local reporter for Prothom Alo in Cox's Bazar, thinks that the Rohingya population shows amazing educational endurance even though they are systematically denied access to education in Myanmar. His professional opinion shows how well they can learn:

> *“They can learn well. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) teach people how to sew, weave, and make things. But it's not just crafts; students also learn how to stop child marriage and polygamy. This is important because Rohingyas typically practice polygamy, with men having four to five*

> *wives. They also learn how to stop people from sexually harassing them. They are learning these ideas and applying them in their lives. They are raising awareness among others, especially around stopping child marriage and sexual harassment. They even walk door to door to disseminate information," (Field Interview, Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This observation is consistent with the findings of Van der Stouwe and Oh (2008), who identified similar trends in educational flexibility among displaced communities. Both the Karen and Rohingya refugee communities demonstrate this adaptability by successfully engaging with NGO training and applying it in their new homes. Karen refugees have built an external educational support system that serves 54,000 children across seven camps in Thailand. Rohingyas, on the other hand, "easily catch" NGO training, "apply it in their life," and "create awareness for others."

Md. Gias Uddin's statement that approximately 400,000 to 500,000 Rohingya youth have attended school in Bangladesh, with support from 60 to 70 NGOs, indicates he recognizes the community's strong commitment to education. His documentation of door-to-door awareness efforts indicates his view of the Rohingya as proactive agents of social change rather than merely passive beneficiaries of assistance, a perspective that aligns with Sánchez and Lillie's (2019) findings. Their research emphasizes refugee agency and resilience, contesting conventional depictions of refugees as passive victims. For instance, Syrian refugees are working hard to keep their identity and normalcy, while Rohingyas are going door-to-door to fight against child marriage and harassment. These examples demonstrate that refugees are not only passive beneficiaries of assistance but also active agents of social change.

10.3.2 Youth Leadership and Community-Led Education Initiatives

Interviews with young Rohingya activists who have led community education despite numerous challenges revealed a striking finding. Ro Khin Maung is a Rohingya youth leader who founded the Rohingya Youth Association and teaches young people in the camps to become leaders. He talked about how the community is taking an active role in creating its own capacity:

> *I teach leadership skills to young people from 2 to 4 p.m. today. Since December, I have been undertaking this training daily. So far, I have taught this leadership course to 300 young people. Why am I delivering this training to young people? Because of military persecution in Myanmar, we were unable to exercise our political rights in our community. We have not been given the opportunity to vote or the right to run for office, so our people did not know what it meant to be a leader. Our folks didn't know what kind of quality a leader should have. This is why I am giving this kind of training (Field Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata (2017) call this "refugee self-reliance," meaning that people who have been forced to leave their homes actively build capacity within their communities rather than waiting for external assistance. Khin Maung's leadership training addresses a void that has persisted for decades, stemming from political exclusion in Myanmar. It shows how Rohingya youth are attempting to develop social capital and governance skills. His efforts go beyond official training sessions to include sharing material on social media:

> *I had a live interview on my Facebook page two days ago. Some young people are asking me, "Can you please give me the original link to the news?" Those kids don't know about this news. I discuss the Bangladeshi foreign minister, the Myanmar foreign minister, the World Bank grant to Bangladesh, the Rohingya, and the host community. The Rohingya people don't know about this most of the time. "Some people found out when I published through Facebook live," said Ro Khin Maung in a field interview in Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023.*

Khin Maung also stressed the good things about the Rohingya people that people from outside the group frequently don't see:

> *"The Rohingya are generally honest." If you stay in touch with us in our community, you can find that the Rohingya people are quite honest and naive. "They believe anything that other people tell them," (Field Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This description goes against the common view that Rohingyas are dangerous and instead shows a community that is based on trust and honesty. He also pointed out that young people are aware of what's going on in the world:

> *Young people are very mindful of what will happen to them in the future. They know what's going on in Ukraine. They know what's going on in Gaza. They know what will happen in the future, but we don't know what to do next. We don't know how to fix this problem (Field Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

The above text demonstrates that Rohingya youth can make their own choices even when they must leave their homes. Ro Khin Maung's leadership training exemplifies "refugee self-reliance," in which communities build their own capabilities rather than relying on external assistance. His work addresses decades of political isolation and challenges negative preconceptions by portraying the Rohingya as honest and aware of the world. But there is still a big problem: young people know what's wrong with their lives, but they don't know how to fix it.

10.3.3 Agent for Economic Productivity and Change

Md. Gias Uddin's journalistic lens captures a significant transformation in gender dynamics within the Rohingya community. His vivid account demonstrates his perception of modernization and empowerment:

> *"One day at Cox's Bazar Sea beach, I encountered four girls wearing fashionable dresses, sunglasses, and carrying umbrellas. Initially, I photographed them and inquired about their identity. They responded, 'We are Rohingya.' I was struck by the transformation, thinking, 'What a change!" (Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar).*

This encounter shaped Md. Gias Uddin's understanding of Rohingya women's agency led him to document their engagement in vocational training and economic activities. His perception of women gaining independence through handicrafts and sewing reflects what Wilhelm (2021) describes as journalists' role in recognizing gendered forms of resilience often invisible in mainstream reporting. Research on gendered digital visibility identifies resilience as a distinct process that demonstrates women's capacity to resist and transform inequalities

in online spaces. The #MeToo movement exemplifies this dynamic by revealing both online hostility against women and their collective resilience in speaking out—forms of agency that mainstream reporting frequently overlooks in favor of focusing primarily on victimization narratives.

His detailed documentation of their skills demonstrates his recognition of human capital, often overlooked in crisis-focused reporting:

> *They are highly skilled in fishing, net weaving, agriculture, and environmental stewardship. In Myanmar, cultivation is practiced using cattle; fishing is highly skilled; and net weaving is used for fishing, gardening, green vegetables, and rice production. They also do so in their camps; those hills were cut for shelter; they plant trees; and they cultivate vegetables in front of their camp here. They engage in net weaving and earn wages here, particularly women who perform this type of work. They received training in sewing and do it. Women here are also learning handicrafts, such as sewing and weaving, and earning a living and becoming independent (Interview, Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar).*

Groutsis, Collins, and Reid (2024) argue that refugees bring diverse skills often overlooked in deficit-based narratives. This aligns with the journalist's recognition of Rohingya expertise in fishing, agriculture, and environmental conservation, highlighting their human capital and challenging portrayals of refugees as mere burdens or victims.

Md. Gias Uddin also noted the community's work ethic and integrity:

> They are more or less honest. In Myanmar, they are not involved in food adulteration, unlike Bangladeshi producers. Neat and clean their home, they do hard work and eat more (Interview, Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar).

Mr. Aman Ullah, a prominent Rohingya historian and activist and a member of the Central Committee of the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA), advocated strongly for recognizing and utilizing the community's economic potential:

> *"Leveraging their hidden talents, such as sports or technical skills, could benefit them and host communities. Of the 1.2 million Rohingya, approximately 500,000 are of working age. If one person works, through one person's work, products for 10 people can be created. However, policymakers believe that if we allow them to work, Bangladeshi people will become unemployed—they do not understand this (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist, Chittagong, 2023).*

He also highlighted specific opportunities for women's economic contribution:

> *If our women could engage in work such as nakshi kantha (traditional quilting) and produce 20 nakshi kanthas per month, it would benefit the country and provide income. However, those who deal with Rohingyas do not want to give this, they do not want to do this, because they think if we do this, Rohingyas will not leave here (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist, Chittagong, September 2023).*

10.3.4 Social and Religious Ties and Integration

Despite widespread negative sentiment, some host community members recognized the Rohingya's proactive efforts at social integration through religious and cultural activities. Host community member named Alamgir Hossain (43), from Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, described positive interactions:

> *I have a good relationship with the Rohingya. In various social programs, we meet one another; for example, we invite them, and they invite us. Two days ago, I was invited by the Rohingyas whose son had Aqiqa, a religious programme to be a Muslim. They have some friends, they invite us, bring us to their home, and feed us winter pitha (traditional rice cakes) (Interview, Alamgir Hossain, Local People, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This evidence aligns with Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis, which shows that shared religious and cultural values create common goals and a sense of equality, promoting positive interactions that reduce prejudice and enhance mutual understanding between refugees and the host community. The shared Muslim identity between Rohingyas and the

host community serves as a superordinate category, fostering positive intergroup contact. This aligns with the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), which suggests that recategorizing members of different groups under a shared identity can reduce prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination while allowing individuals to maintain their distinct subgroup identities.

The local chairman's views contained minimal but notable positive acknowledgment. He demonstrated a thoughtful understanding by recognizing that criminal behavior is not universal:

> *"Not all Rohingya are involved in wrongdoing. Many are sincere Muslims who regularly pray and follow religious practices. There are hundreds of mosques in the Rohingya camps; they pray, and Rohingya women observe purdah," (Interview, M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury, Union Parishad Chairman, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

This recognition of within-group heterogeneity aligns with the Outgroup Homogeneity Effect literature (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992), which suggests that positive intergroup contact can lead to more differentiated perceptions of outgroup members. The chairman's ability to distinguish among segments of the Rohingya community represents a cognitive shift from stereotypical thinking toward more nuanced categorization.

10.3.5 Building Positive Relationships through Sports and Cultural Participation

Some local respondents acknowledged Rohingya efforts to build positive relationships through shared activities. A local student, Md. Helal Uddin (24), observed:

> *"With those we play football, they have good relations. We can communicate with approximately 10% of the Rohingya. Those with whom we play sports and socialize are people with whom we have good relationships (Interview, Md. Helal Uddin, Local Student, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).*

This indicates that people recognize the Rohingya's social abilities and their leadership in bringing people together through sports and casual encounters. These findings align with Spaaij's (2012) research, which demonstrates that recreational athletics promotes social integration among Somali refugees in Australia by reinforcing internal community

relationships, while providing only limited opportunities for broader social connections and access to institutional networks.

Playing football together demonstrates how these organizational approaches function at the community level. It is a cultural activity that brings together local children and Rohingya refugees in shared settings, helping them better understand one another, despite their different backgrounds. These informal contacts not only foster a sense of belonging but also inspire individuals from different cultures to get involved. This is similar to how recreational sports bring people together and help them fit in (Yukich, Fulton, & Wood, 2020).

The football relationships depicted herein illustrate what Putnam (2000) refers to as "bonding through bridging," wherein shared activities facilitate significant cross-group engagement. The quantification of communication success (Nearly 10% Rohingya) indicates a constrained yet quantifiable influence of contact efforts. The sports-based contact described herein corroborates Crisp and Turner's (2009) findings, indicating that cooperative intergroup interactions in informal contexts may be particularly effective in reducing prejudice and fostering positive relationships.

10.3.6 Intelligent and Adaptable

The local chairman said that the Rohingyas are smart and adaptable: *"They are smarter than us, they can speak English, they can use cards, and they are smarter than us"* (M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury, Palongkhali Union Parishad Chairman, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar). This shows that they are resourceful. However, this recognition of ability engendered perceptions of threat rather than reducing bias, consistent with Stephan and Stephan's (2013) Integrated Threat Theory. ITT shows that perceived threats cause prejudice "regardless of whether or not the threat is 'real" (Stephan & Stephan, 2013, pp. 23–45). The chairman's acknowledgment of Rohingya capabilities signified both tangible dangers to local economic benefits and symbolic threats to the anticipated social hierarchy, wherein hosts are supposed to uphold dominance over refugees. This pattern supports ITT's main idea that even positive views of outgroup competence can lead to negative feelings when they threaten ingroup status and resources.

Kamol Dey of Shomoy TV sees the Rohingya as skillful communicators instead of helpless victims. He said*, "They often strategically complained to international media like Al Jazeera and CNN"* (Interview, Kamol Dey, Local Journalist, Shomoy TV, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar). This

remark demonstrates their understanding of the media and their ability to plan ahead. Jack (2015) contends that communication is not ancillary but a fundamental aspect of humanitarian help. Jack's thesis on refugees near the Thai-Burma border demonstrates that empowering refugees to have a voice enhances their resilience, dignity, and rights. This fits with the Rohingyas' intentional use of worldwide media, which shows their power and ability to communicate.

10.3.7 Digital Literacy and Self-Representation through Social Media

The interviews revealed a sophisticated understanding and use of digital platforms among Rohingya community members, particularly youth activists. Ro Khin Maung described the extent of digital engagement: *"I have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, I am not much using Instagram, but I have—and mostly I am using WhatsApp, also I have Telegram and Signal and Viber. I regularly use Facebook, every day after one hour, I am using this kind of application" (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).* He explained his strategic use of these platforms:

> *"My target audience is my community. Within the community, youth and educated people are prioritized. Youth, educated people, and leaders are my priority within our community. I also prioritize the local Bangladeshi population in Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Teknaf, and Ukhiya. My second audience is the Bangladeshi people. My third audience is the international community, including the Myanmar media, journalists, and reporters," (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

The emergence of Rohingya-run media platforms demonstrates the community's capacity for self-representation:

> "*There are many YouTubers in our community, including content creators. There are numerous YouTubers, content creators, photographers, and artists in our community. They are also performing well. They are publishing different content. Art Vision and Zeta TV are also well-known. They are like the media; a team works with them (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).*

This digital activism aligns with Hall's (1997) Representation Theory, demonstrating how marginalized communities can construct counter-hegemonic narratives by gaining control over their own representation.

Mr. Aman Ullah, who has been using Facebook since 2012 with 5,000 friends and 12,000 followers, described his educational mission through social media:

> *"I create posts to inform the younger generation about our issues, much like a teacher providing notes to students. I aim to educate them on our circumstances. Many people like my posts. The younger generation—my posts help them understand our situation well. I primarily write about Burma's politics, geopolitics, military activities, Arakan history, Arakan politics, Rohingya politics, Rohingya history, and legal issues (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist, Chittagong, September 2023).*

His work demonstrates how digital platforms enable refugee intellectuals to preserve and transmit cultural and historical knowledge despite physical displacement.

10.3.8 Initial Sympathy Based on Shared Religious Identity

Several respondents acknowledged initial sympathy upon the Rohingyas' arrival. As the school teacher observed: *"At first, when they came that time, sympathy arose for the Rohingyas as they are Muslim, the Myanmar government is persecuting them"* (Interview, Md. Abdul Malek, Local Teacher, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). This response reflects the temporal dimensions of refugee reception, where initial humanitarian attitudes based on shared religious identity often give way to more complex perceptions over time. The reference to shared Muslim identity as a basis for initial sympathy aligns with broader patterns observed in refugee contexts. Similar dynamics emerged in Turkey's reception of Syrian refugees, where "sympathetic attitudes...were more prevalent in the beginning" among populations that shared Islamic faith with incoming refugees (De Coninck et al., 2021). However, as documented in the Turkish case, these initial advantages diminished as "language and cultural differences, and an economic downturn kept them from uniformly embracing the visitors" (De Coninck et al., 2021).

Md. Gias Uddin's longitudinal perspective reveals how perceptions of the media have evolved. His recollection of the 2017 influx demonstrates initial sympathetic coverage:

> *From Tantulia, Barguna, and Gaibandha, and across the country, people brought large quantities of food and supplies. I wrote a report titled 'Manusher doiai cholse Rohingyara Four months' (The Rohingya are surviving on people's mercy for four months). Out of humanitarian concern, we temporarily welcomed them (Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar).*

This account captures the nationwide humanitarian mobilization during the early crisis phase. Notably, the phrase "welcomed them temporarily" reveals an underlying expectation that the Rohingya presence would be short-lived, an assumption that likely contributed to shifting attitudes as the displacement became protracted.

10.3.9 Committed to Peaceful Co-existence

Local people demonstrated understanding of the Rohingya efforts to maintain dialogue through informal channels. Md. Azizul Haq (21), a local student, highlighted their communication practices: *"At the tea stall, we can have a chance to meet with them and discuss various issues. Offline relations are safe."* (Interview, Md. Azizul Haq, Local Student, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). The "tea stalls" exemplify what Oldenburg (1999) terms "third places" and Amin (2002) describes as "micro-publics", neutral, everyday venues where intercultural encounters occur organically. Unlike formal integration programs, these accessible spaces facilitate genuine dialogue through shared routine activities. The student's reference to discussing "various issues" suggests these informal settings enable substantive cross-cultural communication that supports social cohesion within the community. Such micro-publics demonstrate how meaningful intercultural understanding often develops through prosaic interactions in unpretentious settings rather than through engineered public encounters or institutional interventions.

10.3.10 Cultural Resilience and Artistic Expression

Journalist Md. Gias Uddin documented the Rohingya community's engagement in cultural activities despite their circumstances: *"In Myanmar, they do not have entertainment, but here they can watch television, have mobiles, they do cultural practice, for example singing,*

photography, artwork" (Interview, Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar, September 2023). This observation reflects what Lenette, Brough, and Cox (2013) term "everyday resilience", the maintenance of cultural practices as forms of resistance and identity preservation. Ro Khin Maung emphasized the importance of cultural identity and historical connection:

> *"Our roots are in Arakan. We must educate the younger generation about our history and identity to inspire pride and self-reliance. Our story is ours to tell. If we do not speak up, others will define us in ways that do not reflect who we truly are (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).*

This commitment to self-representation aligns with Conquergood's (2002) concept of "performance as intervention", cultural practices that constitute political acts of resistance and identity affirmation. Mr. Aman Ullah noted changes in perception among Bangladeshi youth over time:

> *"When I was studying, when someone asked me what I was, and I said I am Rohingya, they would act as if Rohingyas had horns on their heads. They thought Rohingya meant some creature. However, for the younger generation, these matters have changed," (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist, Chittagong, September 2023).*

This shift suggests that increased exposure and interaction have enabled a more nuanced understanding of Rohingya identity, moving beyond dehumanizing stereotypes toward recognition of shared humanity.

10.3.11 Commitment to Repatriation and National Identity

A significant finding that challenges negative stereotypes about Rohingya intentions is their consistent and emphatic commitment to repatriation. Mr. Aman Ullah addressed misconceptions directly:

> *Bangladeshi leaders mistakenly believe we aim to separate from Bangladesh by merging Chattogram and Arakan. However, no one from our forefathers to our grandchildren has ever thought this. Many people write that we want to*

> *snatch Cox's Bazar from Bangladesh, when we do not even have security in our own country, when Bangladesh is our last refuge, how can we think such things about those who gave us shelter? (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist and Historian, Chittagong, September 2023).*

Ro Khin Maung reinforced this commitment unequivocally:

> *"We, the Rohingya, are always ready to go to our country. No one wants to stay here. This is our clear statement. Myanmar is my identity and my country, so why will I stay in Bangladesh? Nevertheless, I have no way; I am compelled to stay here," (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).*

He explained the complexity of repatriation:

> *"One thing we all Rohingya agree on—to go to our country. The problem is that Burma is saying they agree to accept the Rohingya, but in reality, they are not agreeing. The Myanmar government is not allowing us to return to our original home. Think about it if you are from Dhaka, would you agree to stay in Cox's Bazar if the government said you have to stay there? This is a scenario that Bangladeshi people are unaware of. The Myanmar government is saying you cannot stay in your original homeland, you have to stay where we are putting you. That is why the Rohingya are not accepting," (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp* 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).

This emphatic commitment to return challenges prevalent fears that Rohingyas intend to settle permanently in Bangladesh. The findings suggest that addressing the conditions for safe and dignified return—rather than restricting Rohingya rights in Bangladesh—would better serve both communities' interests.

10.3.12 Challenging Misinformation and Stereotypes

Md. Gias Uddin demonstrated critical reflexivity about his profession's role in shaping public perceptions:

> *"There is considerable misinformation about the Rohingyas on social media. For instance, reports claim that beggars are increasing in Cox's Bazar. If I*

> *were to report this narrative, the general public would perceive the individuals as beggars and idle individuals, but this is inaccurate. In reality, they are the ones suffering the most. You cannot think about how inhumanely they live in their camp homes. In one room, 7-8 people live. To access water, they must walk long distances. Sanitation or garbage management is zero there. If 50 thousand Rohingya are somehow involved in illegal work, for example, yaba dealing, arms business, human trafficking, but all are being labeled as bad," (Interview, Md. Gias Uddin, Local Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).*

Mr. Aman Ullah contested the criminalization of the entire community:

> *"They talk about us and the drug business. In fact, among us, very few are involved, only 1,000 of 1,000,000 are connected. They take drugs from dealers there and deliver to dealers here. For very little money, a huge burden is being placed on their shoulders, like carrying a 10-taka burden for 2 takas. About arms selling you have seen that RAB recovered guns from ARSA. Those guns can only be used for robbery, nothing else. If we were smuggling guns, would only ARSA have them? Everyone would have them then," (Interview with Mr. Aman Ullah, Rohingya Activist, Chittagong, September 2023).*

Ro Khin Maung also addressed these stereotypes:

> *"Some local people or other people are saying that the Rohingya are drug dealers and that the Rohingya are killing each other. I am saying one thing firmly—the Rohingya people are sincere and innocent. In our community, not everyone is like that. What people are saying, not every Rohingya is a drug dealer, not every Rohingya is involved. However, some people are doing it, and the image of our whole community is lost. In our community, the drug dealers are excluded from the community. The community is not communicating with them as effectively as before. It indicates that our community disfavors this kind of activity. But not everyone is doing this," (Interview, Ro Khin Maung, Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar).*

There are also voices within the local community calling for more balanced media coverage of Rohingya issues. Some locals argue that reports should highlight not only crime but also education, humanitarian struggles, and employment opportunities. Local student Md. Azizul Haq (21) stated: *"News related to Rohingya on humanitarian ground, their education, their job—these should come on social media more."* (Interview, Md. Azizul Haq, Local Student, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, September 2023).

Table 10.1: Summary of Positive Themes Identified Across Participant Categories

Positive Theme	**Indicators from Data**	**Source Participants**
Educational Resilience and Adaptability	Learning capacity, NGO training uptake, awareness campaigns, door-to-door education on child marriage and harassment prevention, historical integration of 1970s arrivals, 400,000-500,000 children accessing education	Local Teacher (Md. Abdul Malek), Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo)
Youth Leadership and Community Education	Leadership training programs (300 youth trained since December), capacity building, information dissemination through Facebook Live, political rights awareness	Ro Khin Maung (Founder & Director, Rohingya Youth Association)
Digital Literacy and Self-Representation	Strategic media engagement, YouTube channels (Art Vision, Zeta TV), Facebook activism, multilingual communication, use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Viber	Ro Khin Maung, Mr. Aman Ullah (Member, Central Committee of ARNA), Journalist (Kamol Dey, Shomoy TV)
Economic Skills and Work Ethic	Fishing expertise, agriculture, net weaving, vegetable cultivation, environmental stewardship, cleanliness, honesty, hard work, no food adulteration	Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo), Mr. Aman Ullah
Gender Transformation and Women's Empowerment	Vocational training, sewing, handicrafts (nakshi kantha), economic independence, changing dress and behavior, women becoming independent	Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo), Mr. Aman Ullah
Religious Observance and	Prayer, mosque attendance (hundreds of mosques in camps), religious	Chairman (M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury),

Positive Theme	**Indicators from Data**	**Source Participants**
Shared Muslim Identity	celebrations, Aqiqa invitations, purdah observance, initial sympathy based on shared Muslim identity	Local Host (Alamgir Hossain), Local Teacher (Md. Abdul Malek)
Sports-Based Relationship Building	Football participation, cooperative activities with local youth, communication through sports (approximately 10% Rohingya)	Local Student (Md. Helal Uddin)
Cultural Resilience and Artistic Expression	Singing, photography, artwork, YouTube content creation, identity preservation, television access, mobile use, cultural practice	Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo), Ro Khin Maung
Commitment to Repatriation	Emphatic desire to return to Myanmar, rejection of settlement rumors, Myanmar as identity, awareness work about repatriation, clear statement that no one wants to stay in Bangladesh	Mr. Aman Ullah, Ro Khin Maung
Honesty and Innocence	Trustworthiness, honest nature, no food adulteration, clean homes, belief in others, sincerity	Ro Khin Maung, Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo)
Peaceful Coexistence	Tea stall dialogues, informal communication, social program participation, Aqiqa invitations, sharing winter pitha (traditional rice cakes)	Local Student (Md. Azizul Haq), Local Host (Alamgir Hossain)
Intelligence and Adaptability	English language skills, card usage, resourcefulness, media literacy, strategic engagement with international media (Al Jazeera, CNN)	Chairman (M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury), Journalist (Kamol Dey, Shomoy TV)
Challenging Misinformation and Stereotypes	Critical reflexivity, contesting criminalization narratives, distinguishing minority criminal involvement from the entire community, and community exclusion of drug dealers	Journalist (Md. Gias Uddin, Prothom Alo), Mr. Aman Ullah, Ro Khin Maung, Local Student (Md. Azizul Haq)

10.4 Media Professional Perspectives on Rohingya Agency

This section examines how Bangladeshi media professionals perceive and write about the positive aspects of the Rohingya community. It does this by looking at interviews with two Cox's Bazar-based reporters who cover the Rohingya. Md. Gias Uddin is a Teknaf correspondent for Prothom Alo in Cox's Bazar, while Kamol Dey is a Cox's Bazar correspondent for Shomoy TV. Two well-known news sources in Bangladesh are Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV. As frontline journalists stationed at the epicenter of the refugee crisis, they have maintained a continuous connection with the Rohingya community, offering distinct views into the group's resilience and proactivity, which are frequently eclipsed by prevailing crisis narratives. Pogliano and Ponzo (2019) contend that mediatized local events function as conduits for national media narratives, with local journalists fulfilling crucial gatekeeping functions. These Cox's Bazar correspondents' ongoing involvement in the Rohingya crisis makes them important links between local realities and national conversations. How they talk about the refugees' traits has a significant impact on how the Bangladeshi public sees the Rohingya situation.

Both journalists see cultural resilience as a key trait of the Rohingya population. Md. Gias Uddin notes that they are involved in "singing, photography, artwork," even though there are few opportunities for these activities in Myanmar. This remark demonstrates media professionals' acknowledgment of what Lenette et al. (2013) refer to as "everyday resilience" the sustenance of cultural practices as mechanisms of resistance and identity preservation.

The views of these media experts align with developments in humanitarian journalism. Their methodology embodies Franks's (2013) critique of "disaster journalism," promoting a transition from episodic reporting to a comprehensive understanding. The correspondents' acknowledgment of the Rohingya's strategic communication skills bolsters Cottle's (2009) assertion that "mediatized conflicts" should be examined, which recognizes that affected communities actively interact with media portrayals rather than merely absorbing them.

The journalists' self-awareness of their role in creating stereotypes is similar to Hanusch's (2019) work on journalism cultures in the Global South, which examines how local reporters balance international news values with community comprehension. Documenting positive portrayals of Rohingya exemplifies what Bunce et al. (2018) refer to as "peripheral journalism" reporting from the margins that can contest prevailing metropolitan narratives.

The infrequent occurrence of these viewpoints corroborates Wright's (2002) examination of "humanitarian news discourse," illustrating how structural limitations in news production prioritize crisis-oriented narratives over agency-focused reporting. The correspondents' insights align with the new "constructive journalism" approaches identified by Rodgers et al. (2021), which emphasize solutions and community strengths alongside issues.

10.5 Discussion and Analysis

The data shows that even while certain people in the community may see the good things about the Rohingya, their ability to adapt and their ability to bounce back from adversity, this recognition is still little compared to the overall unfavorable feelings in the community. Even if there is evidence that Rohingya people are actively involved in their communities, doing well in school, trying to fit in with others, and maintaining strong cultural identity, these positive traits are either ignored or eclipsed by factors that people in the area consider more important. These viewpoints show that even if most of the conversation is tense, there are still signs of empathy, recognition of historical integration, and calls for more equal representations of the Rohingya population.

10.5.1 The Role of Interpersonal Contact

Consistent with Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), favorable perceptions were more pronounced among individuals who engaged in direct, collaborative encounters with the Rohingya. The football players who reported having good relationships, the families who celebrate religious holidays together, and the conversations at the tea stand all exemplify Allport's best conditions for contact: equal status throughout interaction, shared aims, and collaboration. However, there is still little of this kind of contact. Md. Helal Uddin said that only "10%" of Rohingya people still talk to locals. This suggests that there are structural barriers to greater opportunities for engagement. People cannot attend camp activities because they're concerned about their safety, which makes it much harder for them to meet new people.

10.5.2 The Paradox of Competence Recognition

A significant conclusion is that acknowledgment of Rohingya competencies occasionally elicited perceptions of threat rather than alleviating bias. The chairman's admission that Rohingyas are "smarter" and "cleverer" was quickly followed by worries about their moving outside of camps. This pattern supports Integrated Threat Theory's idea that perceived skill

can elicit negative feelings when it threatens one's group's status (Stephan & Stephan, 2013). This paradox indicates that mere positive acknowledgment is insufficient to enhance intergroup ties. Recognition must be accompanied by institutional modifications that address legitimate apprehensions around resource rivalry and status insecurity.

10.5.3 Temporal Dynamics of Sympathy

Several respondents indicated that their initial sympathy had diminished with time. The teacher's remark that "at first, when they came, sympathy arose for the Rohingyas as they are Muslim" illustrates the initial efficacy of the Common Ingroup Identity Model. Nonetheless, as De Coninck et al. (2021) noted in the context of Turkish-Syrian refugees, the benefits of a shared religious identity wane when "language and cultural differences, and an economic downturn" engender new splits. This temporal pattern indicates that a favorable initial reception necessitates ongoing structural maintenance to avert deterioration. Without ongoing intervention, it seems like the change from superordinate (Muslim) to subgroup (host vs. refugee) identity categorization is unavoidable.

10.5.4 Media's Dual Role in Shaping Perceptions

The journalists who were questioned demonstrated what Parrotta (2021) calls "critical humanitarianism" by recognizing refugees' agency while also acknowledging institutional limits. Md. Gias Uddin and Kamol Dey both demonstrated that they could write about positive developments while simultaneously discussing security issues. However, their comments about misinformation and the rise of negative stories on social media indicate that constructive journalism struggles to keep pace with the volume of crisis-focused reporting. Notably, local respondents demanded more equitable coverage, reflecting a public need for alternative perspectives that mainstream media do not provide.

10.5.5 The Significance of Repatriation Commitment

One of the most noteworthy facts that goes against what most people think is how firmly and persistently the Rohingya participants claimed they wanted to go back home. Both Mr. Aman Ullah and Ro Khin Maung made it plain that Rohingyas do not want to stay in Bangladesh forever, but they have to because of problems they can't change. This finding goes against common expectations that the Rohingya want to stay permanently or make territorial claims. It may be crucial to discuss and understand this commitment to reestablish trust between refugees and host communities.

Table 10.2: Conditions Facilitating Positive Recognition of Rohingya Characteristics

Condition	**Examples from Data**	**Theoretical Basis**
Direct Personal Contact	Football matches, religious event invitations, and tea stall conversations	Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)
Shared Superordinate Identity	The common Muslim faith creates initial sympathy and a humanitarian response.	Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000)
Professional Engagement	Journalists are observing the Rohingya capabilities through sustained coverage.	Representation Theory (Hall, 1997)
Recognition of Shared Humanity	Awareness of suffering and inhumane living conditions	Critical Humanitarianism (Parrotta, 2021)
Within-Group Differentiation	Distinguishing religious Rohingya from those involved in crime	Outgroup Homogeneity Effect (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992)
Informal Third Places	Tea stalls and neutral venues enabling organic intercultural encounters	Micro-publics Theory (Amin, 2002; Oldenburg, 1999)
Digital Self-Representation	YouTube channels, Facebook activism, enabling counter-narratives	Counter-Hegemonic Representation (Hall, 1997)

10.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest that policy strategies should emphasize meaningful participation in decision-making, allocate resources for capacity building and leadership training, promote avenues for cultural expression, and recognize refugees' capacity to understand their own situations. Evidence of advanced organizational competencies, including repatriation evaluations and cultural initiatives, indicates that policies focused solely on care delivery overlook opportunities to leverage refugees' skills toward more sustainable solutions.

These proposals align with the participatory development literature initiated by Chambers (1997). This literature stresses "putting the last first" by recognizing local knowledge and talents. The recorded organizational skills of the Rohingya exemplify what Cornwall and

Gaventa (2000) characterize as "citizen participation" strategies that extend beyond the mere solicitation of input to encompass shared authority in decision-making.

The findings support Betts et al.'s (2017) promotion of "refugee economies," which see displaced persons as economic agents rather than solely as recipients of assistance. The evidence of Rohingya entrepreneurship, skills development, and economic activity corresponds with Omata's (2020) notion of "refugee self-reliance" strategies, which can advantage both refugee and host communities when sufficiently supported.

The cultural expression activities recorded in the study correspond with Kibreab's (2003) analysis of refugee agency, highlighting the need to maintain cultural identity as a foundation for alternative empowerment strategies. The Art Garden Rohingya poetry platform and many YouTube channels exemplify what Conquergood (2002) describes as "performance as intervention"—cultural practices that function as political acts of resistance and identity affirmation.

The research validates criticisms of traditional humanitarian approaches as delineated in Barnett's (2011) analysis of humanitarian government. The evidence of Rohingya self-organization capabilities challenges Barnett's notion of "humanitarian paternalism," which assumes that refugees lack the capacity for autonomous action. Transitioning to recognition-based methodologies corresponds with Fassin's (2012) advocacy to transcend "humanitarian reason" and acknowledge the political subjectivity of displaced individuals.

10.7 Conclusion

These findings enhance our understanding of how refugees and host communities can build positive relationships, even under very difficult circumstances. The evidence supports theoretical predictions about contact theory, social identity processes, and integration dynamics, while also highlighting the structural constraints that impede such positive recognition. The persistence of empathy and calls for equitable narratives suggest strategies for improving intergroup relations, consistent with the principles of optimal contact theory.

The study demonstrates that positive recognition is prevalent across various domains, including educational, social, religious, cultural, digital, and economic spheres. This means that there are numerous methods to improve the relationship between refugees and the communities in which they have long lived. The recorded agency of the Rohingya in

education, digital communication, cultural preservation, youth leadership, and community organizing contests challenges stereotypes of refugees as passive victims and demonstrates their capacity for substantial contributions to the host society.

The most essential element is that the Rohingya participants' strong and unwavering desire to return home goes against what most people think about their motives. Khin Maung made it quite clear when he declared, "No one wants to stay here." We are making this clear. When people are displaced for an extended period, it may be vital for both refugees and host communities to discuss and understand this promise as a means of rebuilding trust.

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Chapter 11

DIVERSE IDENTITY PORTRAYALS OF ROHINGYA PEOPLE IN MYANMAR SOCIAL MEDIA

11.1 Introduction

The portrayal of the Rohingya people on several social media platforms illustrates a multifaceted terrain of identity formation that transcends mere nomenclature. Buckingham (2008) posits that the essential paradox of identity is embedded in the name itself, as identity signifies both resemblance and distinction. This paradox is apparent in the debate over the names used to describe Rohingya identity. The self-identified name "Rohingya" and the state-imposed name "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals) or "illegal Bengali immigrants" or "economic migrants" are not just different names; they are also fundamentally different claims about belonging, legitimacy, and collective identity. Even though the Rohingya people share cultural markers and historical experiences that bring them together as a group, their digital representations are very different on Bangladeshi and Myanmar social media platforms. This illustrates the tension between uniqueness and belonging to a group, as Buckingham discussed.

Hall (1997) further underscores this representational aspect of identity formation, positing that identity is shaped by the meanings and representations we experience, characterizing it as a dynamic, socially mediated process rather than a static attribute. In the context of the digital identity of the Rohingya, diverse representations across platforms work together to create, rather than merely reflect, distinct versions of who the Rohingya are and where they belong. Castells (2010) asserts that the classification and representation of communities within the network society influence their social legitimacy and dictate their access to legal protections and material resources. The Rohingya crisis, which gained international attention after the 2017 migration from Myanmar's Rakhine State, serves as an exemplary case study for analyzing how various players establish, contest, and manipulate identity through social media discourse.

This chapter examines the representation of Rohingya identity on Myanmar's social media platforms, utilizing comprehensive material that details organized efforts of delegitimization, dehumanization, and incitement to violence. The analysis uncovers a representational range

that spans from denial of existence to overt eliminationist language, which directly facilitated the genocide committed against this group. This study is important not only because it shows how language changes, but also because it shows how these digital identities affected real-world events, making it socially acceptable and even celebrated to commit violence against the Rohingya (Lee, 2019).

The chapter is organized around a thorough review of the literature that looks at how Myanmar's media ecosystem, which includes both state-controlled traditional media and social media platforms like Facebook, was used to portray the Rohingya as threats to Myanmar's national integrity while also denying their existence as a legitimate ethnic group. This review of the literature forms the basis for the next chapter, which uses empirical data to examine how Bangladeshi social media shapes the identity of the Rohingya.

11.2 Theoretical Framework: Identity, Authority, and Media Representation

11.2.1 Social Identity Theory and Digital Construction

Hall's (1997) theoretical framework on identity formation provides a basis for understanding the construction and contestation of Rohingya identity in the digital realm. Hall defines identity as strategic and situational, perpetually constructed through discourse and representation rather than being static or intrinsic. In the context of the Rohingya situation, this means that the community's identity is not merely given or inherent; it is actively constructed by how diverse groups talk about, label, and define it on social media. Representation is essential in the formation of identity, as meaning and identity are profoundly linked. Hall (1997) asserts that representation fundamentally influences identity, stating, “Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity of who we are and with whom we belong” (Hall, 1997, p. 13). Identity evolves through language, speech, and social interaction as a dynamic, socially produced process rather than an inherent quality. The digital era has fundamentally altered identity formation by democratizing communication and concurrently engendering novel forms of power concentration. Castells (2010) asserts, “Switches connecting the networks are the privileged instruments of power.” So, the people who switch are the ones in charge (Castells, 2010, p. 502). Networks are "open structures, able to expand without limits" (Castells, 2010, p. 502), but they also create systems of inclusion and exclusion. For example, "the social construction of new dominant forms of space and time develops a meta-network that switches off non-essential functions,

subordinate social groups, and devalued territories" (Castells, 2010, p. 508). For oppressed communities such as the Rohingya, social media platforms transform into arenas of both oppression and resistance within these network power systems. Goffman's (1974) frame analysis offers an essential understanding of how various stakeholders construct meanings about Rohingya identity, as each group employs distinct interpretive frameworks to ascertain the Rohingya's identity and comprehension. Entman (1993) defines framing as "highlighting certain aspects of reality to make them more prominent within a communication." This is what occurs on social media, where platforms prioritize different aspects, including humanitarian versus political concerns. These stakeholder frameworks are not neutral tools; they reveal the power relations, institutional interests, and ideological commitments that shape how information is selected and presented to audiences.

This process is essential for marginalized groups, such as the Rohingya. Brooten et al. (2015) showed how "othering" frames in Myanmar's media coverage did this, and Van Gorp's (2005) research showed how frames can "humanize or criminalize refugee populations." On social media, these competing frames appear in episodic stories and thematic issues (Iyengar, 1991), shaping interpretive packages that change how people understand and respond to the Rohingya crisis.

11.2.2 The Politics of Naming and Classifying

Foucault (1972) points out that speech and classification are always political. The Rohingya's contested identity is a good example of this. Foucault posits that inside every society:

The creation of discourse is simultaneously regulated, curated, structured, and redistributed based on protocols that establish who possesses the authority to articulate and whose expressions are deemed genuine (Foucault, 1972, p. 216).

Societies establish "rules of exclusion" that regulate discourse, guaranteeing that "we are not free to say just anything, not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216). This theoretical approach elucidates how the authority to designate and categorize populations functions as a control mechanism with significant material repercussions in the Rohingya context. The Myanmar government's unwillingness to acknowledge "Rohingya" as a valid ethnic designation, opting instead for terms like "Bengali" or "illegal immigrant," exemplifies the utilization of discursive power that directly influences legal status, citizenship

rights, and resource accessibility (Sharma, 2019). These kinds of classification systems don't just describe things; they also make the categories that governments use to control, exclude, or make people stateless.

The government of Myanmar has used these identity categories to turn the Rohingya from citizens into stateless refugees, building the bureaucratic system that made ethnic cleansing possible (Cheesman, 2017). The conflict about Rohingya identity is essentially a contest over the legitimacy of power to delineate the parameters of belonging and to validate whose voice is considered acceptable in establishing membership within the national community. The selection of terminology be it "Rohingya," "Bengali," or "illegal immigrant" dictates not just symbolic acknowledgment but also the attainment of citizenship, legal safeguarding, and finally, survival. This dispute shows that discourse is not "a clear, neutral element," but rather "a privileged area in which power exercises some of its more awesome powers" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216).

11.3 Historical Context: The Systematic Reclassification of Rohingya Identity

11.3.1 Foundations of Colonialism

British colonial censuses established enduring ethnic categories. The 1931 census included "Indian Muslim" but not "Rohingya," even though Muslims had been living in Arakan since the fifteenth century (Roy Chowdhury, 2020). When Britain took over Rakhine in 1824, they quickly mapped out the many ethnic groups in the area, which Roy Chowdhury (2020) terms a "schismogenetic division," which put Buddhists above Muslims. These colonial administrative categories subsequently formed the basis for Myanmar's discriminatory citizenship rules.

11.3.2 From Acknowledgment to Rejection (1948–1982)

In 1954, Prime Minister U Nu first acknowledged the Rohingya as Burmese citizens, saying they had the same rights as other ethnic groups (Haque, 2017). They worked in government and Parliament and spoke their dialect on the radio. The 1961 census showed that 75% of the people of Mayu district were Rohingya (Bari, 2018). But the 1947 Constitution's "indigenous race" clause made things unclear (Hung, 2021). The 1948 Citizenship Act required paperwork that many Rohingya people didn't have, which made them "illegal immigrants" (Yegar, 1972).

After the military coup in 1962, the government, as Roy Chowdhury (2020, p. 10) points out, "re-invoked dormant anti-colonial, racist discourse and wedded it with Buddhist religious fanaticism and populist xenophobia." The government shut down Rohingya organizations, took their National Registration Cards, and then asked for proof of citizenship without the documents they had taken (Lewin, 2012). The 1982 Citizenship Law left the Rohingya out of the 135 recognized ethnic groups and set up three levels of citizenship that most people could not meet (Lewa, 2009). Cheesman (2017, p. 11) says that this statute "made membership in a national race the gold standard for citizenship," putting taingyintha (indigenous ethnicity) above citizenship itself.

11.3.3 Making people stateless (1990s–2015)

Authorities attained statelessness not via legislation but through "deliberate breach and selective application" (Cheesman, 2017, p. 13). Instead of giving out official citizenship papers, they sent them "white cards" that said 700,000 individuals were "Bengali." These cards made it very hard to move around, get married, or have children (Wade, 2019). More than 1 million Rohingya people were not counted in the 2014 census. According to reports, census officials "said thank you, turned around, and walked away" from homes that identified as "Rohingya" (The Guardian, 2014). Ye Htut, the president's spokesman, said that only people who were called "Bengali" will be counted (Reuters, 2015). Kingston (2015) says that Myanmar used "this strategy to discriminate against Rohingya so that later it is easy for the government to exclude them from naturalized citizenship and deportation." In 2015, the government canceled temporary ID cards, which meant that Rohingya could not vote (Kipgen, 2020).

11.3.4 From Noncombatants to Terrorists (2016-2017)

After attacks that were blamed on the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, the government changed the status of the Rohingya to security threats. The military actions in 2017 forced more than 700,000 people to flee to Bangladesh because of killings, sexual violence, and arson (Parmar et al., 2019; TIME, 2018). According to UN officials, it was ethnic cleansing (Martin, 2017). The reclassification of the Rohingya took place in six steps: from recognition to denial (1948–1962), from citizen to foreigner (1962–1982), from documented to undocumented (1982–1993), from mobile to immobile (1993–2015), from counted to uncounted (2014), and from civilian to terrorist (2016–2017). Each level methodically

stripped away rights and rationalized increasing brutality, demonstrating how bureaucratic frameworks facilitate genocide (Sharma, 2019).

11.3.5 Rohingya Resistance to Forced Classifications

A lot of Rohingya people don't like being put inside boxes. Brinham's (2020) research shows that the Rohingya are fighting back. They say, "We are not stateless! You can call us what you want, but we are citizens of Myanmar!" Even though they have been erased for decades, they nevertheless claim citizenship and cultural identity through social memory (Farzana, 2017, p. 292). Roy Chowdhury (2020, p. 14) notes that "once alienated and unimagined from the national space, the Rohingya themselves embraced this identity of victimhood to design their resilient and oppositional disposition." Lee (2021) says that "denying the legitimacy of Rohingya residency in Myanmar has enabled the authorities to place restrictions on Rohingya rights." The Rohingya case shows that modern genocide often starts with administrative acts cancelled cards, manipulated census categories, tiered citizenship laws rather than immediate violence. Gupta (2019) says that the 1982 statute "was no less than a tool of oppression, categorization, and discrimination."

11.4 How Myanmar's media and social media represent the Rohingya identity

The portrayal of Rohingya identity in Myanmar's media and social media platforms represents a coordinated effort to delegitimize, dehumanize, and incite violence against this group, which directly contributed to the genocide against them. Both traditional media controlled by the government and social media sites, especially Facebook, were used to make the Rohingya seem like dangers to Myanmar's national integrity while also denying that they were a real ethnic minority.

11.4.1 Denial of Identity and Existence

The most basic way that Myanmar's media represented things was to systematically erase the Rohingya identity. State-run media sources routinely declined to utilize the term "Rohingya," opting instead for "Bengali" or "Bengalis" to negate the group's indigenous identity and longstanding historical presence in Myanmar (Wade, 2017). This was not just a matter of semantics; it was a planned political move with far-reaching effects. Isti'anah (2018) noted that the lack of the name "Rohingya" in Myanmar newspaper headlines indicated that the

media remained under government control, thereby negating the community's existence and identity.

The Global New Light of Myanmar, the oldest English-language daily newspaper in the country, said that the Rohingya population was a threat to national peace and security, while Myanmar Alin, a state-run Burmese-language daily, called them "Bengali terrorists" (Uddin, 2021). This change in language had a big political impact since it made the Rohingya seem like recent illegal immigrants from Bangladesh instead than a group of people with deep origins in Rakhine State.

Social media spread this story widely, with viral memes, postings, and shared articles regularly making statements such "there is no such thing as Rohingya" and "they are Bengali immigrants who invented a fake identity" (Lee, 2019). These images were shared a lot on nationalist Facebook sites, accounts run by Buddhist monks, and even social media accounts run by the government. By portraying the Rohingya as "Bengali," it effectively destroyed their claims to citizenship by making their identification seem fake something that was done to hide their position as foreign infiltrators (Cheesman, 2017). Siddiki (2019) said that the Buddhist majority in Myanmar has long denied that the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority group exists. They have called them illegal immigrants from the Chittagong province of Bangladesh, which is why they have been persecuted and killed.

11.4.2 Building Multiple Threat Narratives

Myanmar's media ecosystem systematically portrayed the Rohingya as existential risks to the nation by creating overlapping and mutually reinforcing threat narratives that went beyond denying their ethnicity. Kironska (2021) recorded how Myanmar's state media helped to misrepresent the situation in Rakhine State, making the majority of people afraid of the Rohingya people and leading to violence against them. Between 2012 and 2017, this fear-mongering got a lot worse, using a number of different but related threat formulations. The demographic threat narrative said that the Rohingya had very high birth rates that were meant to "outbreed" the Buddhist majority and eventually take over Rakhine State. Viral posts on social media spread false figures and scary pictures that showed maps of Myanmar being taken over by Islamic communities (Schissler et al., 2017). Religious threat narratives depicted the Rohingya as integral to a global Islamic conspiracy aimed at annihilating Buddhist culture, with social media posts linking local conflicts to foreign jihadist activities

and asserting that mosques served as clandestine weapons stores (Wade, 2019). Kironska and Peng (2021) documented how influential Myanmar monks and army officers spread hateful, exclusionary images and commentaries on social media representing Islam as a threat to Buddhism, “traditional values,” and national security, which helped influence people's anti-Rohingya perception and legitimized the military's actions in the region. After the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked police stations in October 2016 and August 2017, social media mostly showed all Rohingya as terrorists or people who support terrorists, making it hard to tell the difference between a small armed group and the whole civilian population (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). These threat narratives portrayed violence against the Rohingya not as persecution but as justifiable self-defense by Myanmar's Buddhist majority. Kironska and Peng (2021) stressed that the military's mass propaganda operation, which was helped by state-run media that called Rohingya "Islamicists" and "Bengali invaders," was the main reason for anti-Rohingya popular opinion in Myanmar.

11.4.3 Rhetoric of systematic dehumanization and elimination

The dehumanization of Rohingya across Myanmar's media platforms utilized overtly eliminationist rhetoric and imagery, which escalated in the lead-up to the 2017 military operations. Hasan (2019) documented how anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim groups used hostile rhetoric on Facebook, including statements such as: “In every town, there is a crude and savage Muslim majority" and "Muslims are like the African carp.” Sohel (2017), citing a 2014 Diplomat magazine article, reported that Burmese people commonly referred to Rohingyas as "animals," "non-human," "aliens," and a "virus." A young Rohingya boy named Mohammad Rafique stated: "Burmese view us simply as 'animal', 'non-human' or 'aliens.'"

A lot of angry Burmese politicians and writers called the Rohingya a "virus" that needed to be gotten rid of. People sometimes used words like "kalar" (a disparaging term for South Asians) and animalistic words like "dogs," "snakes," "fleas," and "maggots" to talk about Rohingya people in posts and comments (Mozur, 2018). Some memes showed Rohingya people with exaggerated physical traits that were similar to earlier genocidal propaganda (Human Rights Council, 2018). Other viral content equated Rohingya people to diseases or parasites that needed to be "cleansed" from Myanmar's national body. Stecklow (2018) did a special investigation for Reuters and identified more than 1,000 postings, comments, pictures, and videos on Facebook that attacked the Rohingya or other Muslims in Myanmar. Almost all of them were in Burmese. The hateful posts called the

Rohingya or other Muslims "dogs, maggots, and rapists," said they should be "fed to pigs," and told them to be "shot or exterminated." Ebbighausen (2021) documented especially inflammatory content that appeared on Facebook during military operations, including posts that were shared and "liked" thousands of times. One post said, "We have to fight the Rohingya like Hitler fought the Jews, damned Kalar!" Another post displayed an image of Rohingya refugees on a boat that was too full with the remark, "Pour on gas and light it so they get to Allah faster."

Stecklow (2018) gave more translated examples from Facebook posts, like "Cut off those necks of the sons of the dog and kick them into the water" (April 2018), "Stuff Pig's fat inside the damn kalar's mouth" (September 2017), "Pour Fuel and set fire so that they can meet Allah faster" (April 2018), "If it is kalar, get rid of the whole race" (October 2016), and "Just feed them to the pigs" (October 2016). These posts broke Facebook's community standards, but they stayed up for a long time without any action from the platform. Researchers have called the normalization of dehumanizing rhetoric a "permissive environment" for mass atrocities, where violence against the Rohingya became socially accepted and even praised (Lee, 2019).

11.4.4 Coordinated social media operations backed by the military

The most shocking thing about how the Rohingya are portrayed on Myanmar's social media was how many planned, military-backed propaganda campaigns there were. In The New York Times, Mozur (2018) said that members of the Myanmar military utilized Facebook as a weapon as part of the government's program of ethnic cleansing against the country's mostly Muslim minority community. The military's Facebook operation started years ago and, according to reports, had up to 700 personnel who made troll accounts and news and celebrity sites on Facebook. They then filled those pages with inflammatory comments and articles to spread anti-Rohingya propaganda.

According to an investigative study by Reuters, military troops used phony Facebook accounts to propagate anti-Rohingya propaganda in a planned way. Some of these posts even urged for violence with terms like "kill all the kalar" (Stecklow, 2018). The hate campaign went beyond Facebook and spread to other sites. On social media, similar stories called Rohingya "illegal immigrants" and "Bengalis" (Mozur, 2018).

Reuters looked at more than 1,200 of these new Twitter accounts. They found that 349 of the 564 accounts (62 percent) made between August 27 and August 31, 2017, when the military crackdown was at its worst, were against the Rohingya (Stecklow, 2018). Khan (2018) recorded a Facebook post from September 2017 by a young Burmese man that said, "I am always honing my sword to kill you, shit Kalar. You, Kalar, are a son of bitch, son of swine." The post included pictures of him posing with a sword, showing how social media made it possible for people to openly show their willingness to commit violence against the Rohingya community.

11.4.5 False stories of being a victim and denying crimes

As the world became more aware of the brutality against the Rohingya, Myanmar's social media users came up with clever counter-narratives that said the Rohingya were making up their victimization to sway public opinion throughout the world. These depictions asserted that the Rohingya set fire to their own villages to elicit international sympathy, that images of atrocities were fabricated or appropriated from unrelated conflicts, and that the international community was being misled by a coordinated "Muslim propaganda machine" (Brooten et al., 2019). Rohingya refugees were depicted as opportunistic economic migrants taking advantage of humanitarian systems instead as true victims of persecution. These kinds of stories spread quickly on Facebook, thanks to regular users, nationalist pages, and well-known public figures. They made international human rights documentation seem less credible and protected people who commit violence from facing consequences (Quintana, 2018). The phony victimization story turned reality upside down, making the people who did the crime look like victims and the true victims look like clever liars. This narrative tactic was especially good at keeping people in the country on board with military actions while avoiding criticism from other countries.

11.4.6 Amplification by Authorized Voices and Platform Algorithms

These images acquired significant influence through dissemination by socially sanctioned individuals whose voices possessed institutional authority. Siddiki (2019) explicitly targeted prejudiced monks like Ashin Wirathu, who used nationalist and anti-Muslim rhetoric to "purify" the Buddhist homeland of minority Muslims, who were wrongly seen as a "threat" to Buddhism and its way of life. Buddhist monks like Ashin Wirathu, who had hundreds of

thousands of followers on Facebook, often posted incendiary anti-Rohingya content that was extensively shared and commented on (Beech, 2013).

Military-related pages and accounts claimed to be patriotic sources of information about the "threat" posed by the Rohingya. At the same time, nationalist politicians and parties used Facebook as their main way to talk about the Rohingya in their campaigns (Fink, 2018). Even famous people in entertainment and social media stars shared or supported anti-Rohingya stories, which made these kinds of conversations commonplace across a wide range of consumers. Khan (2018) said that even government officials helped spread propaganda. For example, Zaw Htay, who was then the deputy director general of the presidential office, commented on Facebook in June 2012 that "Rohingya terrorists" with weapons were getting into Myanmar.

Facebook's algorithmic tools consistently boosted the most emotionally charged content. This meant that posts that used incendiary language and degrading images about the Rohingya got more organic reach than posts that were more moderate or factual (Mozur, 2018). After Myanmar's telecoms market was opened up to competition in 2013–2014, Facebook became the most popular website in the country. For many users, it became synonymous with the internet (Stevenson, 2019). Because of this technological context, conversations on Facebook had a big impact on how people saw the Rohingya situation.

11.4.7 Global acknowledgment of the media's involvement in genocide

The international community, including officials from the United Nations and human rights groups, acknowledged the important role that Myanmar's media ecosystem played in stirring up violence. Meixlier (2018) said that the UN Fact Finding Mission told the UN Human Rights Council that "incitement to violence" was widespread and unpunished. The mission pointed to social media networks, especially Facebook, as a major cause of hate speech against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. A United Nations fact-finding mission found that Facebook had a "determining role" in Myanmar by letting hate speech spread unchecked, which led to the violence that happened in 2017 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018). Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, wrote a report that said, "We know that the ultra-nationalist Buddhists have their own Facebooks and are really inciting a lot of violence and hatred against the Rohingya or other ethnic minorities, and I am afraid that Facebook has now turned into a beast in Myanmar" (BBC News, 2018).

The results from Amnesty International were significantly worse. According to an Amnesty International report, Ortutay (2022) said that Facebook deliberately distributed and amplified hate speech and false information against the Rohingya. This led to major human rights violations against the Rohingya in Myanmar in 2017. The investigation made it clear that Facebook was not only a site with too little content control; instead, Meta's algorithms "proactively amplified and promoted content" on Facebook that incited deadly hatred against the Rohingya as early as 2012. The report interviewed Maung Sawyeddollah, a 21-year-old Rohingya male who now lives in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. He told Amnesty International:

"We think that Facebook made the genocide against the Rohingya possible. They used Facebook to talk to each other, spread hate, and plan campaigns. But Facebook didn't say anything" (Ortutay, 2022).

Facebook finally did something after rights groups put a lot of pressure on them, but opponents said it was too late. According to Aziz (2021), Facebook took down the accounts of some Buddhist monks and military commanders. The company said on August 28, 2018, "Today, we removed 425 Facebook Pages, 17 Facebook Groups, 135 Facebook accounts, and 15 Instagram profiles in Myanmar for engaging in 'coordinated inauthentic behavior' on Facebook." But this action came only after years of documented abuse and after the violence had already reached genocidal levels.

11.5 Study: The Representational Architecture of Genocide

The portrayal of Rohingya identity in Myanmar's media and social media platforms formed an extensive framework of delegitimization, dehumanization, and provocation, engendering a "toxic ethos" that legitimized violence and ethnic cleansing (Siddiki, 2019). This investigation elucidates the interrelated mechanisms by which digital representations have contributed to real-world violence.

11.5.1 Identity Denial as a Basis for Violence

The systemic denial of Rohingya identity through media depiction became the fundamental prerequisite for ensuing bloodshed. By continuously refusing to use the word "Rohingya" and instead using "Bengali" or "illegal immigrant," Myanmar's media ecosystem achieved a number of interconnected goals. First, it made the Rohingya's claims to belong, be a citizen,

and have a historical presence less valid. Second, it framed violence against them not as persecution of natives but as border enforcement against foreign infiltrators. Third, it made sure that what people said in public matched what the government said, making sure that what people understood matched what the government said. This trend corroborates Hall's (1997) theoretical assertion that representation not only reflects identity but also actively develops it, with significant material ramifications for individuals whose identities are challenged or denied.

11.5.2 The Escalation Logic of Threat Narratives

The building of many, overlapping threat narratives demographic, religious, and security followed a pattern of escalation that made increasingly severe reactions seem more reasonable. At first, the Rohingya were seen as economic rivals and demographic risks. Then, they were seen as religious foes. After the ARSA attacks in 2016 and 2017, they were all called terrorists. With each new threat frame, the need for stronger countermeasures grew, from discrimination to displacement to mass violence. This pattern of escalation backs up Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2013) by showing how real and symbolic threats can come together to create prejudice that can lead to violence in groups in some situations.

11.5.3 Dehumanization and the Enabling Environment for Atrocity

Scholars have called the explicit dehumanization of Rohingya through animal metaphors, illness imagery, and eliminationist language a "permissive environment" for mass atrocities (Lee, 2019). When a whole group of people is called "dogs," "maggots," "snakes," or a "virus" that needs to be "cleansed," the mental barriers to violence are taken down one by one. The connection to Hitler's treatment of Jews, which was made clear in many viral posts, made the goal to kill clear instead of unclear. This pattern corroborates the academic agreement that dehumanization is an essential prerequisite for genocide (Smith, 2011), and that media encompassing social media significantly contributes to the normalization of dehumanizing portrayals prior to and during mass violence.

11.5.4 Platform Complicity and Algorithmic Amplification

Facebook's role in spreading anti-Rohingya information raises important questions about how responsible platforms should be when there is ethnic conflict. The platform's algorithm favored emotionally charged content, which meant that incendiary anti-Rohingya posts were

always more likely to be seen than moderate or accurate ones. Facebook's design, together with poor content monitoring in Burmese and a slow reaction to reports of abuse, helped the spread of genocidal incitement. The UN's description of Facebook as having a "determining role" and Amnesty International's judgment that Meta's algorithms "proactively amplified and promoted" hate content show that the platform was clearly involved in the violence that followed. This case has become a model for how social media sites may make mass crimes easier when the desire to make money is more important than protecting people's rights.

11.6 Final Thoughts

Myanmar's media ecosystem turned the Rohingya from people with legitimate claims to belonging into existential threats that needed to be eliminated. This was done by systematically denying their identity, creating multiple overlapping threat narratives, using explicitly eliminationist language, coordinating military-backed propaganda operations, spreading false victimhood stories, and amplifying these stories by socially authorized voices and platform algorithms. This systematic representation in state media and on social media showed how both traditional and digital media can be used as weapons to help genocide happen, making it okay and even celebrated for mass atrocities to happen. The analysis in this chapter supports the theoretical frameworks of Hall (1997), Foucault (1972), and Castells (2010), showing that how people identify themselves online is very political. The ability to name and classify groups of people is a means of controlling them that can have life-or-death consequences. The Rohingya case serves as a cautionary example of the potential for social media to be exploited against vulnerable groups, highlighting the critical necessity for platform responsibility in situations of ethnic discord and imminent violence.

This literature-based analysis of the representation of Rohingya in Myanmar's media offers crucial context for the following chapter, which scrutinizes the construction of Rohingya identity in Bangladeshi social media. Comprehending the representational violence that preceded and accompanied physical violence in Myanmar elucidates the significance of identity building in digital realms and the necessity of scrutinizing the portrayal of displaced communities in their host nations.

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Chapter 12

ROHINGYA IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN BANGLADESHI MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

12.1 Introduction

The portrayal of Rohingya refugees in Bangladeshi media and social media is a significant aspect of identity formation that influences public perception, policy actions, and the lived experiences of more than one million displaced individuals. Since the huge migration from Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017, the Rohingya have been the focus of conflicting narratives, ranging from humanitarian sympathy to systematic dehumanization. This chapter examines how different media platforms in Bangladesh shape public awareness of the Rohingya community by analyzing the linguistic tactics, framing devices, and discursive patterns that construct their identity.

Utilizing Hall's (1997) theory of representation and identity, Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, and Entman's (1993) framing paradigm, this study elucidates how various stakeholders including mainstream media, governmental institutions, humanitarian organizations, Rohingya activists, and average social media users employ distinct terminological strategies that mirror their institutional mandates, political agendas, and ideological stances. The Rohingya instance illustrates how a singular group might be categorized as "refugees," "terrorists," "indigenous people," "Muslims," "citizens of Myanmar," or "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals," contingent upon the identifier and the intended aim.

12.2 The Change in Media Stories

The portrayal of the Rohingya people in Bangladeshi media has experienced a significant change since the invasion in 2017. Tayeb (2022) says that when the biggest wave of Rohingya migrants came in August 2017, the media was very sympathetic and focused on the genocide that Myanmar's Tatmadaw military forces caused, which made them leave. But over time, this friendly narrative changed to show refugees as "burdens." Media sources started to write stories that focused on the economic consequences of taking in refugees, the effects on local

biodiversity, and the crimes that Rohingya refugees commit, especially drug smuggling (Tayeb, 2022).

12.2.1 The Most Common Frames in Mainstream Media

Uddin's (2021) study showed that major Bangladeshi newspapers write about the Rohingya people in four key ways: human interest, assigning blame, making them seem dangerous, and conflict. The research revealed that increasing xenophobia among the indigenous population of Cox's Bazar, driven by demographic pressures, criminal activities, and perceived security threats associated with the Rohingya, was both mirrored and exacerbated by mainstream newspapers (Uddin, 2021). Fatima and Torun's (2022) research revealed that five prominent national publications adopted a somewhat balanced tone and utilized the term "Rohingya" instead of Myanmar's favored designation, "Bengali Settler."

12.2.2 Government Officials and Public Discourse

High-level government remarks had a big impact on how the media talked about the Rohingya. In September 2022, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told India's ANI news agency that Rohingya Muslims living in refugee camps were a "big burden." She questioned how long they would stay in Bangladesh and said that some of them were involved in drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking (Prakash, 2022). In the same way, former minister Obaidul Quader was quoted as saying that he was worried that terrorists and conspiracies could come to Bangladesh with Rohingya refugees (Kunnawut, 2018).

12.2.3 Criminalization and Threats to Security

The media in Bangladesh more and more portrayed the Rohingya as criminals, drug dealers, and risks to security. The Daily Star published articles that said that with the inflow of Rohingya people in 2017, there has been a big rise in illegal Yaba drug trafficking from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The Rohingya camps are at the center of these smuggling activities (The Daily Star, 2022). Wadud's (2020) research uncovered distinctive frames employed by Bangladeshi media that were absent in previous refugee studies, such as the depiction of Rohingya as public health hazards and the "baby booming" frame indicating exceptionally elevated birth rates.

12.2.4 Hate speech and dehumanization on social media

Hasan's (2019) study found that hate speech on social media, especially Facebook, has gone up a lot after the Rohingya left. People on Facebook used comments, emoticons, nasty photos, and mocking the Rohingya's situation in camps to spread hate speech. People on Facebook hated the Rohingya because they had a lot of babies, and they used terms like "breed like bitches" and "breed like pigs" to make them seem less human (Hasan, 2019). This language that dehumanized the Rohingya made them less than human, which made violence and prejudice easier.

12.2.5 Rohingya Counter-Narratives on social media

Even though they had limited resources and couldn't move around much, the Rohingya used social media, notably Facebook, extensively to counter pervasive negative narratives (Wadud, 2020). Surendran's (2013) research found more than 30 active Facebook pages about Rohingya issues, with a total of approximately 50,000 likes. The largest page, "Rohingya Community," had more than 16,000 likes and 400 to 2,000 daily users. Religion and victimization were two of the main topics, along with authorities' inaction and suspicions of state-sponsored terrorism.

12.3 How Bangladeshis represent their identities on social media

This study investigates the construction of Rohingya identity across social media platforms by analyzing 348 posts from six sources, spanning 2017 to 2025. The analysis shows how different groups, such as mainstream media, humanitarian organizations, Rohingya activists, and government agencies, employ distinct identity categories to discuss this displaced community, according to their institutional and political objectives and audience needs. There are many different ways to talk about the Rohingya, such as "Rohingya," "ethnic minority," "Rohingya Muslims," "indigenous people," "Myanmar nationals," "citizens of Rakhine," "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)," and "forced displaced people."

Table 12.1: Identity Terminology Used Across Social Media Platforms

Platform	Total Posts	Primary Category	%	Secondary Category	%
Prothom Alo	143	"Rohingya"	92.31	Alternative terms	7.69
Aman Ullah	66	"Rohingya"	75.76	Ethnic/Indigenous	24.24
Shomoy TV	37	"Rohingya"	97.30	Religious/Other	2.70
UNHCR	64	Refugee identity	96.90	Ethnic/Indigenous	3.10
RYA	31	"Rohingya"	93.55	Genocide survivors	6.45
MOFA	5	"Rohingya"	60.00	FDMN	40.00

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of posts using each identity category within each platform.

12.3.1 Platform-Specific Analysis

Daily Prothom Alo (143 posts)

Daily Prothom Alo predominantly uses the term "Rohingya" in 132 out of 143 posts (92.31%), while alternative terms appear in only 11 posts (7.69%). The alternative terms used include "Refugee from Myanmar," "Citizens of Myanmar," "Muslim insurgents," "Displaced Arakanese," "Rohingya Muslims," "Myanmar residents," "Rohingya intruders," and "Citizens of Rakhine." Figure 12.1 illustrates Prothom Alo's coverage of the Rohingya crisis using geographic and demographic framing.

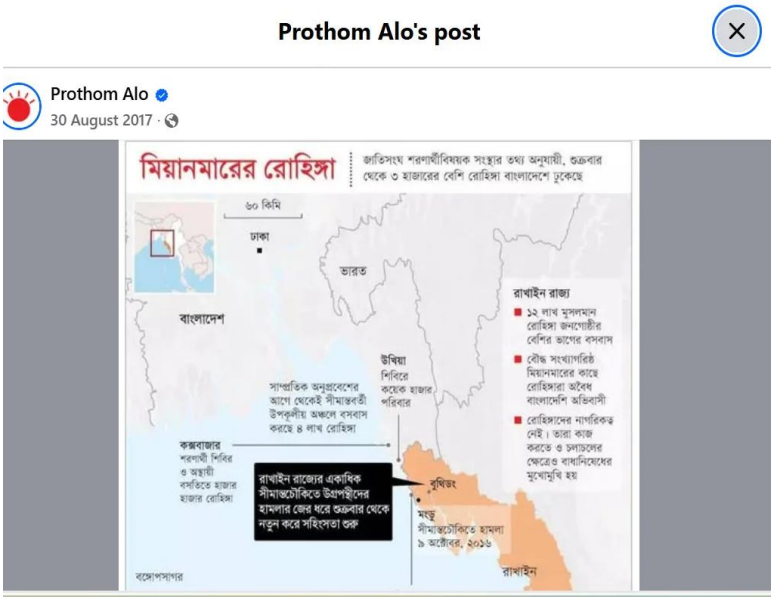


Figure 12.1: Prothom Alo's Geographic Framing of Rohingya Identity (August 30, 2017)

Source: Prothom Alo Facebook page. Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

As shown in Figure 12.1, Prothom Alo used the term "মিয়ানমারের রোহিঙ্গা" (Myanmar's Rohingya), framing the community by reference to their geographic origin while retaining the "Rohingya" identifier. This reflects the newspaper's approach of acknowledging the community's self-identified name while emphasizing their Myanmar nationality—a framing that supports Bangladesh's position that the Rohingya are Myanmar's responsibility.

UNHCR (64 posts)

UNHCR primarily emphasizes the Rohingya refugee identity in their posts. Out of 64 posts, 62 posts (96.9%) refer to the Rohingya as refugees, stateless, or a Muslim minority, highlighting their displaced status and need for assistance. This emphasis reflects UNHCR's institutional mandate to provide protection and assistance to displaced populations. Figure 12.2 demonstrates UNHCR's consistent use of "Rohingya refugees" terminology.



Figure 12.2: UNHCR's Humanitarian Framing Using "Rohingya Refugees" (September 4, 2017)

Source: UNHCR in Bangladesh Facebook page. Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

Figure 12.2 shows UNHCR's post titled "Rohingya refugees' story, as UNHCR hears from them on the ground," accompanied by the hashtag #WithRefugees. This framing positions the Rohingya primarily through their humanitarian needs, emphasizing their displacement status and the urgency of providing shelter and assistance. The humanitarian frame, while effective for mobilizing aid, may inadvertently undermine Rohingya political claims to citizenship and indigenous status in Myanmar (Chouliaraki, 2006).

Mr. Aman Ullah (66 posts)

This platform employs a mixed approach, with three-quarters (75.76%; 50 posts) using the straightforward "Rohingya" identifier. The remaining 24.24% (16 posts) emphasize ethnic and indigenous aspects, describing them as a "distinct ethnic and religious group of Myanmar," "indigenous people," "indigenous race," "Muslim ethnic minority," and "Muslims in Arakan." Figure 12.3 illustrates Aman Ullah's emphasis on indigenous and ethnic identity.

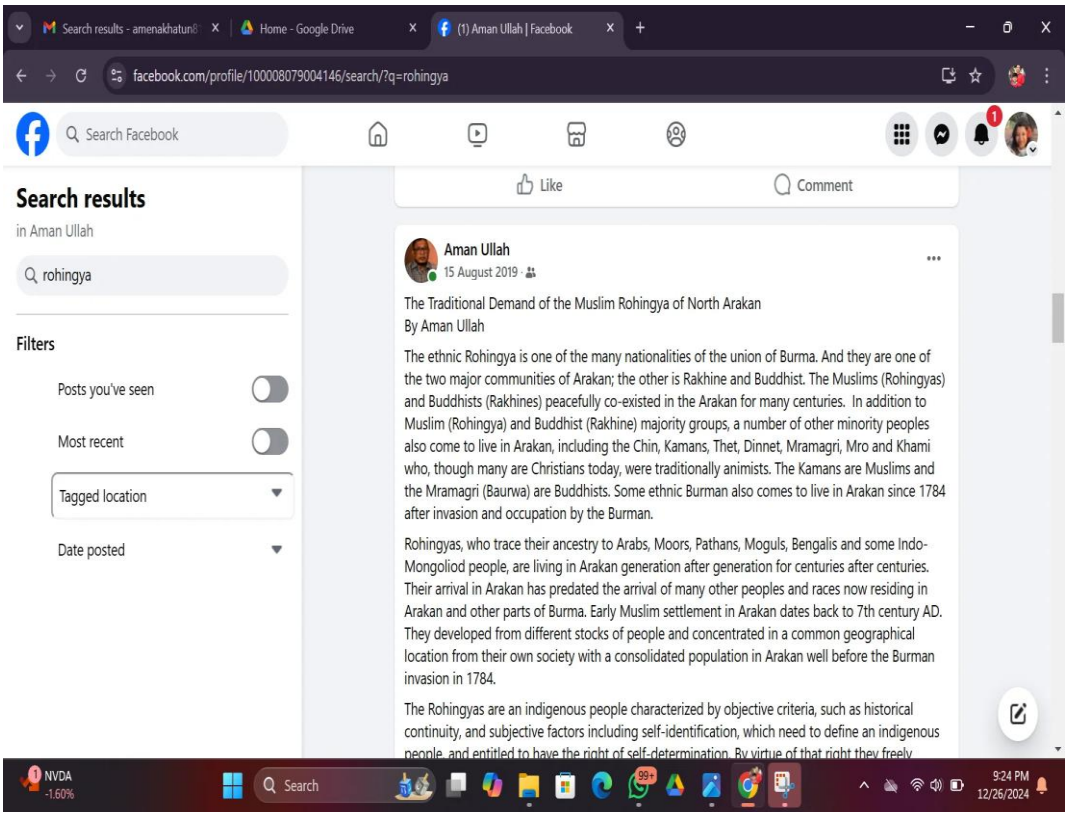


Figure 12.3: Aman Ullah's Ethnic/Indigenous Framing of Rohingya Identity (August 15, 2019)

Source: Aman Ullah's Facebook page. Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

As demonstrated in Figure 12.3, Aman Ullah explicitly frames the Rohingya as "ethnic Rohingya" and "one of the many nationalities of Burma, descended from indigenous tribes in Arakan." The post emphasizes that "The Rohingyas are an indigenous people characterized by objective criteria, such as historical continuity, and subjective factors including self-identification." This activist perspective directly challenges Myanmar's denial of Rohingya indigenous status and asserts their rightful claim to citizenship (Rogers, 2013; Hussain, 2017).

Rohingya Youth Association (RYA) (31 posts)

The Rohingya Youth Association predominantly uses the term "Rohingya" in 29 out of 31 posts (93.55%), while two posts (6.45%) employ alternative terms such as "genocide survivors" or "ethnic group with distinct community and culture within Myanmar." Figure 12.4 shows RYA's use of "genocide survivors" framing.



Figure 12.4: RYA's "Genocide Survivors" Framing (March 28, 2021)

Source: Rohingya Youth Association Facebook page. Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

Figure 12.4 demonstrates the RYA's use of "Rohingya genocide survivors" framing, stating "Rohingya genocide survivors need our support now more than ever. Supporting the needs of others is our primary responsibility." By using "genocide survivors," RYA frames the Rohingya experience within international legal frameworks while asserting their resilience and ongoing needs (Ibrahim, 2018). This framing demands accountability, justice, and reparations rather than merely humanitarian assistance.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Bangladesh (5 posts)

Out of five posts by MOFA, 40% (2 posts) identified the Rohingya as FDMN (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals), while 60% (3 posts) referred to them as Rohingya. The substantial use of FDMN reflects the Bangladesh government's diplomatic stance that the Rohingya are Myanmar nationals who must return to Myanmar. Figure 12.5 illustrates MOFA's use of the FDMN terminology.

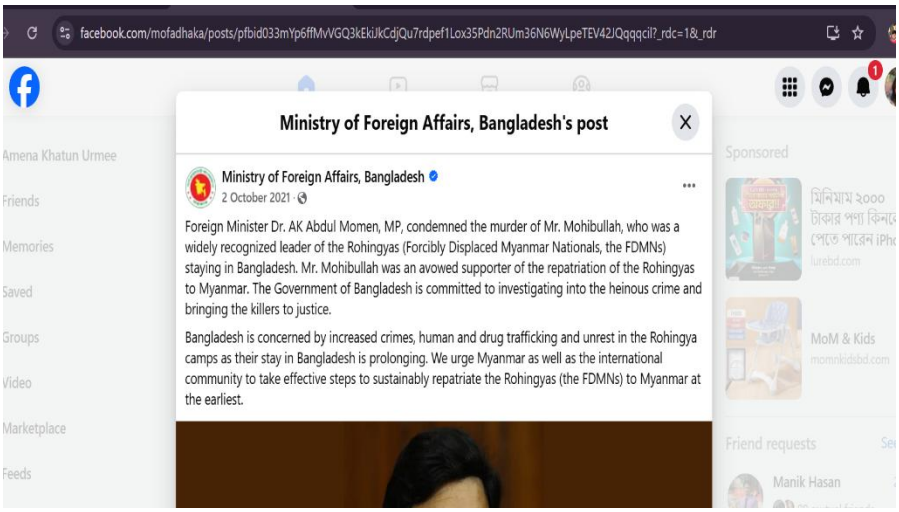


Figure 12.5: MOFA's Use of "FDMN" (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals) Terminology (October 2, 2021)

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Facebook page. Screenshot from data collection period (2017-2023)

As shown in Figure 12.5, MOFA explicitly uses the term "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals, the FDMNs" alongside "Rohingyas," stating that Bangladesh "urge[s] Myanmar

as well as the international community to take effective steps to sustainably repatriate the Rohingyas (the FDMNs) to Myanmar at the earliest." This terminology serves multiple diplomatic objectives: it maintains international pressure on Myanmar to repatriate, positions Bangladesh as providing temporary rather than permanent protection, and avoids the legal obligations associated with formal recognition of refugee status (Thein & Maung, 2015; IOM, 2018).

12.4 Theoretical Framework: Understanding Identity Categories

The analysis of Rohingya identity construction across different platforms reveals how various actors employ distinct terminological strategies that reflect their institutional mandates, political interests, and ideological positions. Identity is not an inherent or fixed characteristic but rather a social construct shaped through language, discourse, and representation (Hall, 1997). The various terms used to identify the Rohingya reflect different dimensions of their identity and experience: ethnic/indigenous ("indigenous people," "ethnic group," "Arakanese"), religious ("Muslim minority," "Rohingya Muslims"), legal/political ("refugees," "stateless," "FDMN," "Myanmar nationals"), geographic ("Myanmar residents," "citizens of Rakhine"), experiential ("genocide survivors," "forcibly displaced"), and criminalized ("terrorists," "Muslim insurgents," "criminals").

12.5 Discussion

The analysis of Rohingya identity construction across six platforms reveals how different actors strategically frame identity to advance particular political, humanitarian, and ideological objectives. While "Rohingya" has gained significant international recognition as the community's self-identified name (used in 60-97.3% of posts across platforms), the persistent useD C of alternative terminologies reflects ongoing struggles over recognition, rights, and political belonging. A central tension emerges between humanitarian and political framings of Rohingya identity.

12.6 Social Media Users' Perspectives on Rohingya Identity: A Comment-Based Analysis

This section examines how Bangladeshi social media users constructed the identity of Rohingya refugees through their comments on Facebook and YouTube from 2017 to 2023. The study reveals a dramatic transformation in public discourse, where initial humanitarian sympathy evolved into systematic dehumanization and hostility. By analyzing 33,918 social

media comments across six platforms, this research documents the linguistic patterns, metaphors, and labels used to construct the identity of the Rohingya in the digital public sphere.

Table 12.2: Summary of Comment Distribution by Category

Comment Category	Total Comments	Percentage (%)
Victim-Blaming/Dehumanization	8,795	25.93
Social Support/Humanitarian Advocacy	8,006	23.60
Xenophobic	7,956	23.46
Irrelevant	5,859	17.27
Genocidal Thought/Incitement to Violence	1,181	3.48
TOTAL	**33,918**	**100.00**

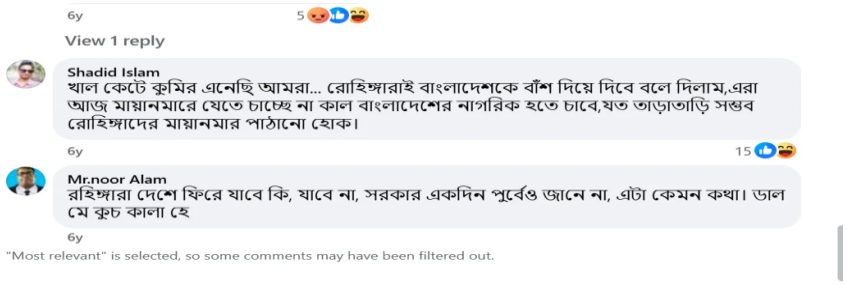
Source: Social Media Comment Analysis, 2017-2023.

12.7 The Transformation of Rohingya Identity: A Temporal Analysis

The identity construction of Rohingya refugees in Bangladeshi social media underwent a complete reversal over four years. In August 2017, when Rohingya began fleeing Myanmar's military crackdown, early social media comments expressed sympathy and solidarity, referring to them as "Our Muslim brothers," "helpless Rohingyas," "oppressed people," and "victims of genocide." However, by 2019 and 2020, the transformation was complete. Rohingya were no longer referred to as refugees or victims but were systematically labeled as "pests," "parasites," "crocodiles," "snakes," and "future Israel."

The most striking feature of Rohingya identity construction in social media was the systematic use of animal metaphors. The dominant metaphor was "crocodiles in the canal," which appeared thousands of times in variants such as "We dug a canal and brought crocodiles." The second most common predatory animal metaphor was snakes, with commenters writing, "Bangladesh is nurturing snakes with milk and bananas." Beyond predators, the Rohingya were frequently compared to pests requiring extermination—"cockroaches," "parasites," and "Aedes mosquitoes." Figure 12.6 presents anonymized examples of such dehumanizing discourse from social media comments.

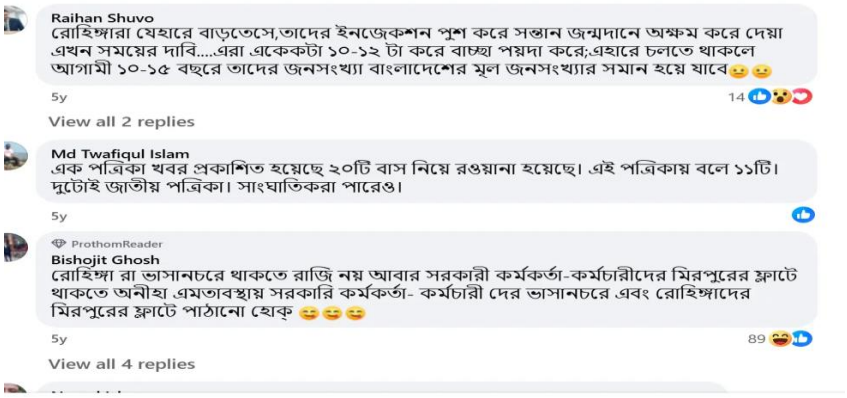
(a) "Crocodile in the Canal" Metaphor



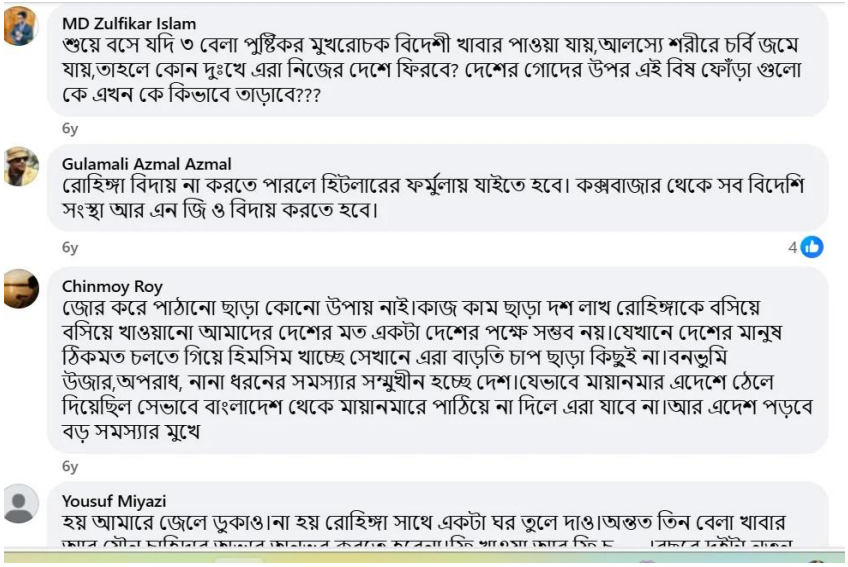
(b) Violent and Eliminationist Rhetoric



(c) "Baby Booming" and Demographic Threat Frame



(d) "Free-Loader" and Economic Burden Framing



(e) News Post Triggering Hostile Comments (Prothom Alo, August 22, 2019)



Figure 12.6: Examples of Dehumanizing Discourse in Social Media Comments

Source: Facebook comments from Prothom Alo and other platforms, 2019-2021. Screenshots from data collection period (2017-2023)

Figure 12.6 illustrates the range of dehumanizing discourse that characterized social media comments about the Rohingya. Panel (a) shows the pervasive "crocodile in the canal" metaphor (খাল কেটে কুমির এনেছি আমরা), suggesting Bangladesh foolishly invited a dangerous predator. Panel (b) demonstrates violent eliminationist rhetoric, including references to "Hitler's formula" and calls for forcible expulsion. Panel (c) exemplifies the "baby booming" frame, expressing demographic anxieties about Rohingya birth rates (এরা একেকটা ১০-১২ টা করে বাচ্চা পয়দা করে—"they produce 10-12 children each") and fears that Rohingya population would equal Bangladesh's within 10-15 years. Panel (d) shows the "free-loader" framing, portraying Rohingya as lazy parasites receiving "three meals of nutritious foreign food" while gaining weight, contrasted with hardworking Bangladeshis. Panel (e) provides context by showing a Prothom Alo news post about a failed repatriation that triggered numerous such hostile responses.

These examples demonstrate how disease- and contamination-related imagery was also deployed. The Rohingya were labeled as "cancer to the country," "poison," "virus," and "a poisonous sore on a paradise." Most alarmingly, the Rohingya were described as "a nuclear bomb for Bangladesh" and "a powder keg ready to explode." These explosive metaphors combined the disease framework with security threats, suggesting that the Rohingya were ticking time bombs that would inevitably detonate and destroy Bangladesh. This linguistic escalation prepared the ground for increasingly extreme solutions.

12.8 Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis of Bangladeshi media and social media discourse from 2017 to 2023 demonstrates how rapidly and radically refugee identification can shift in the digital public sphere. The media changed the way they talked about the Rohingya from "oppressed Muslim brothers" fleeing slaughter to "parasitic pests," "crocodiles," "future Israeli occupiers," and "terrorists" who should be killed and hurt. A quantitative analysis of 33,918 comments indicates the magnitude of this change: 23.60% of comments remained supportive or humanitarian, whereas more than 52% were antagonistic.

The five figures in this chapter (Figures 12.1–12.5) show how different institutional actors disagree about how to define Rohingya identity: Prothom Alo's geographic framing, UNHCR's humanitarian "refugee" framing, Aman Ullah's ethnic/indigenous framing, RYA's "genocide survivors" framing, and MOFA's diplomatic "FDMN" framing. Each one shows a different way to name and group the Rohingya, based on different political, humanitarian, and ideological goals. This study shows how quickly social media conversations can turn humanitarian crises into security concerns, migrants into enemies, and sympathy into violence, which has terrible effects on vulnerable groups who need protection.

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Chapter 13

CONCLUSION

13.1 Introduction

This thesis has conducted an extensive analysis of the representation of Rohingya refugees on social media platforms in Bangladesh, scrutinizing prevailing narratives, conflicting frameworks, and their consequences for public perception and policy responses. The study, informed by Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Herbert Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958), examined the active construction of meaning regarding the Rohingya through language, signs, and images on digital platforms, and how these representations influence public attitudes via compliance, identification, and internalization processes.

The research utilized qualitative thematic content analysis of 348 social media posts from six organizational sources, including mainstream media (Prothom Alo, Shomoy TV), humanitarian organizations (UNHCR), government bodies (MOFA), and Rohingya-led platforms (RYA, Aman Ullah). Additionally, it conducted a systematic analysis of 33,918 user comments and in-depth interviews with 22 stakeholders, revealing a complex, contested, and evolving landscape of refugee representation in the digital public sphere. The temporal analysis of seven significant events from August 2017 to May 2023 documented substantial shifts in the portrayal and perception of the Rohingya, corroborating Hall's (1997) assertion that representation is inherently biased, shaped by power dynamics that determine which voices are amplified and which are suppressed.

This final chapter synthesizes the most important results from the empirical chapters, discusses their theoretical implications, examines the methodological contributions and limitations, and offers recommendations for policy, media practice, and future research. The analysis examines the primary research question: How are Rohingya refugees portrayed on social media platforms in Bangladesh, and how do these depictions affect public perceptions?

13.2 Synthesis of Key Findings

13.2.1 Victimhood and Vulnerability: Variations across Platforms

The examination of victimhood and vulnerability frameworks exhibited considerable heterogeneity, indicative of unique institutional objectives and communication tactics. Prothom Alo (40.56%) and Shomoy TV (29.73%) were the most focused on stories about persecution in mainstream Bangladeshi media. This is because news values favor dramatic, emotionally powerful stories (Brooten, Ashraf, & Akinro, 2015). This conclusion corresponds with recognized trends in media studies, indicating that refugee coverage tends to focus on dramatic suffering that captivates audiences (Chouliaraki, 2006). Humanitarian organizations like UNHCR don't focus on victimhood as much (7.81%) because they have a wider mission that includes both documenting need and sending messages of resilience to keep donors from getting tired of feeling sorry for people (Franks, 2013).

Rohingya-led platforms notably had the least focus on persecution (RYA: 3.23%), indicating a deliberate attempt to counter externally imposed victimhood and affirm community agency. This conclusion corroborates theoretical frameworks about refugee self-representation, illustrating what Smets et al. (2019) describe as refugees' repudiation of being exclusively categorized as victims. Hall (1997) contends that representation serves as a battleground where marginalized populations can construct counter-hegemonic discourse by asserting control over their own representation. The study revealed a significant disjunction between digital portrayals that depict the Rohingya as deserving victims and the evolving perceptions within the local community, which have shifted from initial sympathy to increasing resentment, with 95% of interviewed host community members indicating a desire for the Rohingya's departure. Kelman's (1958) social influence theory explains this change: the failure of compliance-level sympathy brought on by victim tales to overcome material frustrations caused by direct experience of struggle for resources and environmental degradation.

13.2.2 The Securitization of the Rohingya Presence

The study recorded a methodical shift in the portrayal of Rohingya individuals from humanitarian subjects to security threats, a process of securitization that significantly escalated during the study period. State institutions, mainstream media, and social media users all worked together to create stories that painted the Rohingya as a threat to national

stability. MOFA officially framed the long-term presence of Rohingya as causing "increased crimes, human and drug trafficking, and unrest." This is what Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) call a "securitizing move," which moves issues from everyday politics to the level of existential threats that need extraordinary measures. Media platforms constantly selected crime tales and utilized certain language frameworks that linked Rohingya identity with criminality, so supporting what Huysmans (2006) characterizes as the securitization of migration through media discourse.

The analysis of social media comments revealed a significant trend that corroborates Hall's (1997) assertion regarding the influence of representation on reality: supportive comments decreased from 34.51% during the 2017 exodus to 17.15% by 2023, whereas xenophobic framing increased from 15.42% to a peak of 42.97% during the Bhasan Char relocation. The Rohingya were not objectively transformed from victims to threats; rather, they were discursively reconstructed through repeated securitized framing. Each media story linking refugees to crime and each government statement highlighting burden and instability contributed to what Hall describes as a "regime of representation" that normalized threat perception. Importantly, this securitization faced opposition from Rohingya counter-narratives that disputed data, offered structural critiques of the political economy of guilt, and proposed alternative interpretations of the character and intents of their community.

13.2.3 Stories of Burden and Dependence

The analysis of burden and dependent discourse demonstrated that these categories are neither inherent or impartial; rather, they are socially and politically produced through specific narratives that advance particular goals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs prioritized burden (60%), carefully portraying Bangladesh as a benevolent host worthy of international support—what Milner and Loescher (2011) refer to as load-sharing rhetoric utilized by host nations to garner external help. Mainstream media used burden frameworks to get people interested by making content that was framed in terms of money, which made people worry about not having enough resources that people who are under economic strain can relate to (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Rohingya-led sources exhibited little burden framing, indicating a resistance to externally imposed narratives that diminish refugees to mere consumers of resources instead of acknowledging their creative contributions. The examination of 33,918 social media comments indicated that perceived burden escalated

during policy-centric events; the Bhasan Char relocation generated 42.97% xenophobic reactions, while the 2nd Anniversary produced 35.21%. Comments voicing worries about "taxpayer money for outsiders" and inquiries regarding "how much longer can we bear this burden" illustrated how fears about burdens are provoked by particular triggers associated with permanence, policy choices, and perceived risks to resource distribution. Dependency narratives were constructed through classist framing, which ascribed migrants' situations to intrinsic cultural and class traits rather than to structural determinants. Nevertheless, these were vigorously opposed by counter-narratives that acknowledged structural limitations and refugee agency. These results support Hall's (1997) assertion that language serves as a battleground for ideological conflict, with various groups vying to shape the interpretation of issues and identities.

13.2.4 Agency, Resilience, and Counter-Narratives

The study contested deficit-oriented narratives by illustrating Rohingya agency, resilience, and proactive community involvement across various areas. Shomoy TV had the highest rate of positive portrayals (54.05%), followed by RYA (22.58%) and UNHCR (21.88%). The analysis uncovered advanced manifestations of agency: active involvement in repatriation decision-making; youth leadership via organizations like the RYA, which trained over 300 young individuals; digital literacy and strategic media engagement; cultural preservation through initiatives such as the Art Garden Rohingya; and economic productivity despite stringent constraints. These findings challenge prevailing narratives that portray refugees as passive beneficiaries of charity, illustrating what Malkki (1996) criticizes as the "speechlessness" artificially imposed on refugee populations through humanitarian rhetoric.

Platform-specific analysis demonstrated significant disparities in the acknowledgment of agency: community-led platforms attained markedly higher supportive engagement (RYA: 98.93%; Aman Ullah: 87.50%) compared to mainstream media platforms (Prothom Alo: 22.94%; Shomoy TV: 13.72%).

This illustrates Hall's (1997) theoretical proposition that marginalized populations might develop counter-hegemonic narratives upon acquiring control over their own image. The rise of Rohingya-operated media platforms, YouTube channels, and activist Facebook pages signifies a substantial advancement in contesting prevailing narratives; however, structural inequalities in digital environments, such as restricted internet access in camps, algorithmic

marginalization, and harassment campaigns, limit their accessibility to mainstream audiences (Madianou, 2019). However, the presence of these alternate representational spaces engenders what Castells (2010) refers to as networked counter-power, allowing marginalized groups to challenge prevailing interpretations in the digital public sphere.

13.2.5 Positive Perceptions and the Paradox of Contact Theory

The study of the circumstances that give rise to positive perceptions revealed few but notable cases of local acknowledgment of Rohingya competencies. In line with Allport's (1954) Contact Theory, positive perceptions were most pronounced among individuals engaged in direct, cooperative interactions such as football players reporting favorable relationships, families participating in shared religious celebrations, and conversations at tea stalls exemplifying contact opportunities that fulfilled the ideal conditions of equal status, shared objectives, and institutional backing. The investigation delineated many dimensions of positive recognition: educational resilience and adaptability; youth leadership and community education; digital literacy and self-representation; economic skills and work ethic; and a commitment to repatriation rather than permanent settlement.

A paradox arose in which acknowledgment of Rohingya competencies occasionally elicited perceptions of threat rather than mitigating prejudice, thereby corroborating Stephan and Stephan's (2000) assertion in Integrated Threat Theory that perceived competence can exacerbate negative attitudes when it threatens ingroup status. The local chairman's admission that the Rohingya are "smarter" and "cleverer" was quickly followed by worries about their leaving the camps. This shows that recognizing someone's abilities can make people worry about competition instead of respecting them. This data enhances theoretical comprehension by illustrating that good recognition does not inherently result in positive sentiments; the link is influenced by perceived threats to ingroup resources and status. The enduring empathy and appeals for balanced accounts indicate possible avenues for enhancing interactions between refugees and hosts. Recognition alone is inadequate; structural modifications are essential to tackle legitimate apprehensions over resource rivalry (Verkuyten, 2018).

13.2.6 Building and Fighting for Identity

The examination of identity production unveiled systematic patterns of nomenclature, labeling, and classification that fulfill certain political roles. In Myanmar, state media and military-backed social media operations carried out campaigns of dehumanization, delegitimization, and incitement to violence. These included denying "Rohingya" identity by calling them "Bengali," making up multiple threat narratives (demographic, religious, and security), using eliminationist language to compare Rohingya to "dogs, maggots, and rapists," and using algorithms to spread hate content (Mozur, 2018). The United Nations Human Rights Council (2018) reported that Facebook played a "determining role" in enabling genocide by not dealing with hate speech in Burmese. This shows how digital representation can have real-world effects.

In Bangladesh, identity representation shown substantial consistency in the use of "Rohingya" across platforms (60-97.3%), signifying considerable normalization despite ongoing resistance from Myanmar. However, different ways of defining identity showed hidden tensions: humanitarian groups stressed refugee status (UNHCR: 96.9%), government groups used the term FDMN (Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals) (MOFA: 40%), and mainstream media sometimes used criminalized language ("terrorists," "intruders," "dacoits"). Rohingya campaigners stressed the ethnic and indigenous aspects. Zetter (2007) contends that these designations are not neutral descriptors but possess considerable political and legal implications,"refugee" signifies international protection commitments, "FDMN" underscores temporary status and Myanmar's responsibility, whilst "illegal immigrant" utterly undermines legitimacy of presence. The analysis of social media comments revealed a total shift in how people see themselves, going from "Muslim brothers" in 2017 to "pests," "crocodiles," "future Israeli occupiers," and "terrorists" by 2021. This was done by using dehumanizing metaphors that Hall (1997) would recognize as stereotyping that separates those who belong from those who do not.

13.3 Contributions to Theory

13.3.1 Promoting Representation Theory in Digital Environments

This research provides significant empirical corroboration and extension of Hall's (1997) constructionist framework on representation in digital media and refugee discourse. The results indicate that representation does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs it the Rohingya were not objectively redefined from victims to threats. But language, images, and story patterns helped them change how they were seen. The significant disparity in

representation across platforms (54.05% positive on Shomoy TV compared to 7.58% on MOFA) illustrates Hall's assertion that meaning is generated by representation rather than merely reflected by it. Various stakeholders, mainstream media seeking audience engagement, humanitarian organizations eliciting sympathy, government entities overseeing diplomatic relations, and Rohingya activists affirming identity, use distinct representational strategies that generate fundamentally divergent interpretations of the same population.

The research expands Hall's paradigm by illustrating how digital platforms serve as disputed arenas of meaning-making, where dominant, negotiated, and oppositional interpretations coexist and contend in observable and traceable manners. In contrast to conventional media, where audience reactions are predominantly obscured, social media comments provide empirical evidence of how users interpret representations: either by embracing securitized frames (dominant reading), balancing sympathy and concern (negotiated reading), or actively contesting negative portrayals (oppositional reading). The rise of Rohingya-led counter-narratives on platforms like RYA exemplifies what Hall identifies as counter-hegemonic discourse, as marginalized communities assert representational authority and generate alternative interpretations of refugee status. The analysis demonstrates that the contestation surrounding Rohingya identity is essentially a struggle for meaning and power, waged within the discursive realm of digital media representation, yielding tangible implications for policy, protection, and lived experience.

13.3.2 Expanding Social Influence Theory to Digital Refugee Discourse

Kelman's (1958) social influence theory has been useful for understanding how representations on social media change people's opinions through processes such as compliance, identification, and internalization. The data indicated that the initial humanitarian responses in 2017 predominantly exhibited compliance-level engagement, characterized by superficial sympathy influenced by social norms and the expectation to publicly express care when presented with depictions of pain. The religious framing of the Rohingya as "oppressed Muslim brothers" triggered identification processes, leading users to adopt supportive positions based on their shared religious identity. But from 2019 to 2021, national identification processes took over as users took positions based on their shared Bangladeshi identity and worries about national interests, economic competition, and social stability.

The most extreme hostile comments showed internalization, which is the deepest level when dehumanizing sentiments become part of a person's belief system and stay there, no matter what the social situation is. Comments that praise violence against Rohingya, use eliminationist language, and compare refugees to vermin show that people's attitudes have changed from simply going along with what everyone else does to really believing what they say. The temporary resurgence of empathy during acute crises (Cox's Bazar fire: 26.02% supportive) illustrates that even extensive securitization is not permanent humanitarian emergencies can rejuvenate compassion and momentarily supplant internalized animosity, indicating that the "regime of representation" is still open to challenge. Nonetheless, the disengagement in 2023 (with merely 554 responses compared to thousands in previous eras) signifies a third consequence, apart from support or hostility: apathy. This discovery enhances Kelman's theory by illustrating that sustained exposure to securitized narratives may result in what could be described as "attitude exhaustion"—characterized by neither active opposition nor active support, but a complete retreat from participation with the subject.

13.3.3 Incorporation with Securitization and Framing Theories

The research illustrates the effective amalgamation of many theoretical frameworks. The Copenhagen School's securitization theory (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) elucidates the construction of refugee issues as existential threats that necessitate extreme measures. The shift from humanitarian to security framing occurred in a distinct manner: state actors (MOFA) executed securitizing actions via official statements highlighting crime, instability, and burden; the media intensified these narratives through the consistent selection of threat-related content; and audiences acquiesced to the emergency framing, as indicated by evolving engagement patterns in social media comment sections. This three-way interplay between securitizing actors, amplifying media, and accepting audiences shows how securitization works in digital spaces where these interactions can be seen and tracked. Framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974) offered methodologies for examining how various platforms highlight distinct facets of the Rohingya crisis—humanitarian necessity, security risk, economic strain, or community resilience—each frame catering to specific institutional agendas.

The multi-platform analysis demonstrated that stakeholder frames are not impartial; they embody inherent power dynamics, institutional directives, and ideological allegiances. Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) and Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) have been

instrumental in elucidating the conditions that foster positive or negative perceptions at the interpersonal level. Their integration with media representation theory has also shed light on the disparity between digital discourse and face-to-face interactions. These frameworks collectively furnish a thorough analytical tool for comprehending refugee representation as a media phenomenon, a political process, and an interpersonal dynamic.

13.4 Contributions to Methodology

This research offers numerous methodological advancements to the domain of refugee and media studies. The multi-platform comparative approach—examining content from mainstream media (Prothom Alo, Shomoy TV), humanitarian organizations (UNHCR), government entities (MOFA), and community-driven platforms (RYA, Aman Ullah)—facilitated a systematic comparison of the ways in which various stakeholders shape refugee identity. This method showed differences that single-platform research couldn't see and proved that who owns a platform has a big effect on how people talk about things. Without a cross-platform comparison, it would be impossible to see that Rohingya-led sites get 98.93% supportive engagement, while mainstream media only gets 22.94%.

Second, combining content analysis with in-depth interviews provided a third source of information, making our results more reliable and demonstrating that digital representations and real-life experiences don't always align. The interviews with Rohingya community members, residents, and journalists provide essential context for analyzing social media trends and for documenting counter-narratives and nuanced viewpoints that are frequently overlooked in quantitative studies. Third, the longitudinal study (2017-2023) examined the temporal dynamics of refugee representation, illustrating the evolution of discourse from early sympathy to systematic antagonism and highlighting the procedural aspects of securitization and identity formation. The event-based sampling strategy—focusing on seven critical moments, including the 2017 exodus, 2nd Anniversary, ICJ case, Bhasan Char relocation, Cox's Bazar fire, Mohibullah's assassination, and 2023 repatriation—enabled examination of how specific events trigger shifts in representation and engagement.

Fourth, the extensive comment analysis (33,918 comments) enabled a quantitative evaluation of trends in public participation. Conversely, qualitative analysis of specific comments elucidated the linguistic tactics, metaphors, and identity labels used by typical social media users. The creation of a coding scheme that differentiates between social support, xenophobia,

racism, classism, victim-blaming, religious intolerance, genocidal incitement, and counter-narratives establishes a reproducible framework for subsequent study on refugee representation in digital contexts. This approach, combining content analysis of institutional posts with thematic analysis of user comments and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, offers a model for studying refugee representation that captures both top-down construction and bottom-up reception of meaning in digital environments.

13.5 What this means for policy

13.5.1 Effects on Humanitarian Policy and Programming

The results indicate multiple ramifications for humanitarian practitioners engaged with Rohingya communities. First, the reported gap between digital humanitarian representations and Rohingya self-representation shows that we need to move past stories that focus on victims and unintentionally weaken refugee agency and political demands. UNHCR and other groups should ensure that stories about resilience and capability are included alongside those about need. They should also make sure that the Rohingya have a real say in messaging about their own circumstances. The discovery that Rohingya-led platforms effectively sustain agency-centered discourse indicates that enhancing community voices, rather than articulating on behalf of refugees, may provide more equitable representation.

Second, the discovery that extended displacement without sustainable solutions fosters an environment conducive to securitization (Milner & Loescher, 2011) highlights the necessity of seeking political resolutions over perpetual humanitarian oversight. The transition from favorable to hostile public discourse is linked to the prolonged duration of displacement and unsuccessful repatriation efforts, indicating that ongoing humanitarian responses without progress towards solutions may unintentionally exacerbate anti-refugee sentiment. Third, programming should tackle the structural factors that foster reliance and incite competition between refugee and host communities. The investigation showed that burden fears are triggered by specific material complaints, such as economic competitiveness, environmental deterioration, and perceived preferential treatment, which humanitarian narratives alone cannot resolve. To safeguard refugees appropriately, we need to deal with these structural issues instead of just making people feel sorry for them by telling their stories.

13.5.2 What this means for government policy

The findings underscore the tensions for the Government of Bangladesh between immediate political rhetoric and enduring repercussions. Securitized framing may achieve short-term goals of exerting pressure on Myanmar and controlling domestic sentiment; however, the normalization of demeaning rhetoric fosters an environment that compromises protection and may incite violence. The celebration of Mohibullah's assassination on social media shows how the antagonism that is accepted can lead to support for violence against refugee leaders. Policy approaches should acknowledge that enduring solutions necessitate consideration of both refugee needs and host community concerns not only eliciting global sympathy for burden-sharing, but also fostering conditions for constructive cohabitation during the displacement period.

The FDMN phrase, although serving diplomatic interests by avoiding acceptance of permanent refugee status, contributes to framing the Rohingya as permanent outsiders rather than as individuals with legitimate grievances demanding political resolution. The examination of Rohingya repatriation commitment where community members repeatedly express their intention to return to Myanmar when situations allow contradicts widespread apprehensions regarding plans for permanent settlement. It may be necessary to discuss and act on this promise to reestablish trust between the communities that host refugees and the refugees themselves. Government communication techniques should not promote danger narratives that may achieve immediate political goals but eventually erode social cohesiveness and safety.

13.5.3 Consequences for Media Practice and Platform Management

The findings underscore the critical influence of framing choices in the formation of refugee identity for media professionals. The analysis showed that mainstream media can either reinforce dominant narratives portraying refugees as burdens and threats or produce counter-dominant stories that highlight their agency and humanity. The examined journalists exhibited reflexivity regarding their influence on perceptions, with some proactively recording good attributes of the Rohingya and contesting misinformation. Franks (2013) argues that the media should move away from covering crime as a series of isolated events and instead examine how crime fits into broader structural factors. This would help prevent the propagation of negative stereotypes. The discovery that online news portals are markedly

more antagonistic than print media prompts inquiries into verification standards and the proliferation of unverified social media content in digital journalism.

The Myanmar case, where Facebook was found to have played a "determining role" in facilitating genocide through algorithmic amplification of hate content (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018), serves as a cautionary tale for social media platforms regarding their potential to be weaponized against vulnerable populations. The Bangladesh case, although less severe, illustrates analogous trends in the dissemination of dehumanizing content in the absence of address the unique vulnerabilities of refugee populations to coordinated hate campaigns. This includes investing in local language content moderation, working with civil society groups that keep an eye on hate speech, and making changes to algorithms to make sure that dehumanizing content doesn't get more attention. The recorded proliferation of eliminationist rhetoric equating Rohingya to pests and advocating for their removal or worse signifies a failure in content moderation with potentially lethal ramifications.

13.5.4 Effects on Civil Society and Advocacy

The proven success of Rohingya-led platforms in maintaining a focus on the individual (98.93% supportive participation in RYA) indicates that civil society actors should prioritize supporting community-led media projects. These forums let migrants tell their own stories without anyone else controlling them, fight against negative preconceptions, and show skills that are frequently not seen in mainstream discourse. Counter-narrative initiatives must focus on the particular frameworks that appeal with Bangladeshi viewers. The frequent use of the Palestine/Israel parallel in negative comments shows that we need different historical frameworks that don't see refugee shelter as always leading to displacement and permanent settlement.

The "crocodile in the canal" metaphor became viral, showing how one strong image can change how people think about something. This shows how important it is to come up with strong alternative framings that connect with people on an emotional level while fighting dehumanization. Civil society organizations ought to allocate resources towards media literacy initiatives that empower both members of the host community and refugees to scrutinize media portrayals and assess propaganda methodologies critically. The discovery that directs personal contact fosters more favorable perceptions than digital representation indicates the significance of initiatives that promote substantial interaction between refugee

and host communities—such as sports leagues, collaborative celebrations, and economic partnerships—thereby fulfilling the criteria established by Contact Theory for diminishing prejudice.

13.6 Study Limitations

There are a few things that should be kept in mind. First, the examination of social media looked at only six specific sites. These platforms may not show the whole breadth of how the Rohingya are represented in Bangladeshi digital spaces, even though they do show a variety of points of view. The analysis did not include new platforms like TikTok, which have become very popular. Second, the comment analysis is thorough (33,918 comments), but it only covers users who opted to speak up in public. People who don't speak up and whose opinions may be different are not represented. Algorithmic amplification may also produce "filter bubbles" that affect whose comments are seen. The fact that most of the comments (91.34%) come from Prothom Alo compared to other sources could skew the results toward that platform's user base.

Third, the interview sample of 22 participants yielded substantial qualitative data, however it may not accurately reflect larger groups. Access limitations hindered intended interviews with officials from UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while security concerns may have affected the participants' willingness to disclose information. Fourth, the longitudinal study, although it unveiled significant temporal dynamics, failed to capture real-time discourse evolution or immediate reactions to emergent occurrences. The study depended on posts and comments that were still available, which could mean that it missed content that had been deleted or taken down. Lastly, the researcher's status as an external observer of both the Rohingya community and the Bangladeshi host community may have affected interpretation; yet, triangulation across many data sources and theoretical frameworks was utilized to bolster validity.

13.7 Suggestions for Future Research

This work creates several possibilities for further research. First, comparative study analyzing Rohingya representation in several host countries—Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, would elucidate how distinct national contexts influence refugee discourse and if observed patterns are applicable across diverse settings. Second, using computers to track how conversation changes over time could make it possible to keep an eye on changes in

sentiment in real time and warn people early about rising antagonism. Natural language processing techniques could make the research work with bigger datasets while still being able to pick up on local language patterns in Bangla and Rohingya.

Third, studies on how well counter-narrative interventions work would help people who work in advocacy. What kinds of content are good at breaking down dehumanizing frames? When do alternative stories start to acquire traction? How can media projects led by Rohingya people increase visibility in mainstream digital spaces? Fourth, examining the connection between online discourse and offline attitudes and behaviors would elucidate the real-world implications of digital representation. Does exposure to dehumanizing information forecast discriminatory behavior? What part does using social media play in changing the attitudes of the host community compared to firsthand experience?

Fifth, studies on platform governance interventions such as content filtering, algorithmic modifications, and counter-speech initiatives would contribute to evidence-based policies to combat hate speech directed at refugee communities. The Myanmar scenario exemplifies a failure of the platform; what constructive solutions have proven effective in other contexts? Lastly, participatory research that centers Rohingya voices will address the gap in mainstream coverage that overlooks everyday experiences, hopes, and perspectives. How do people in the Rohingya community feel about and respond to their digital representation? What tactics do they use to communicate in difficult situations while yet keeping their identity and dignity?

13.8 Final Thoughts

This thesis has recorded a significant change in how the internet world portrays Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In 2017, they were seen as "oppressed Muslim brothers" who needed help, but by 2021, they were seen as "parasitic pests," "crocodiles," and "future Israeli occupiers" who needed to be gotten rid of. This change happened because people used dehumanizing metaphors, frameworks for economic burden, danger projections, and finally, the idea that violence is a good way to deal with an existential threat. The rapid and thorough nature of this discursive reconstruction illustrates the capacity of digital media to influence public perceptions of marginalized groups, with potentially catastrophic outcomes. Hall (1997) contended that representation is inherently implicated in power dynamics that dictate whose narratives are conveyed, whose identities are acknowledged, and whose lives are esteemed.

The investigation also uncovered areas of resistance and alternative representation. Rohingya-led platforms sustained agency-centered narratives despite systemic limitations and organized harassment. Counter-narratives contested prevailing frameworks and documented affirmative attributes that are sometimes overlooked in conventional discourse. Some people in the community and journalists knew what the Rohingya could do and kept calling for fair representation. The temporary resurgence of empathy during severe humanitarian crises illustrated that hostile discourse, although prevalent, is not permanent; the "regime of representation" can be challenged and possibly transformed through strategic intervention, personal engagement, and the elevation of marginalized voices.

The Rohingya case finally demonstrates that representation is inherently biased, serving specific interests and objectives. The contention about the identity of the Rohingya, whether they are victims or dangers, refugees or illegal immigrants, indigenous individuals or alien infiltrators, competent agents or perpetual dependents, constitutes a basic conflict over meaning and power with significant material ramifications. In the digital age, this fight takes place on social media sites, where algorithms make emotionally charged content more popular, state actors work together to spread information, and regular users help shape the identities of people they may never meet. To come up with better, more humanitarian, and longer-lasting ways to deal with displacement crises, we need to understand how these things work.

As global forced displacement continues to rise—with over 100 million people displaced worldwide, the Rohingya experience offers critical lessons about the potential for digital media to be weaponized against vulnerable populations and about the possibilities for resistance, counter-narrative, and the assertion of dignity in the face of comprehensive dehumanization. The Rohingya are not only people who are represented; they are also active actors in the fight to establish their own identity, assert their rights, and shape their destiny. A Rohingya youth leader said in an interview, "We are not just victims waiting to be saved—we are people with skills, dreams, and the determination to rebuild our lives." Any response that seeks fairness must recognize and support this agency rather than telling stories that deny it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

University of Dhaka

Amena Khatun
PhD Candidate
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Dhaka
Tel: 01712656983
Email: amenakhatun@ru.ac.bd

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Choosing whether to participate will have no impact on your life.

Project Title: "Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media"

Researcher:

Amena Khatun, PhD student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Rafiqul Islam, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Co-Supervisor Professor, Dr. Marcela Douglas Aranibar, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromso,

The Study:

You are invited to participate in research investigating how Rohingya refugees are portrayed on social media platforms in Bangladesh and how these portrayals shape public opinion. The key objectives of this research are to:

A. Examine how Rohingyas are depicted through various narrative frames (such as victims, threats, vulnerable populations, burdens, dependent groups, or as proactive and resilient individuals) across different platforms;

B. Explore how identity labels (including Rohingya, Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals, and Myanmar nationals) are employed and assess their political and discursive significance;

C. Investigate how users interact with and respond to various portrayals of Rohingyas, including examining perceptions and discourse patterns;

D. Record alternative narratives developed by Rohingya-led groups and advocates that contest mainstream depictions;

E. Monitor how representations of Rohingyas have evolved between 2017 and 2023, particularly around significant events including the 2017 mass displacement, repatriation discussions, and changing attitudes among host communities;

F. Contrast online portrayals of Rohingyas with firsthand perspectives gathered from relevant stakeholders (including residents, Rohingya community members, media professionals, and government representatives).

What is involved?

You have been selected for this study due to your expertise and familiarity with Rohingya-related issues, social media narratives, displacement, and community relations in Bangladesh. Should you agree to participate, you will be invited to an in-depth interview lasting approximately 45 minutes, conducted in person at a location convenient for both parties.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

Your insights and contributions will be invaluable in enabling me to complete this research and fulfill the requirements for my doctoral degree at the University of Dhaka. While there are no direct personal benefits to you, this study seeks to enhance understanding of how refugees are depicted in the media and to support more thoughtful policy development and public discourse regarding the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh.

Are there any risks if I am involved?

No foreseeable risks are associated with your participation in this research. Should you have any questions or worries about potential risks or discomfort, please do not hesitate to discuss them with the researcher.

What happens to the information I provide?

All collected data will be utilized to support and explain the findings of this doctoral research. The researcher will ensure that all information remains secure and strictly confidential. Your name and personal details will not be revealed in any part of the research without your express permission. Following transcription and safe storage of interview content, all audio recordings will be permanently deleted.

Will I receive a copy of the study results?

Upon completion and publication, you will be able to access the thesis through the University of Dhaka library or its institutional repository.

What do I do if I would like to participate?

If you are willing to be interviewed, please contact me by email or phone to propose a suitable date, time, and venue for our meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to review this information sheet. I sincerely hope you will consider accepting this invitation to participate.

Appendix 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Interview Study on the Representation of the Rohingya in Social Media

SECTION 1: STUDY INFORMATION

Study Title: Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media

Researcher: Amena Khatun

Institutional Affiliation: PhD Student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka; Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Rajshahi.

Contact Information: Email: amenakhatun@ru.ac.bd, Phone: 01712656983

SECTION 2: PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the representation of the Rohingya people on social media. This study aims to understand the ways Rohingyas are depicted in social media and how people feel about them or their attitude towards Rohingya experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by displaced Rohingya communities, host communities, journalists, and other stakeholders. Your participation will contribute to academic research and potentially inform humanitarian efforts and policy discussions.

SECTION 3: PARTICIPANT CATEGORIES

Please indicate your participant category (tick one):

☐ Local Community Member (Palongkhali, Ukhiya)

Role: ☐ UP Chairman ☐ Teacher ☐ Student ☐ Business Owner ☐ Youth ☐ Woman

☐ Rohingya Community Member (Rohingya Refugee Camp, Kutupalong, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, and Chittagong)

Role: ☐ Majhi (Leader) ☐ Youth ☐ Activist

☐ Journalist Media Outlet: Prothom Alo and Shomoy TV

SECTION 4: INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide information about your experiences, observations, and perspectives on the Rohingya crisis. The interview will cover topics including:

- Your background and connection to the Rohingya situation
- Social, economic, and humanitarian impacts of the crisis
- Relationships between host communities and Rohingya refugees
- Security concerns and challenges
- Future perspectives and potential solutions
- Any other relevant experiences you wish to share

Estimated Duration: The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

Recording: With your permission, the interview may be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. You may decline to be recorded while still participating.

SECTION 5: VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to:

- Decline to participate without any consequences
- Refuse to answer any specific question(s)
- Withdraw from the study at any time without explanation
- Request that your data be removed from the study (before publication)

SECTION 6: CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

The researcher is committed to protecting your privacy and confidentiality:

- Your personal identity will be kept confidential unless you explicitly consent to be identified.
- Pseudonyms or codes will be used instead of real names in all research outputs.

- All interview data (notes, recordings, transcripts) will be stored securely and accessible only to the research team.
- Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription and verification.
- Research findings may be published in academic papers, reports, or presentations, but your identity will remain protected.

SECTION 7: RISKS AND BENEFITS

Potential Risks:

- Some questions may ask about sensitive experiences that could cause emotional discomfort.
- You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable.
- If needed, the researcher can provide information about support services.

Potential Benefits:

- Your perspectives will contribute to academic understanding of how Rohingyas are depicted in social media in Bangladesh.
- The research may help inform humanitarian policies and interventions.
- You will have an opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints.

SECTION 8: CONSENT DECLARATIONS

Please read each statement and tick the appropriate box:

☐ I have read and understood the information provided above regarding this research study.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequences.

☐ I understand how my data will be collected, stored, and used, and I consent to its collection, storage, and use.

☐ I agree to participate in this research study.

Audio Recording Consent (Optional):

☐ I consent to the audio recording of my interview.

☐ I do NOT consent to audio recording (notes only).

Identification Consent (Optional):

☐ I consent to being identified by my real name in research outputs.

☐ I prefer to remain anonymous (a pseudonym will be used).

SECTION 9: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND SIGNATURES

Name:	
Age:	
Profession/Role:	
Place/Location:	
Religion (Optional):	

Signatures:

Participant:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness (if participant cannot sign):

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Principal Researcher: Amena Khatun

Email: amenakhatun@ru.ac.bd

Phone: 01712656983

Institution: Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rafiqul Islam

A copy of this consent form will be provided to the participant.

Appendix 3

IDENTITY OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Research Study on the Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media

In-Depth Interview (IDI) Participant Registry

STUDY INFORMATION

Study Title:	Representation of the Rohingya People in social media
Principal Researcher:	Amena Khatun
Institution:	PhD student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka
Study Period:	September 2017 to May 2023/ June 2022 to December 2024
Research Method:	In-Depth Interview (IDI)
Total Participants:	22

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY

SL	Category	Subcategory/Role	Number	IDI Codes
1	**Local Community (Ukhiya)**	UP Chairman	1	IDI-01
		School Teacher	1	IDI-02
		Student	3	IDI-03 to 05
		Small Business Owner	1	IDI-06
		Youth	3	IDI-07 to 09
		Woman	1	IDI-10
Subtotal (Local Community):			**10**	**IDI-01 to 10**
2	**Rohingya Community**	Majhi (Rohingya Leader)	2	IDI-11 to 12
		Rohingya Youth	6	IDI-13 to 18
		Rohingya Activist	2	IDI-19 to 20
Subtotal (Rohingya Community):			**10**	**IDI-11 to 20**
3	**Journalists**	Prothom Alo Journalist	1	IDI-21

SL	Category	Subcategory/Role	Number	IDI Codes
		Shomoy TV Journalist	1	IDI-22
		Subtotal (Journalists):	**2**	**IDI-21 to 22**
		GRAND TOTAL:	**22**	**IDI-01 to 22**

Note: *UNHCR Official and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official interviews were planned but not conducted due to security concerns.*

IDENTITY OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Research Study on the Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media

In-Depth Interview (IDI) Participant Registry

STUDY INFORMATION	
Field	**Details**
Study Title	Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media
Principal Researcher	Amena Khatun
Institution	PhD student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka
Study Period	September 2017 to May 2023/ June 2022 to December 2024
Research Method	In-Depth Interview (IDI)
Total Participants	22

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY

SL	Category	Subcategory/Role	Number	IDI Codes
1	Local Community (Ukhiya)	UP Chairman	1	IDI-01
		School Teacher	1	IDI-02
		Student	4	IDI-03 to 06
		Small Business Owner	1	IDI-07
		Youth	1	IDI-08
		Woman	1	IDI-09
		Local Host/Community Member	1	IDI-10
		Subtotal (Local Community):	**10**	**IDI-01 to 10**
2	Rohingya Community	Majhi (Rohingya Leader)	2	IDI-11 to 12
		Rohingya Youth	6	IDI-13 to 18

		Rohingya Activist	2	IDI-19 to 20
	Subtotal (Rohingya Community):		**10**	**IDI-11 to 20**
3	Journalists	Prothom Alo Journalist	1	IDI-21
		Shomoy TV Journalist	1	IDI-22
	Subtotal (Journalists):		**2**	**IDI-21 to 22**
	GRAND TOTAL:		**22**	**IDI-01 to 22**

Note: UNHCR Official and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official interviews were planned but not conducted due to security concerns.

INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT IDENTITY SHEETS

CATEGORY 1: LOCAL COMMUNITY (Palongkhali, UKHIYA)

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 1	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-01
Category	Local Community (Palongkhali, Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Union Parishad Chairman
Description	Local government representatives' perspective on the Rohingya crisis
Name	M. Gafur Uddin Choudhury
Age	50
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Union Parishad Chairman
Place/Location	Palongkhali Union, Ukhiya
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	September 23, 2022
Interview Time	Morning

Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Union Parishad Office (Palongkhali Union, Ukhiya)
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shikh Salman Shakil (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 2	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-02
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	School Teacher
Description	Educational insights and community impact perspective
Name	Md. Abdul Malek
Age	41
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Teacher
Place/Location	Palongkhali High School, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	23 September 2022
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali High School, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla

Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Humanun Kabir (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 3	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-03
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Student
Description	Youth perspective on Rohingya issues
Name	Md. Helal Uddin
Age	24
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Student
Place/Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	23 September 2023
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shiekh Salman Shakil (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 4	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-04
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Student
Description	Youth perspective on Rohingya issues
Name	Md. Azizul Haq
Age	21
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Student
Place/Location	Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	23 September 2023
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shiekh Salman Shakil (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 5	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-05
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Student
Description	Youth perspective on Rohingya issues
Name	Md. Zubayer
Age	22
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Student
Place/Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	September 23, 2022
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali High School, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Humaun Kabir (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 6	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-06
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Lawyer
Description	Legal perspective on Rohingya issues
Name	Md. Moin Uddin
Age	34
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Lawyer
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar Sadar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	24 September 2022
Interview Time	Morning (11 AM)
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Cox's Bazar Sadar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md Humaun Kabir (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 7	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-07
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Small Business Owner
Description	Economic perspective on the crisis
Name	Md. Anowar
Age	44
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Grocery shop owner
Place/Location	Palongkhali, Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	24 September 2022
Interview Time	Afternoon (3-4 pm)
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali, Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shekh Salman Sheikh
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 8	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-08
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Youth
Description	General youth perspective on social issues surrounding the crisis
Name	Md. Mamun Hossain
Age	25
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Day labourer
Place/Location	Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	25 September 2022
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shekh Jamal (Data Collector)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 9	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-09
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Woman
Description	Gendered perspective on the crisis
Name	MST. Lutfunnessa
Age	35
Gender	Female
Profession/Occupation	House wife
Place/Location	Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	25 September 2022
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali Bazar, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Sheikh Zamal (Data collector)
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 10	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-10
Category	Local Community (Ukhiya)
Subcategory/Role	Local Host/Community Member
Description	Host community perspective on social integration with Rohingya
Name	Alamgir Hossain
Age	43
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Local Community Member
Place/Location	Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	23 September 2023
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shiekh Salman Shakil (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

CATEGORY 2: ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 11	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-11
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Majhi (Rohingya Leader)
Description	Community leadership perspective from within the Rohingya population
Name	Noor Mohammad Shikhder
Age	29
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Camp Management
Place/Location	Rohingya Camp 14
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	22 September
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee camp 14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla (with the help of a Rohingya Translator)
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shikh Salman Shakil
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 12	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-12
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Majhi (Rohingya Leader)
Description	Community leadership perspective from within the Rohingya population
Name	Mohammad Anwar
Age	38
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Camp management
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	22 September
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla (with a Rohingya Translator)
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Humaun Kabir (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 13	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-13
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Md. Taher
Age	22
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Content Creator
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	21 September
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp 13, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla (with a Rohingya Translator)
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shiekh Salman
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 14	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-14
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Ro Maung Shwe
Age	27
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Freelance writer
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	21 September
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Camp 14
Interview Language	Bangla (with Rohingya language translator)
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Sheikh Zamal
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 15	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-15
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Ro Maung Maung
Age	22
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Private Teacher
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	21 September, 2023
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp 14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya
Interview Language	English
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Sheikh Zamal
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 16	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-16
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Osama Ibrahim
Age	30
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Freelance Photographer
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	19 September, 2023
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp-14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	English
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Sheikh Salman Shakil (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 17	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-17
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Md. Rumman Khan
Age	24
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Freelance Photographer
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	20 September, 2023
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp 14, Palongkhali, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Interview Language	English
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Humaun Kabir (Research Assistant)
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 18	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-18
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Youth
Description	Youth views from the Rohingya community
Name	Mohmmad Khalek
Age	25
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Day labourer
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	22 September
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Rohingya Refugee Camp 14
Interview Language	Bangla (with the help of the Rohingya language translator)
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Shiekh Zamal
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 19	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-19
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Activist
Description	Activist community perspective
Name	Ro Khin Maung
Age	26
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Rohingya Activist (Founder of the Rohingya Youth Association)
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	22 September 2023
Interview Time	Morning
Interview Duration	45 minutes
Interview Location	Camp 13
Interview Language	English
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Sheikh Salman
Notes/Remarks	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 20	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-20
Category	Rohingya Community
Subcategory/Role	Rohingya Activist
Description	Activist community perspective
Name	Mr. Aman Ullah
Age	61
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Rohingya activist and renowned Rohingya historian
Place/Location	Chittagong
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	20 September, 2023
Interview Time	Evening
Interview Duration	45 minutes - 1 hour
Interview Location	Chittagong
Interview Language	English
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md. Sheikh Salman
Notes/Remarks	

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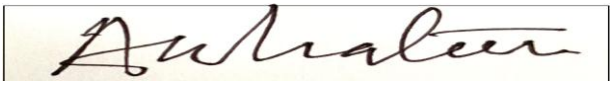
CATEGORY 3: JOURNALISTS

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 21	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-21
Category	Journalist
Subcategory/Role	Prothom Alo Journalist
Description	Perspective from a major Bangladeshi print media outlet
Name	Md. Gias Uddin
Age	58
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Journalist (Cox's Bazar Correspondent, Prothom Alo)
Place/Location	Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Islam
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	19 September, 2023
Interview Time	Evening
Interview Duration	45 minutes - 1 hour
Interview Location	Over Phone
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Researcher, Amena Khatun
Notes/Remarks	

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 22	
Field	**Details**
Participant Code	IDI-22
Category	Journalists
Subcategory/Role	Shomoy TV Journalist
Description	Television media's perspective on the Rohingya crisis
Name	Kamol Dey
Age	30
Gender	Male
Profession/Occupation	Journalist (Cox's Bazar Correspondent, Shomoy TV)
Place/Location	Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar
Religion (Optional)	Hindu
Contact Information	N/A
Interview Date	21 September
Interview Time	Afternoon
Interview Duration	45 minutes - 1 hour
Interview Location	Ukhiya Bazar
Interview Language	Bangla
Consent Obtained	☑ Yes ☐ No
Audio Recording	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined
Interviewer Name	Md Humaun Kabir
Notes/Remarks	

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DATA VERIFICATION AND COMPLETION	
Research Method	In-Depth Interview (IDI)
Total Interviews Planned	26
Total Interviews Completed	22
Data Collection Period	September 19-26, 2023
Verified By	Amena Khatun, Principal Researcher
Verification Date	September 30, 2023
Signature	

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Appendix 4

Questionnaire

Research Title: Representation of the Rohingya People in Social Media

Questionnaire 1: Displaced Rohingya / Rohingya Activists

Participant Information

Field	Response
Participant Code	
Name	
Age	
Gender	
Profession/Occupation	
Place of Interview	
Camp Name/Block (if applicable)	
Date of Interview	

Section A: Social media and Usage (Q1-5)

1. Which social media platforms do you use, and how long have you been using them?
2. What device do you primarily use to access social media, and do you face any challenges? (Internet, cost, restrictions, etc.)
3. For what purposes do you use social media? (Communication, news, entertainment, advocacy, documentation, income, etc.)
4. What topics do you typically post about, and who is your intended audience?
5. What factors do you consider before posting something on social media? (Privacy, safety, accuracy, potential reactions, etc.)

Section B: Rohingya Content Creators and Media Consumption (Q6-10)

6. Do you know any Rohingya individuals who create content on YouTube or other platforms? If yes, please provide channel names and describe their content.
7. Are you aware of any social media pages or channels specifically created by Rohingya people to share their stories? How important is it for the Rohingya to have their own platforms?
8. Which Bangladeshi media outlets do you follow on social media? Why?
9. Which Myanmar or international media outlets do you follow? Why?
10. Which country's media publishes the most positive information about the Rohingya, and which publishes the most negative? Why do you think so?

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Section C: Representation and Perception (Q11-16)

11. How do you think Rohingya people are generally represented on social media by others (media, locals, international organizations)?
12. Do the posts shared on social media accurately reflect your actual situation and conditions? Please explain.
13. What positive representations of the Rohingya people have you seen on social media?
14. What negative things do people say or propagate about the Rohingya people on social media?
15. Can you give specific examples of false information or propaganda about the Rohingya that you have encountered on social media?
16. Have you seen any content about the Rohingya on social media that deeply hurt you? If yes, please describe.

Section D: Impact and Online Safety (Q17-21)

17. When you see negative content about the Rohingya on social media, how does it affect you personally? (Frustration, anger, sadness, fear, etc.)
18. How would you describe the current relationship between the Rohingya people and the local host community? Has social media played any role in shaping this relationship?
19. Have you ever experienced any of the following on social media: hate speech, bullying, threats of violence, account suspension, or spread of false information about you? If yes, please describe in detail.
20. Comparing online and offline situations, where do you feel most unsafe? Please explain.
21. What measures do you take to protect yourself online, and have you ever been afraid to post something due to potential consequences?

Section E: Aspirations for Representation (Q22-25)

22. In your opinion, which issues related to the Rohingya should receive the most coverage in mainstream news media?
23. Which issues should be most highlighted on social media and communicated to the public?
24. What stories or aspects of Rohingya life are missing or underrepresented in media coverage?
25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with social media and how Rohingya people are represented?

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Questionnaire 2: Local Community / Host Community Members

Participant Information

Field	Response
Participant Code	
Name	
Age	
Gender	
Profession/Occupation	
Place/Village/Area	
Date of Interview	
Distance from refugee camps	

Section A: Social media and Usage (Q1-4)

1. Which social media platforms do you use, and how long have you been using them?
2. For what purposes do you use social media, and what topics do you typically post about?
3. Who are the people in your social media network? Do you have any Rohingya contacts?
4. Which Bangladeshi, Myanmar, or international media outlets do you follow on social media for news about Rohingya issues?

Section B: Perception of Media Representation (Q5-9)

5. How much of the information that the media publishes about the Rohingya people do you think is true? How much is false or exaggerated?
6. Do the posts shared on social media help you understand the actual situation of the Rohingya people? Please explain.
7. What kind of content about the Rohingya is more common on social media, positive or negative? Please give examples of each.
8. Have you seen any information about the Rohingya on social media that you later found out was false or misleading? If yes, please describe.
9. Do you know any Rohingya individuals who create content on YouTube or other platforms? Have you watched their content? What was your impression?

Section C: Relationship with Rohingya Community (Q10-15)

10. How would you describe the relationship between local people and Rohingya people? Please explain in detail.
11. How do you personally interact with Rohingya people in daily life? (Markets, workplaces, social events, etc.)

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12. Initially, local people welcomed the Rohingya warmly, but later this attitude changed. Why do you think this shift happened? Please explain with examples.
13. What are the main concerns or complaints that local people have about the presence of Rohingya in this area?
14. In your estimation, out of 100 local people, how many would want the Rohingya to leave?
15. Do you think local attitudes toward the Rohingya have been influenced by what they see on social media? If yes, how?

Section D: Social Media Engagement on Rohingya Issues (Q16-19)

16. Have you ever reacted to, commented on, or shared any content (positive or negative) about the Rohingya on social media? If yes, what kind and how did you respond?
17. Have you seen hate speech or hostile content targeting the Rohingya on social media? How common is it?
18. Have you seen positive or supportive content about the Rohingya on social media? Please describe.
19. Do you think social media has affected the relationship between local and Rohingya communities positively or negatively? Please explain.

Section E: Aspirations for Representation (Q20-24)

20. Do you think Rohingya people are fairly represented on social media, or is the representation biased? Please explain.
21. In your opinion, which issues related to the Rohingya should be covered more in the news media?
22. Which issues should be highlighted more on social media and communicated to the public?
23. How can social media be used constructively to improve understanding between local and Rohingya communities?
24. Is there anything else you would like to share about the Rohingya people, social media, or your community's experiences?

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Questionnaire 3: Local Journalists

Participant Information

Field	Response
Participant Code	
Name	
Age	
Gender	
Media Organization	
Position/Designation	
Type of Media	(Print / TV / Online / Radio / Freelance)
Place/Bureau Location	
Date of Interview	

Section A: Professional Background (Q1-4)

1. Which social media platforms do you use, and do you use them for professional purposes? If yes, how?
2. How long have you been working as a journalist, and how long have you been covering Rohingya-related issues?
3. What topics or aspects related to the Rohingya do you typically report on? (Humanitarian conditions, crime, politics, repatriation, health, education, human interest, etc.)
4. What factors do you keep in mind when preparing reports on Rohingya issues? (Accuracy, balance, sensitivity, legal considerations, editorial policy, etc.)

Section B: Editorial Decisions and Guidelines (Q5-8)

5. How do you decide which aspects of the Rohingya issue to cover or which angle to take? Can you independently decide, or does your editor decide?
6. Does your media organization have any specific guidelines or instructions for reporting on Rohingya issues? (Specific terminology, language to use or avoid, framing, etc.)
7. Are there any guidelines or restrictions from the administration regarding reporting on Rohingya issues?
8. Is there any pressure from local people or other stakeholders that affects how you cover Rohingya issues? Are there topics you feel you cannot cover freely?

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Section C: Shifts in Media Coverage (Q9-12)

9. When the Rohingya first arrived, the media focused on their needs and suffering, but later, negative information started being published. What are the reasons for this change?
10. Toward the latter period, the Rohingya have been increasingly criminalized in media coverage. What are the reasons for this?
11. Have you noticed any difference in how national versus local media, or Bangladeshi versus international media, cover Rohingya issues?
12. Do you think media coverage of Rohingya issues has been fair and balanced overall? Why or why not?

Section D: Sources and Access (Q13-16)

13. Whom do you contact to gather information about the Rohingya? (Government, law enforcement, camp administrators, NGOs, Rohingya community members, local community, etc.)
14. We have noticed that administrative sources (government, law enforcement) are used more frequently in reporting. Why is this the case?
15. When news reports are made about the Rohingya, statements from the accused (Rohingya individuals) are used less frequently. What are the reasons for this?
16. Do you face any challenges in getting the Rohingya perspective in your stories? (Language barriers, access restrictions, fear of sources, lack of spokespersons, etc.)

Section E: Social media and Representation (Q17-21)

17. What factors do you consider when sharing information about the Rohingya on social media?
18. Have you noticed any negative or false information about the Rohingya being spread on social media? If yes, please describe with examples.
19. How prevalent is hate speech or hostile content targeting the Rohingya on social media in Bangladesh?
20. Do you think social media has influenced mainstream media coverage of Rohingya issues? If yes, how?
21. Do you think Rohingya people have adequate platforms to represent themselves? What is your assessment of Rohingya-created content on social media?

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Section F: Aspirations and Closing (Q22-25)

22. In your opinion, which issues related to the Rohingya should receive more coverage in the news media?
23. Which issues should be highlighted more on social media?
24. How can journalists contribute to a more balanced and accurate representation of the Rohingya people?
25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences covering Rohingya issues or about media representation of Rohingya people?