

What value does social media add to governance programmes?



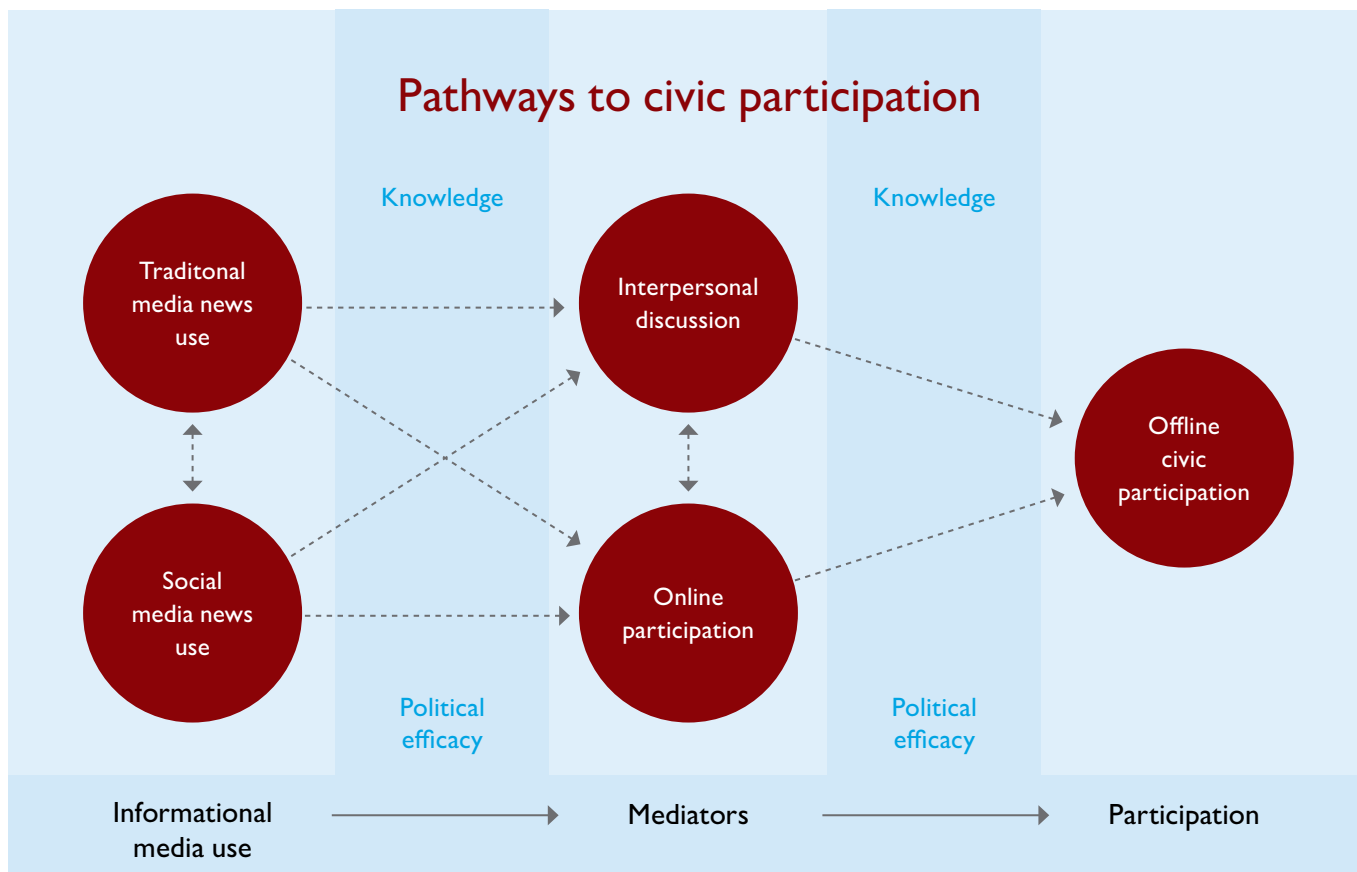
Working in collaboration, students from the London School of Economics (LSE) Master of Public Administration (MPA) programme and BBC Media Action examined the value that social media brings to governance programming aimed at influencing engagement and civic participation.

Pathways to civic participation: a new model

Based on a review of existing literature on the intersection between social media, traditional media and civic participation, the students developed the following model of pathways to offline civic participation. In this model, use of informational media (that is, news consumption) from traditional and/or social media platforms leads to offline civic participation, mediated by knowledge, political efficacy, interpersonal discussion, and online participation.

What is civic participation?

BBC Media Action defines civic participation as a range of activities that can be social and/or political in nature, or designed to influence policy and decision-making. Civic participation can include political participation activities, which are activities that have the intent or effect of influencing government action either directly or indirectly.



Traditional media, social media and participation

Globally, traditional media (TV, radio, and newspapers) remain the most commonly used and trusted form of media, and rural audiences in particular rely on radio. However, social media – including short messaging services (SMS), Twitter, blogs, and Facebook – offer means of civic participation beyond what traditional media offer. Some online civic activities, such as signing a petition or learning about an issue of interest, are adaptations of longstanding forms of civic participation. Others, such as blogging and Twitter, are new forms of engagement.

BBC Media Action’s researchers asked audience members about their engagement in offline and online civic participation activities.

“Offline civic participation” indexed 11 measures of formal political participation, summarising whether the respondent had:

- Worked for a political council
- Participated in an organised effort to solve a neighbourhood or community problem
- Attended a meeting of the local town council or with other government officials
- Contacted a local official, such as a local councillor or an official who works for a government agency
- Lodged a complaint with a government body or a civil society organisation
- Contacted a national elected official
- Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration on some national or local issue
- Contacted a local chief or traditional leader (response options for this survey item were customised for each country, for example, “Ashareya” in Palestinian Territories).
- Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation
- Used personal connections to get contact with a public official

“Online civic participation” indexed seven activities, summarising whether the respondent had:

- Posted comments, queries or information on Facebook about a political or current affairs issue
- Posted comments, queries or information on a blog or other online discussion about a political or current affairs issue
- Followed someone on Twitter who tweets about political or current affairs issues
- Uploaded photos or videos online about a political or current affairs issue
- Joined a group online that tries to influence government policies
- Blogged about a political or current affairs issue
- Watched clips or videos of political programming on Facebook or YouTube

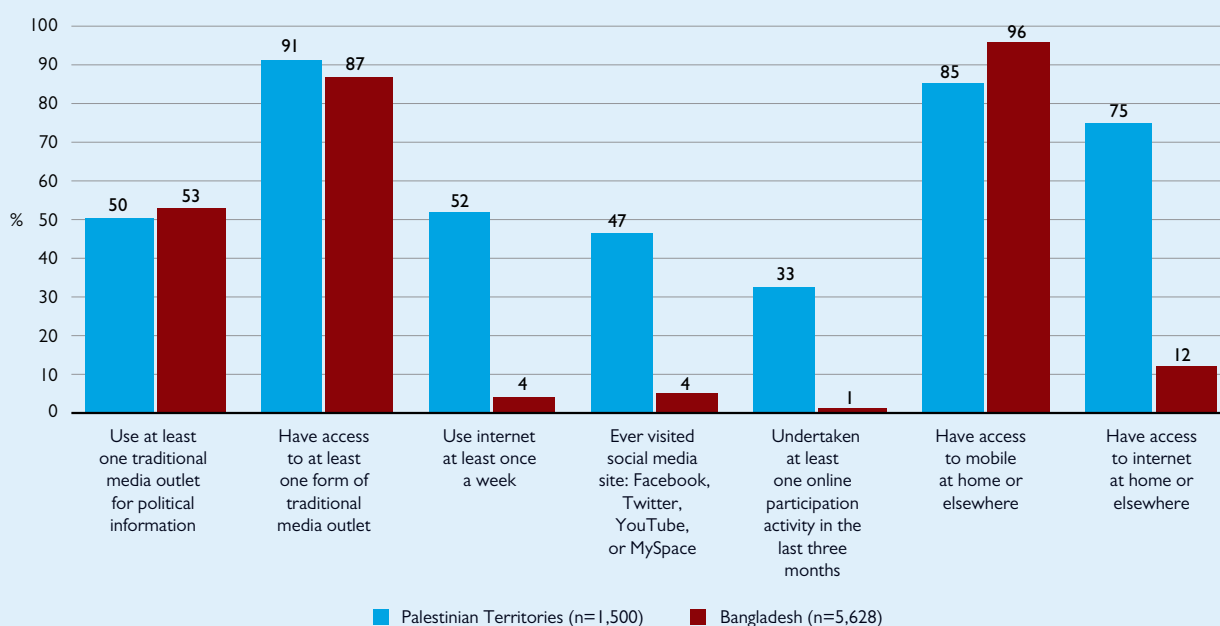
Sharing new approaches to research and social media

Through a grant from DFID, BBC Media Action is conducting research on people’s media use and their involvement in the public sphere across 11 developing countries. This research provides an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to the evidence base on how media and communication can support governance outcomes.

Students from the London School of Economics used BBC Media Action data from Bangladesh and Palestinian Territories to explore – both theoretically

and empirically – the nature of engagement with social media. Their analysis considered it alone as well as in combination with traditional media, and the ways the use of social media influence engagement and participatory outcomes. This research briefing highlights some findings from the students’ work, conducted between October 2012 and March 2013. In the spirit of DFID’s open and enhanced research access policy, BBC Media Action seeks to share this and our other data with external researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders.

Media use and access: Palestinian Territories and Bangladesh



Next steps – using research findings to support governance programmes

These findings imply that practitioners should engage purposefully with social media as a catalysing complement to traditional TV and radio programming. Current and future programming should consider social media an important, if not essential, platform for reaching audiences and motivating civic participation. **Social media may be valuable in its own right but seems particularly effective when combined with other platforms.**

Formative research conducted to inform programme makers about audiences and the issues that are important to them should consider audiences' access to and appreciation of social media platforms in project design, planning, and resourcing. Stratifying data by sex, to analyse distinctions between how men and women use social media and engage in offline participation, could be informative, particularly as the students' analysis found gender to be significantly associated with offline participation.

Comparing the impact of online interpersonal discussion and offline interpersonal discussion on offline participation could also be useful. So could panel data, in which the same respondents are consulted at several points in time. As BBC Media Action's organisational approach to governance and theories of change for individual projects evolves, we will refine our approaches to social media programmes and research.

BBC Media Action is conducting its own analysis of the baseline data from Bangladesh and Palestinian Territories. *BBC Bangladesh Sanglap* (Dialogue) went on air in November 2012, and *Aswat Min Filesteen* (Voices from Palestine) and *Hur el Kalam* (Free to Speak) have been on air in Palestinian Territories since September and October 2012, respectively.

BBC Media Action plans to conduct follow-up surveys in both countries to find out which audiences are exposed to these programmes and to assess their impact among audience members. BBC Media Action and the London School of Economics plan to conduct a second collaborative research project in 2013/14.

Understanding political communication

Several theories of political communication informed the students' conceptual model for civic participation.

Agenda-setting theory proposes that media has a direct, albeit not immediate, impact on audiences. This is mediated by interpersonal communication, which can affect the power of the media to set the agenda, influence behaviour and form public opinion. New media gives individuals access to others with similar interests, even without mediation by traditional mass media. Traditional media outlets also use new media forms such as blogs and Twitter,

challenging distinctions among “mediated” and “unmediated” sources of content.

Political efficacy is the perception that one is capable of influencing the decision-making process.

The communication mediation model hypothesises that informational media use enables political efficacy, knowledge acquisition and citizen communication, which lead to civic participation. Interpersonal discussion is important for traditional media consumption and for participation.

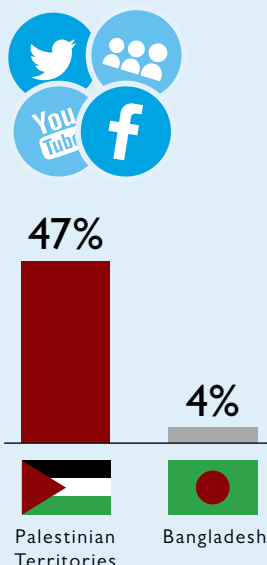
Findings and implications

Social media and traditional media both play a role

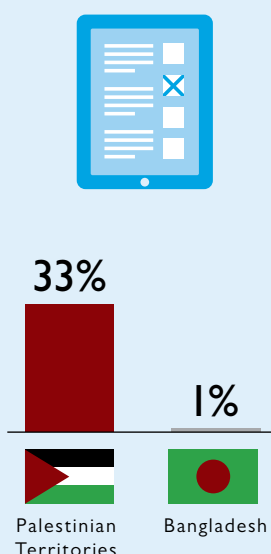
Traditional media in Bangladesh and Palestinian Territories remain the dominant forms of media. Social media usage and online civic participation are less prevalent – particularly in Bangladesh. In Palestinian Territories, 47% of participants had visited any one of the social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or MySpace) and one in three people (33%) had undertaken an online civic participation activity in the last three months. In contrast, only 4% of Bangladeshis had visited social media sites and only 1% had undertaken an online civic participation activity.

The LSE students' analysis of BBC Media Action data found that in the Palestinian Territories, offline civic participation was associated with multiplatform media use (both traditional and social media). Furthermore in the BBC Media Action data, use of social media was positively associated with political efficacy and offline participation.

visited social media sites



undertook online civic participation



Social media found to add value to governance programmes

Using BBC Media Action survey data from Palestinian Territories, the students tested their conceptual model and found that:

- Those who used social media and traditional media (multiplatform users) appeared to be more likely to participate offline than those who used traditional media alone, in a model adjusted for age, income, education, sex, and place of residence (urban or rural).
- Those who used social media and traditional media were no more likely than those who used social media alone to participate offline, in a model adjusted for age, income, education, sex, and place of residence.
- Offline participation was significantly associated with social media use and with interpersonal discussion, in a model adjusted for internet use for political information, traditional media use, political efficacy, income, education, age, sex, and place of residence.
- Offline participation was positively associated with online participation, in a model adjusted for interpersonal discussion, political efficacy, income, education, age, sex, and place of residence.

The students came to these insights by using multivariate regression (a statistical technique that estimates values of a variable in relation to two or more other variables) to test several hypotheses related to their conceptual model. It was not possible to apply this analysis to the Bangladesh data because of low levels of social media use and sample size restrictions in the Bangladesh dataset.

Contributing to the evidence base

This research briefing summarises findings from a longer research report, *Social Media and Civic Participation: Literature Review and Empirical Evidence from Bangladesh and Palestinian Territories*. To read more, and for information on the technical aspects of this research, please visit: www.bbcmmediaaction.org/publicationsandpress/research.html

BBC Media Action's work

BBC Media Action, the international development organisation of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), uses the power of media and communication to support people to shape their own lives. Working with broadcasters, governments, other organisations and donors, we provide information and stimulate positive change in the areas of governance, health, resilience and humanitarian response. We work in more than 20 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Acknowledgements

BBC Media Action thanks the LSE alumni for their insightful analysis and dedication to this project: Dina Bokai, David Fernando Forero, Pablo Garcés, Joseph Peralta, and Kate Shieh. We also thank Professor

Borge Wietzke and Dean Lloyd Gruber of the London School of Economics for guiding the project.

At BBC Media Action, Alaa Radi, Lana Shehadeh, Georgina Page, Sanjib Saha, Arif Al Mamun, Mohammed Ehsanul Haque Tamal, Sally Gowland, Chris Larkin, Sara Elias, Zoe Fortune, and Adrienne Testa contributed to the design, management, data analysis, and reporting of the research to which this briefing refers. Delia Lloyd organised the Capstone project with LSE. Delia Lloyd, Julia Glyn Pickett, Kavita Abraham-Dowsing, Anna Godfrey, Catherine Harbour, Sara Elias, Diana Shaw and Anna Egan contributed text and commented on drafts of this research briefing.

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international development charity. The content of this briefing is the responsibility of BBC Media Action. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent those of the BBC itself or of any donors supporting our work.

This research briefing was prepared thanks to funding from the UK Department for International Development, which supports BBC Media Action's research and policy work.



Front cover image:
A Bangladeshi woman uses a mobile phone

Photo credit: BBC Media Action

BBC Media Action is registered in England & Wales under Charity Commission number 1076235 and Company number 3521587.

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