

Visual Art as a Creative Cultural Resistance in Bangladesh: A July 2024 Uprising Perspective

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ABSTRACT: This research paper examines the transformative role of visual art as a creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines survey data (n=252) with thematic content analysis, this study illustrates that a myriad forms of visual culture, spanning graffiti, murals, street art, posters, cartoons, digital illustrations, iconic imagery, and social-media content, was pivotal to portraying the oppressions, challenging the status quo and dominant narratives, serving as the source of information and communicating the protest messages, fostering a sense of solidarity, and creating a collective political memory. The ranking of visual art forms and their instrumental roles delineates the multidimensional impacts of visual culture in spearheading an artistic resistance that culminated in the overthrow of the authoritarian regime. Altogether, this paper asserts that visual art operated not only as an auxiliary catalyst but as a strategic instrument that redefined contemporary activism and protest mobilization in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Creative cultural resistance, Visual arts, Activism, Protest Movement, July 2024 Uprising.

I. INTRODUCTION

Heather Cox Richardson, a professor of US history at Boston College, when interviewed by popular satirist Ben Tumin regarding the rise of fascism and resistance against it in the United States of America (USA), opined that it was the creativity of Americans that galvanized the resistance against it. According to him, in a battle against the dominance of the hierarchy, the battle must be fought with creative

weapons, instances of which, like the newer forms of literary works emerged from the ravages of American civil war in the 1860s, and the rise of various forms of art including murals, sculptures, buildings etc. during the 1930s can be traced back in the history. The maxims uttered by Cox during that interview are also applicable to the historical and contemporary context of Bangladesh. Historically, arts in Bangladesh have played a vibrant role during the critical times and events, be it a performing or non-performing form of art. From the 1971 liberation war to the most recent July 2024 uprising, unconventional art forms that are not regarded as 'high culture', such as rap songs, memes, posters, graffiti, slogans, and caricatures, have enkindled cultural resistance against the oppression and injustice in the country (Naher, 2024). The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh is a course-changing political event that can also be viewed as a combination of a series of creative displays that reshaped the socio-political horizon and reimagined the vision for future instrumentalising accessible artistic and cultural expressions, such as music, art, literature, and social media content. The rebellious events of July have played a formative role in creating an alternative political and cultural memory for the nation using impactful artistic, performative and creative repertoire, both online and in the streets, while challenging the dominant power structure, portraying oppression and injustice, communicating the protest spirit, galvanising resistance and solidarity, and fostering collective action (Hussain, 2024). The art of resistance, neither ornamental nor incidental, rather an aesthetic intervention, was instrumentalized to produce numerous roaring posters, graffiti, murals, and even digital art with the help of a bunch of domestic and diasporic artists, to defy the authority as a response to repression and crackdown with an amplifying level of dissents and rebellion during the tumultuous upheaval of July 2024 uprising (Venkataswamy & Majumder, 2024). This research paper, adapting the cultural resistance framework from Duncombe (2007) and employing a mixed methodology, illustrates the role and impacts of visual culture during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. According to the findings of the study, visual art played multidimensional roles during the uprising: it portrayed oppression, challenged dominant narratives, fostered solidarity, communicated protest messages, and created lasting political memory. While elucidating the crucially multidimensional role and impacts of the visual arts, this paper also depicts various forms of visual art and illustrations that were instrumentalised with a view to creating resistance among the protesters and the people. Furthermore, this paper also determines a ranking, from the most impactful to least impactful form of visual art, and from the most important to least important role played by the visual artistic expressions, during the momentous uprising. Nonetheless, this research paper underscores how creative visual illustrations and expressions produced by street artists cartoonists, meme creators, amateur artists, photographers, digital illustrators, and even the agitated protesters spontaneously painting the rebellious slogans and chants in the street-side walls became central cultural agents of the uprising who maneuvered a creative cultural resistance against the injustice and oppression of the dominant status quo that culminated in the overthrow of the authoritarian regime.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research paper involves a mixed-methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, for achieving a comprehensive answer to the research question with substantive data. The qualitative component involved content analysis of available literature, including book chapters, journals, websites, and newspaper articles. These qualitative findings were thematically coded and interpreted to complement and validate the quantitative results. The quantitative component utilised the survey method (n=252) with closed-ended and ranking questions to understand the role and impact of the visual arts as creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. The integration of both methods has facilitated the triangulation and enhancement of the validity and reliability of the study. The quantitative component of the research employed several statistical tools to analyse the collected data.

Descriptive statistics such as cross-tabulation, frequency distribution, and percentage analysis were conducted using SPSS (Version 26) to identify distribution patterns and trends. Additionally, the Borda scoring method was applied to analyse the ranking-type questions, allowing for the aggregation of individual preferences into a collective ranking system.

III. CREATIVE CULTURAL RESISTANCE: THE VISUAL ARTS IN PROTEST AND ACTIVISM

Art is an essential element of human culture that manifests the creativity of humankind in expressing imagination, thoughts, memories, and ideas (Davies, 2005). All the forms of art aim to express ideas, emotional sentiments, and worldviews that transcend lingual and cultural barriers (Bennett, 1996; Chogan, 2023). Besides, for a long time, art has remained a powerful instrument, generating collective resistance, empowerment, and transformation in society. Both in history and contemporary times, diverse art forms, including visual arts, performing arts, literature, film, and digital media, have been serving multiple roles, not only serving as a medium for systematic critique, advocacy, identity creation, etc., but also shaping social and civic realities (Annet, 2025). Activism and protest using art were predominantly seen around the globe, especially during the anti-war protests in the mid-20th century. In contemporary times, art has also become a powerful and global medium of expression to portray dissent against all forms of human rights violations. For instance, during the Arab Spring, artistic expressions were used to make anti-authoritarian statements and criticisms against the authoritarian regimes (New Tactics in Human Rights, 2017). Protest art is an important means of persuasion, communication, and resistance for all of them, who are in power and want to cement their authority, and who want to challenge the oppressive social order. As an instrument of activism and mobilisation, it often broadcasts alternative values that do not follow established cultural norms and practices (Dittmar & Entin, 2010). Activism through art is more effective than traditional political approaches since it possesses the ability to change the views of the people, empathise with audiences, and inspire change by connecting individuals to combat prejudice and injustice. Nonetheless, art acts both as a communicating bridge and a mobilising catalyst by revealing the existing societal struggles and popular aspirations for change. In campaigns like the anti-coal movement in Oakland, art fostered the ability of the people to understand the complicated political and environmental problems (Mishra, 2023).

In countries and regions where freedom of speech was highly limited, protest art disseminated information about the violation of human rights and the strangling of the voices. Being a universal language, resistance art can turn common tragedy into an experience felt and suffered by all through the conveying of complicated messages to the audience and creating an emotional appeal for justice. For instance, in many countries, various forms of art, including puppetry, visual symbolism, mass bike rides, fashion statements, musical concerts, etc., are used to criticise the dominant status quo and spark action politics by inspiring the participatory unity from all sections of society (Schmidt et al., 2017). Millennial activists often use artistic expressions in their activism to create spaces for alternative ways of challenging hierarchies, exposing the dominant power structure, and generating an emotional resonance. These expressions have been widely successful in linking affective orientations, creative practice, and mass political engagement during the protest movements (Weiser, 2018). Such practice of manoeuvring cultural meanings, symbols, and expressions to contest and combat a dominant power structure through the production or reappropriation of cultural practices, not only for self-preservation but also as explicit political action, is regarded as cultural resistance (Tremblay, 2015).

Cultural resistance often involves diverse artistic and cultural expressions ranging from substantially high-risked actions such as painting controversial murals, occupying a privately owned or disputed space, criticising the government and power structure with performance art, to minimally risked resistance such as posting stickers, making digital content, banging pots and pans or flickering lights from inside homes. In essence, it elaborates on the use of arts, literature, and traditional symbols, expressions, and practices to

challenge and combat unjust oppressions and dominant power structures, and advocates for a change with nonviolent actions, campaigns, and mobilisations. In a broader perspective, it is a way of voicing the dissents against the concerning socio-economic, political, and other circumstances, raising awareness of the issues, fostering collective solidarity and action, and creating a political and cultural memory of resistance and sacrifice for future generations (Bloch et al., 2012). When activism involves unconventional and imaginative methods to oppose and resist injustice and oppression of the dominant power structure, rather than relying on traditional forms of protest and mobilisation tactics like marching or petition, the protest movement becomes creative and innovative. The more efforts to blend art, performance, symbols, humour, and intellectuality with activism as unexpected tactics to oppose the dominant narratives, revive critical thought, and inspire rejuvenations, the more it would be regarded as creative cultural resistance (Duncombe, 2007).

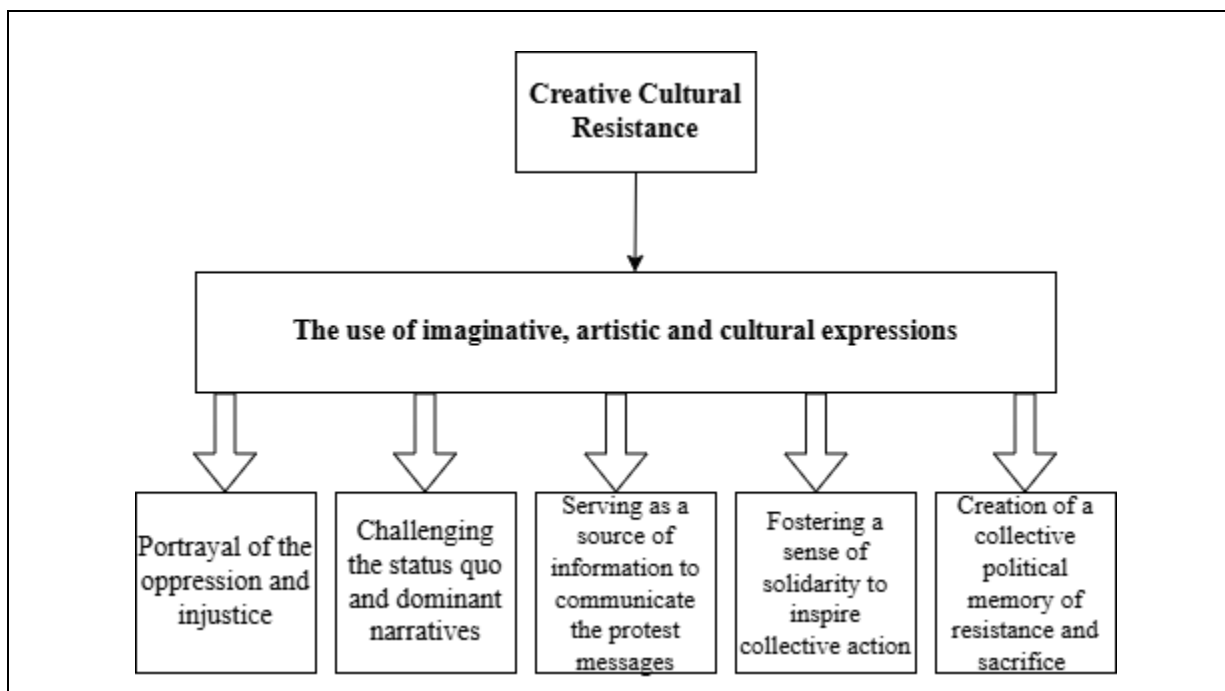


Figure 01: Creative cultural resistance framework elaborating on the role and impact of Arts in protest and activism (Prepared by the authors, adapting from Duncombe, 2007)

Visual art refers to the form of art that evokes emotions after meeting the eye. They range from ancient forms of visual arts, including paintings and drawings, to modern-day tech-aided sculpture, printmaking, photography, and installation art (Britannica, 2025). As a creative cultural resistance, visual memory can not only be mobilised in the context of activism and protests but also formation of political memory (Mattoni et al., 2023). Visual arts have the capacity to directly communicate with viewers using the evocation of emotions, provocation of thoughts, and reflection of the beauty and complexity of real-life experiences (Williams, 2020). Moreover, visual arts, including street art and digital illustrations, can act as transformative instruments for challenging the dominant narratives, voicing the marginalised people, and creating a sense of solidarity. Exploring instances from multiple movements such as Black Lives Matter, AIDS activism (Silence = Death), and climate strikes shows, it has been evident that art can raise issues more humanely, grab the media attention, and inspire grassroots mobilisation. Likewise, colours and symbols used in protests and activism around the world demonstrate enhanced solidarity and collective identity. Protest arts such as memes and iconic imagery on digital platforms have radicalising effects. Furthermore, emotional and symbolic power generated by visual art forms the core of political

participation by raising opposition, empathy, and solidarity (Hoi Yan, 2024). In the summer 2020 protest movement of Black Lives Matter at Richmond in Virginia, USA, visual digital arts played a formative role by framing the issue, communicating the plans, and constructing a collective identity. The protest art, especially graffiti and murals used in that movement, vividly manifested the call for the establishment of social justice in societal and cultural space, which in turn institutionalised the objectives of the movement (Asonye, 2021).

Digital visual culture has become a powerful tool of protest mobilisation and resistance in contemporary struggles. For instance, digital illustrations used in the Nigerian End SARS protests amplified the imagery and collective identity of the movement (Siyabola et al., 2023). As a dominant form of dissent against authoritarian regimes where the scope for expressing dissent is limited, the artists around the world have made bold but symbolic statements using the visual media, murals, paintings, street art, and other artistic installations in public to criticise state affairs (Bhamare, 2021). Likewise, activism using visual imagery and photography that operates in shaping collective political and cultural memory through the production, reproduction, and circulation of iconic imagery has also been widely prevalent in the world of protest art (Rigney & Smits, 2023). For instance, the photography works of Brazilian photographer Nair Benedicto during the final years of the military dictatorship played a crucial role in recording the oppressions that became historical accounts and collective memory to revolutionise people against oppression (Zerwes, 2023). Correspondingly, it has also been found that ‘collective memory’ is shaped by the iconicity and virality of imagery photographs using online and digital platforms (Merrill, 2023). As a case in point, photo-portraits of disappeared Mexican students became the symbols of visual activism and collective memory since these portraits operated as both the testimony of state violence and a mobilising force, connecting local context with the global narratives of ‘enforced disappearance’ (Dufays, 2023). In a nutshell, visual art that persisted throughout the history of art as a transformative power involves a perfect blend of politics and culture to promote social change by paving the way for expressing dissent, organising communities, telling compelling stories, creating emotional resonance, and creating a political memory. By materialising the advancements of digital technology, creative cultural resistance manoeuvred through the visual expressions has traversed the national border to reach the regional and global level on various issues such as climate change, gender inequality, and human rights abuse (Eyerman, 2013).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Creative Cultural Resistance: The Role and Impact of Visual Arts in the July 2024 uprising of Bangladesh

Historically, art has been the mirror to the society in Bangladesh that reflects the joys, sorrows, and struggles. It has been a powerful tool of cultural resistance that has been paving the way for expressing discontent, challenging authority, and inspiring aspired change in the country. Visual art, one of the several forms of art, has also been a powerful tool for political activism, social commentary, and cultural resistance as it played a paramount role in all the course changing events in the history of the nation, starting from the 1971 liberation war by which the country emerged as a sovereign political entity in the global map to the latest July 2024 uprising that ended the authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hasina’s regime. The historical linkage of activism and visual artists can be traced back to a procession on March 26, 1971, led by Zainul Abedin under the banner of “Charu O Karu Shilpi Songram Porishod”. Cartoons, posters, and placards with roaring slogans and satires carried in that procession were drawn by Rafiqun Nabi, Hashem Khan and others. Legendary artist Zainul Abedin, who refused a title awarded by the Government of Pakistan to express his solidarity with the freedom fighters, was inside the country during the 1971 Liberation War. He drew a painting titled ‘Soronarathi’ depicting a horrific war scenario where people were crossing the border for safety and security, and a sketch named ‘Muktijuddho’ portraying a

group of freedom fighters progressing forward boldly to win the war. Another prominent artist, Quamrul Hassan, also contributed to the glorious Liberation War with his artistic creations. He protested the atrocities of the Pakistani military with a caricature of Yahya Khan with the tagline “Annihilate these demons”. As the head of the Ministry of Information and Publicity of the provisional government during the war, he led a group of patriotic artists who attempted to draw the attention of the global community by sketching the monogram of independent Bangladesh, and producing rebelliously artistic stamps, posters, banners, cartoons and leaflets. There were several other artists who used art as a weapon during that historic war. Prominent artist Aminul Islam’s oil painting named ‘Gonohotya’, portraying the mass genocide conducted by the Pakistani army, and the sketches drawn by famous artist Mustafa Manwar for Shawkat Osman’s novel ‘Jahannam Hote Biday’ were also highly impressive. Moreover, other prominent artists of Bangladesh, Qayyum Chowdhury, and young painters of that time, Rafiqun Nabi and Swapan Chowdhury, also contributed with several paintings that were drawn for the cause of the 1971 liberation War (Abedin, 2017).



Figure 02: The role of visual art as a creative cultural resistance during the 1971 liberation war.

Visual art also played a monumental role during the anti-dictatorial protest that led to the toppling of the military dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad's regime in December 1990. Political cartoons, visual imagery, and protest art served as a powerful instrument of protest and activism during that movement. The iconic image of activist Noor Hossain, with slogans "Gonotontro Mukti Pak" (let democracy be free) written in black on his bare chest, and "Shoirachar Nipat Jak" (down with autocracy) on his back, became the most enduring and expressive visual symbol of the anti-dictatorial protest after his death (Feroze, 2019). Though the young protester Nur Hossain was killed by police and his body was dumped in a police cell, his iconic image with pro-democracy slogans painted on his chest and back inspired a full-fledged uprising, toppling the dictator Ershad (BBC News, 2020). Artists also produced satirical visual illustrations to condemn and protest the misrule of that regime with political cartoons, among which the cartoon titled "Tokai," by painter and cartoonist Rafiqun Nabi, was a prominent one. The champion painter Quamrul Hassan drew his last artwork to awaken the people against dictator Ershad's regime, just before his demise in 1988. Further to these contributions, a bunch of young artists that included Dhali Al Mamoon, Shishir Bhattacharjee, and Nisar Hossain, formed a protest art movement called 'Shomoy', with narrative paintings to criticise military dictatorship and seek political salvation through the restoration of the spirit of democracy and liberation war (Samdani Art Foundation, 2023).



Figure 03: The role of iconic imagery as a creative cultural resistance against Ershad regime.

In contemporary Bangladesh, the ‘Subodh series, created using stencils and spray paint, was a prominent instance of manoeuvring street art for expressing socio-political discontent and disseminating political messages. This kind of unexplained graffiti was not witnessed for the first time, but during the 1990s, graffiti consisting of a single sentence, “Aijuddin is in pain”, was regularly seen in the Dhaka University campus area at that time (Reza, 2017). During the later second half of the year 2017, Subodh's graffiti appeared in the walls of Dhaka with various ambiguous and mysteriously painted stencil and spray artworks where Subodh was portrayed as a frustrated man with messy hair and slightly stooped shoulder, wearing tattered jeans who was clutching behind the prison bar, flying away, and touching the shoulder of a young girl while bearing the caged sun with the other hand. These stencil graffiti accompanied unexplained and ironic texts, including "Subodh, run away; never ever come back", "Subodh, when the dawn would arrive?", "Run away, Subodh; people have forgotten to love", "There is nothing in your luck; run away, Subodh", "Subodh is now in jail". Although several interpretations were available about the "Subodh Series", it was evident that this much-talked-about stencil-painted street art series referred to the social and moral decline of people and asked to raise the conscience of the people (Islam, 2017).

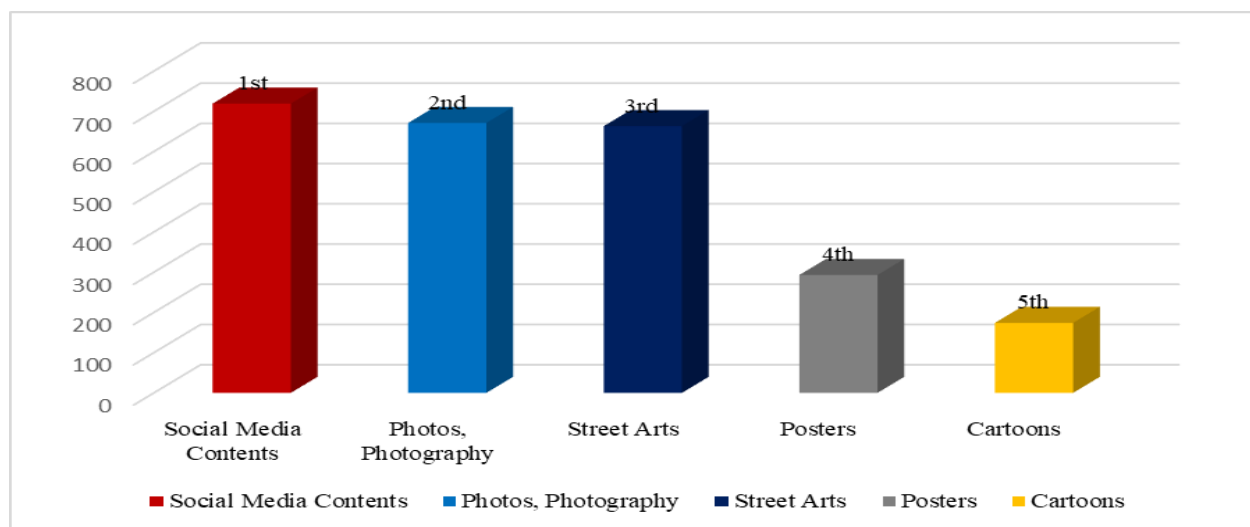


Figure 04: The ‘Subodh Series’ as a creative cultural resistance in contemporary times.

The July 2024 uprising, beginning with a student protest for the abolition of the quota system in public services, is an epoch-making event in the political history of the country as it overthrew a long-standing authoritarian government. During this 36-day-long student-led mass uprising, both students and masses of people faced brutal repression and a crackdown that led to tragic losses of lives and critical injuries of the protesters. Such a crackdown and repression quickly transformed the student protest for the abolition of the quota system into a full-fledged mass uprising. During this rebellious transforming event, visual artistic expressions including graffiti, murals, stencil art, spray paint, iconic imagery, and social media contents played a crucial role, not only fueling the agitated protesters by documenting the violence of the

regime but also bringing back lost courage to seek justice for the state repression and struggle for an aspired change (Waresa, 2024).

This student-led mass uprising in Bangladesh is a creatively unique one in a way that the various forms of visual artistic expressions and illustrations, both on the street walls of the urban centres and social media platforms, came together to debunk the dominant narratives, expose the injustice, and reinforce the slogans of the protests. As students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines became united to contribute to the cause of the movement, some captured the streets and public walls with revolutionary artworks, while the rest instrumentalised keyboards to create a visual language equally powerful as any political manifesto. At the height of the protest, when the streets roared with chants and slogans, the street-side walls and public spaces were painted with visual artistic expressions such as graffiti, stencils, murals, and spray paint. The social media platforms were also flooded with content such as photographs, reels and memes, photocards, digital posters, and satirical cartoons that bore the collective spirit of defiance, unity, and solidarity. The street-side walls of Dhaka and other major city centres of the country turned into canvases for expressing political dissents overnight. Graffiti, murals, and artworks using stencil and spray paint transformed these ordinary walls into walls of resistance with powerful statements that documented the agitations, determination, and aspirations for a change. Likewise, humorous and satirical social media content became a powerful medium for communicating the protest messages, voicing the truth, criticising the absurdities and injustice of the government in a country where freedom to challenge the dominant narratives of the power structure had been under threat. All these online artistic visual expressions using social media instantly galvanised public support for the protesters.



Graph 01: The most impactful form of visual art during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.

The bar chart in Graph 01 illustrates the ranking of the most impactful form of visual art during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, as ranked by respondents using the Borda scoring method. Social media content emerged as the most impactful form (1st), followed by iconic imagery and photography (2nd), street arts (3rd), Posters (4th), and cartoons (5th) in the study. Overall, this result indicates that digital and easily shareable visual illustrations, especially social media content, were perceived as the most impactful tool for communication and mobilisation during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. The powerful posters by Debashish Chakrabarty, a US-based Bangladeshi artist, stood out in blending art and activism to amplify the resistance and unity while capturing the spirit of the protest during the July 2024 uprising. Though his artworks are referred to as the “posters”, they are not like the traditional posters those found on street-side walls, but they are the digital visual illustrations that are found on Facebook. He was long

known for critiquing injustice and misrule both inside and outside the country with his artistic posters containing a distinct visual style of using vintage news-style fonts and limited colour variations, including yellow highlights, black shadows, and red midtones that create vibrant aesthetic posters resonating the voice of the oppressed. He has been creating rebellious posters for several years, which used to focus on the state-level malpractice, and the tyranny of the ruling party under the series "Rashtro Jontrona" before the July 2024 uprising. During the early days of the July 2024 uprising, Chakrabarty got actively involved in the protest with his two impactful posters with slogans "Drive out fascists, claim justice" and "Kick out the frauds, achieve equality". Following the attack on students on July 15, he created another striking poster that uttered, "On spring nights like this, I spit in the face of fascists". These posters quickly became viral as people shared it widely, fueling the cause of creating an emotional resonance with the people. As the protest grew wild, his other posters including "Roktakto July" depicting the cradling of a fallen comrade by a protester, "Shaheed Mamara" depicting the homage to the rickshaw pullers, and "Bikolpo" depicting people as the alternative to authoritarian party-political regime inspired the protesters and mass people for sustaining the collective struggle against the tyrannical regime (Hossain, 2025).



Figure 05: The powerful posters by Debashish Chakrabarty as a creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising.

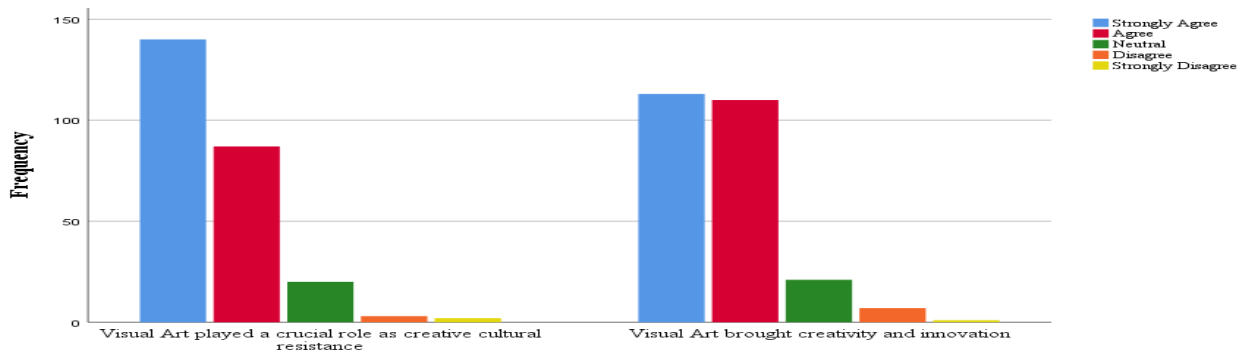
Another important artistic instrument that highlights contemporary socio-political anomalies is the political cartoon. Starting from the Pakistan period to independent Bangladesh, these cartoons were instrumental in criticising political parties, political leaders or heads of state, and protesting injustice and corruption. However, for a long time, these front-page cartoons providing comic relief and powerful messages, almost entirely disappeared from the protest art and activism arena. During the previous regime, the few cartoons that appeared before the audience were largely symbolic since the cartoonists refrained from directly depicting the subject matter amid fear of imprisonment and repression. But the July 2024 uprising marked a turning point since cartoonists began to instrumentalise their cartoons as a powerful tool of protest, casting years of silence and fear aside. From amateur enthusiasts to professional cartoonists like Morshed Mishu, Mehedi Haque, Fahim Anzoom Rumman, Natasha Jahan, and many others contributed with their cartoon works for the cause of student protests. Bangladesh Cartoonist Association has reported that more than 500 cartoons were drawn during the uprising, which generated newfound vigour, courage, and resilience among the protesters and the people (Tasnim, 2024). Besides, the familiar theatre of political battle in Bangladesh that once depended on posters on the street-side walls, banner-festoons strung on the city lanes, and the mike and megaphones spearheading the cacophony of political rhetoric has changed. The new and alternative space that has emerged as a political battleground in Bangladesh is social media feeds of the millions of people, and one of the new lethal

weapons of critiquing politics and crushing political enemies is the meme. During the July uprising, when the streets roared with chants and slogans for the protesters, social media and the internet experienced a similar and parallel thunderous strike of satirical memes and political battle got meme-fied (UNB, 2025). Like the political cartoons, memes also played an important role in protest art and activism during the bloody July 2024 uprising (Safia, 2025). Civic memes of several political themes significantly contributed to the large-scale mass involvement and participation by influencing the dynamics of the protest and resulting in sustained resilience in the protest movement and activism during the month of July (Afrin, 2024).



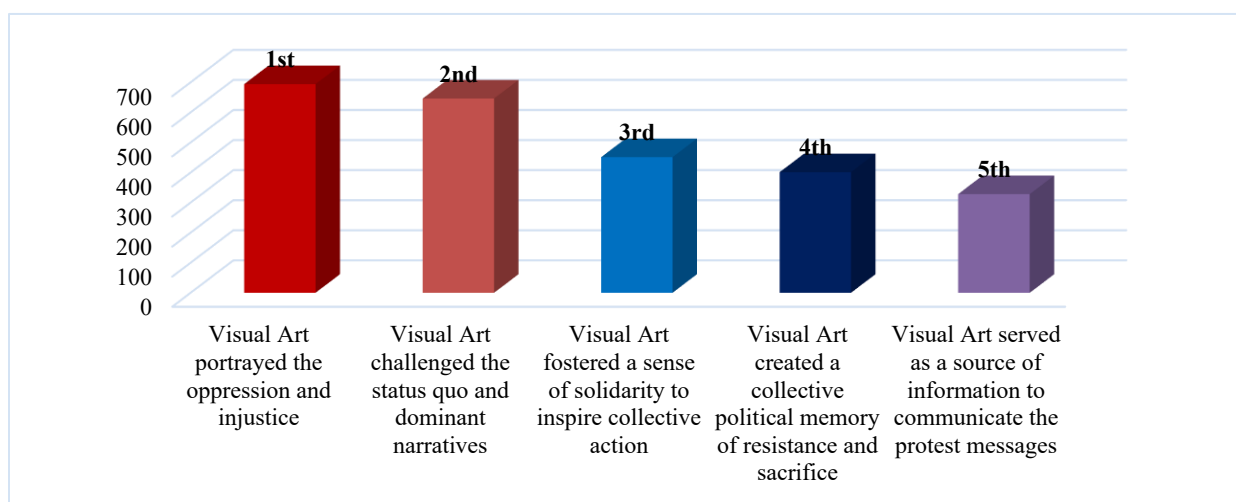
Figure 06: The role of political cartoons and memes (social media content) as a creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising.

The role and impact of visual art in July 2024 uprising as a creative cultural resistance cannot be overstated since these artistic and imagery visual illustrations played a multidimensionally crucial role during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, including inspiring people to join the side of the students by portraying the oppression and injustice, challenging the status quo and dominant political narratives, keeping the events at the forefront of the public awareness through serving as the source of information and communicating the protest messages, and fostering a sense of collective solidarity and action for shaping the course of the movement from non-violence towards violent overthrowing of the past authoritarian regime. A year after the uprising, the walls and streets of Dhaka still proudly bear these faded and weathered revolutionary artworks that narrate the story of the valiant people, and satirical social media content from the uprising, currently archived in newspapers and digital platforms, has become a part of the political and cultural memory of that nation (Monamee,2024).



Graph 02: Visual art played a crucial role as creative cultural resistance, bringing creativity and innovation in protest activism during the July 2024 uprising.

The bar diagrams in Graph 02 present the perceptions of the respondents on the role of visual art as creative cultural resistance, bringing creativity and innovation in protest activism, during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, with each statement answered by 252 participants. Answering the question on “Visual art played a crucial role as creative cultural resistance”, 140 respondents (55.6%) strongly agreed, 87 (34.5%) agreed, 20 (7.9%) were neutral, 3 (1.2%) disagreed, and 2 (0.8%) strongly disagreed while answering for the question on “Visual art brought creativity and innovation to the protest movement”, 113 respondents (44.8%) strongly agreed, 110 (43.7%) agreed, 21 (8.3%) were neutral, 7 (2.8%) disagreed, and 1 (0.4%) strongly disagreed. These frequencies and percentages illustrate the distribution of viewpoints, highlighting a predominantly positive consensus on the crucial role of visual art as creative cultural resistance during the activism and protest movements of the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.



Graph 03: The most important role of visual art as creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh

The bar diagrams in Graph 03, based on the Borda Scoring Method, show a ranking of the role of visual art during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. Answering the ranking question of identifying the most important role of visual art played during the July 2024 uprising, this study finds that respondents have identified “Visual art portrayed the oppression and injustice” as the most important role (1st), “Visual art challenged the status quo and dominant narratives” as the second (2nd). “Visual art fostered a sense of solidarity to inspire collective action” as the third (3rd), “Visual art created a collective political memory of resistance and sacrifice” as the fourth (4th), and “Visual art served as a source of information to communicate protest messages” as the least important (5th). Overall, this result indicates that participants viewed the expressive and oppositional role of visual art as the most powerful contribution to the protest movement and communicative and memory-formative role as the least important contribution of visual art in the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.

One of the most compelling aspects regarding street art and graffiti was that the students and protesters used spray paint on the police riot cars in front of the on-duty police, which symbolised the defiance against state repression. The slogans of the dissent that went viral during the days of mass protest were recreated with artistic graffiti, murals, stencil art, and spray paint anonymously, with no specific individuals bearing the responsibility for that (Shuddhashar, 2025). There were incidents of erasing a mural of Abu Sayeed, with the words "Whom will we go to justice for the murder of martyr Abu Sayeed?" mentioned under it when the video of Abu Sayeed's death became widespread on social media (Sharif, 2024). On the Dhaka University campus, the student protesters erased the artworks of the

student political organisation affiliated with the overthrown regime during the early days of violent July resistance and substituted them with paintings the slogans of agitation and defiance against the authoritarian regime amid the fear of the law enforcers and party goons. Beyond functioning as protest art, these rebellious artworks of the July 2024 uprising became the memory sites that help the people of the country to preserve the memories of collective resistance and sacrifice. Moreover, these street arts are the testament of agitation, despair, hope, and inspiration for future generations in their fight against misrule and injustice, and remind everyone that change is achievable (“Let the Walls Speak”, 2024).



Figure 07: The role of street art as a creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising

During the July 2024 uprising, social media was the frontline of the protest since Facebook feeds, Instagram stories, and YouTube videos kept the momentum going for the band of protesters. When the crackdown and repression intensified, the protest and resistance gained momentum with stories in the feeds and contents communicating updates of the protest events. According to Manzur-al-Matin, a lawyer, television host, and one of the prominent faces during the July upheaval, social media became the substitute and replacement of the mainstream media when the major media outlets remained silent at that time (Anika, 2025). Facebook became a powerful instrument during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh. It did not merely function as a logistical support for communication and coordination but as a pivotal symbolic space for sharing grievances and fostering a sense of solidarity for the protest. Moreover, with the combination of visual and verbal strategies, Facebook orchestrated multimodal expressions including iconic imageries, photocards, videos, reels, satirical memes, hashtags, posters, and colour movements not only to challenge the dominant narratives of the authoritarian power structure but also to mobilise public sentiment to create a strong collective identity for the protesters (Abir, et al., 2025).

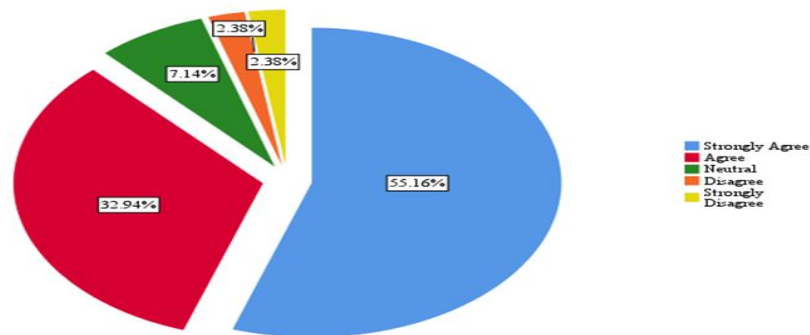


Chart 01: Social media amplified the effectiveness of the role of visual art in the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.

The pie chart in Chart 01 summarises the responses to whether social media increased the effectiveness of visual art in protest movements, based on answers from 252 participants. Among the respondents, 139 (55.16%) strongly agreed, 83 (32.94%) agreed, 18 (7.14%) were neutral, and both “disagree” and “strongly disagree” received 6 responses each (2.38% for each). These frequencies and percentages clearly show that a strong majority believe that social media platforms have amplified the impact of visual art in the context of generating creative cultural resistance during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.

V. CONCLUSION

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, a student-led mass political movement, marks a defining moment in the political history of the country, not only for its unprecedented level of mass mobilization but also for a political memory created from the resistance and sacrifice endured by the student protesters and the masses. This study highlights the multidimensional role of visual culture in shaping the dynamics, escalating the trajectory of the rebellious uprising by vividly revealing that visual artistic illustrations—across both physical and digital spaces—were instrumental in challenging entrenched dominant narratives, catalysing mass participation and intensifying emotional resonance during the tumultuous days of the uprising. Visual art did not merely catalyse the uprising; rather, it actively spearheaded its meaning, empowered its participants, and broadened its reach to reclaim public spaces from entrenched political control. Both street-side artistic illustrations, including graffiti, murals, stencils, and spray-painted slogans, and social media and other digital platform-based visual contents, such as iconic imagery, graphic illustrations, photocards, digital posters, and satirical memes, played a transformative role in shaping a non-violent student protest into a violent regime toppling uprising. Amid the silence of the mainstream media outlets, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube became an alternative mass media for truth-telling, an alternative communicative tool for coordination, and a new public sphere for expressing dissents against the authoritarian regime. Overall, the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh portrays that visual art can play a decisive role as a creative cultural resistance in shaping its rhythm, amplifying its voice, and constructing its legacy rather than merely orchestrating a supplementary role to the movement. Last, but not least, the impactful multidimensional role played by the visual arts during the uprising has become a testament to the fact that the visual arts are not only a cultural artifact but also a strategic political instrument capable of reshaping struggles for justice, accountability, and freedom by reconfiguring public space and mobilising collective sentiment to bring aspired change in the

system.

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