

Manufacturing Consent, Legitimizing Power: The Dialectic of Media Discourse in Narrating Sheikh Hasina's Fall

Hasan Shaikh

hasanshaikhrampal@gmail.com

English Discipline, Khulna University, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Power is rarely taken in silence but is legitimated in words. In the contemporary power conflicts, Sheikh Hasina's fall appears not only as a political event but also as a well-narrated spectacle, constructed, distorted, and legitimated through the architecture of media discourse. Drawing on the Propaganda Model, this analysis examines how *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh's most prominent English-language newspaper, crafts a regime change narrative through carefully designed rhetorical strategies that mask elite and transnational power interests while shaping public consent. Using the tools of language, it paints regime change not as a messy, bitter rupture, but as a natural and necessary correction. To do this, it systematically mutes the voice of Hasina, while amplifying foreign voices, military figures, and the opposition. This is not an oversight; it is a deliberate choice. The media turns military leaders into democratic heroes and protests into powerful myths, all to make this specific version of events feel inevitable and right. Editorial "flak" emerges not as explicit censorship but as tonal calibration and deliberate sourcing choices, effectively shielding dominant actors from critique. In the end, the study shows a media that has traded its watchdog role for that of a master storyteller, building public consent for a narrative that serves elite interests.

Keywords: Media Discourse; Mass Deception, Manufacturing Consent, Sheikh Hasina, Political Fall

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, we have trusted the media to be a truth-teller, a vital force for public enlightenment in a democratic society. But what if this ideal of objectivity is just a disguise? Beneath the surface, news reporting can function as a subtle tool that maintains the power of certain interests, all while presenting a face of impartiality (Schirrmacher & Mousavi, 2023). Nowhere is this more apparent than during a political crisis. In these moments, the media does not just record history; it actively makes it. This study pulls back the curtain on this process by focusing on the fall of Sheikh Hasina, the longest-serving prime minister, in Bangladesh. It critically dissects the media's language to expose how specific rhetorical strategies were used to normalize the regime change and manufacture public agreement. By doing so, it reveals a troubling truth: the language sold to us as pure and objective is often precisely what warps our political reality, as Fulton (2005) wrote that "narrative in the media becomes simply a way of selling something" (p. 3).

The core to this study is the fact that the media not only report the happenings of the events, but also actually shapes those events. “Since audience sectors are defined and distinguished on the basis of their assumed VALS (values and lifestyle), narratives have to display and reinforce the same sets of VALS as the desired audience” (Fulton, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, the political figures, particularly in weak or in transition situations, are not characterized with objective fairness. Rather, they are constructed through the help of a preferred highlighter, by omission in a tactical way, and by rhetorical rhetoric in a compelling manner. The media in this respect are a more of the mirror of a magician rather than a mirror.

Not only was the ousting of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, after 15 years of uninterrupted rule, a change of government but a divide of the nation between the national narrative. The tyrannical disaster of her rule, curfews, by way of inoculation and victimization of demonstrators as “Razakar”, a term which reminds of infidelity in the past, made the country scream in outrage by student rebellion against a highly unpopular policy of job quota. The army was not ready to save Hasina and she eloped to India. Her resignation resulted in an interim government under Nobel prize winner Muhammad Yunus.

The matter is aggravated by the culture of media in Bangladesh. Despite constitutional privacy of expression, journalism has been throughout the history in the backdrop of de-facto restrictions such as political patronization and even innuendo of electronic espionage. And under the government of Sheikh Hasina, various media sources are suspended because they questioned the legitimacy of her government as well as foreign and domestic policies. Thus, the publishing houses such as *the daily star*, which to some is the mouth piece of the Sheikh Hasina regime that once enjoyed a certain degree of acceptance of its policy will most probably walk on a performative tight rope discussing liberal democratic ideals and balancing regimes that have a different degree of tolerance of opposition. It reports and also influences the perception of Bangladesh, particularly to the international community. So, when the paper recounts the fall of such a figure as Sheikh Hasina, it does not do so in a vacuum, but in a geopolitical regime of readability with some story lines being more intelligible, fundable and morally palatable than others.

While lots of existing literatures on media discourse and political communication focus on Western democracies (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021; Steppat et al., 2021), this study intervenes by focusing on a postcolonial Global South context. As a location of global and regional tensions, Indian interest, Chinese investment, U.S. geopolitical monitoring, Bangladesh offers a particularly fertile ground of the interaction of national media stories with power politics. Through reviewing media discourses of the political downfall of Sheikh Hasina, the research conceptualizes these representations not as personalized political descriptions but as iconic reconstructions of nationality, sovereignty and world standings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The heart of the construction of public opinion lies in the media discourse and has been used to perform mass deception by using the stylistic devices to control ideologies. Baranova et al. (2023) discusses the neologisms, metaphors, and evaluative words that occur in the political language such as Brexit and the war between Russia and Ukraine and that attempt to provoke some emotions and ideas. This study has shown how the media has not only taken up the new stereotypes such as Ruscist with its language but it has also helped to reinforce the stereotypes by manipulating the language. In addition, Boeva-Omelechko et al. (2019) outline representations of Russia through the years as a “friendly” country after the dissolution of the

USSR before labeling it as an “aggressive” threat later, exposing how media garners consent towards its agendas and interests. The authors mention zoomorphic metaphors, “the Russian bear”, for describing the purported creation of meaning by media for promoting their geopolitical purposes. This has parallels in potential framings for Sheikh Hasina’s political downfall where the same desired results could be mediated by media.

Convergence of mass deception and media discourse is a field that has been studied extensively, showing how opinion and consent are manufactured by the public through language and communication tactics. Gryshchenko (2024) used to claim that discourse delivers information along with disinformation, highlighting the degree to which constructed news takes advantage of mental models for managing access to knowledge. Building mass media discourse as a tool of ideological domination, Shesterina et al. (2024) discusses its scope, stability, and thematically elastic nature. It contends that mass mediation provides ruling discourses that prescribe beliefs and mold public consciousness. To this end, Kenzhekanova et al. (2015) discuss political discourse manipulation by means of euphemisms, dysphemisms, and nominalization. The research demonstrated that media texts depersonalize action, constructing emotional appeals and making mass deception possible. In this case, Gryshchenko (2024) is pushing the research of fake news as a manipulative genre to a new level, revealing media as an ideological battlefield.

Furthermore, the explanation of *Fox News* in Proffitt (2007) illustrates the manufacturing consent model because corporate ownership and political elites made dissent unpatriotic, and this built support for the Iraq War. This depoliticizes dissent, reducing complex issues to “right vs. wrong” (p. 70). Moreover, Pepermans and Maesele (2018) accuse climate change coverage of depoliticizing structural issues and framing policy in moral or technical rather than ideological terms. Similarly, Gu’s (2019) CDA study on interpreter-mediated discourse in China illustrates how English media can reshape political discourse for consent. It illustrates how interpreters reinforce state hegemony by enhancing people-oriented rhetoric, typically not precipitated by the source text, to legitimize power linguistically.

Moreover, the application of Kony 2012 by Ecke (2012) illustrates the continued utility of the propaganda model in revealing ways in which U.S. media concealed geopolitical and economic interests behind humanitarian rhetorics in order to trick audiences into accepting militarized interventions. In the same manner, Rahman and Marjan (2013) reveal how Bangladeshi media distorted public opinion of the Hefajat-e-Islam protests through exaggeration of false frames such as exaggerated casualty figures in order to advance partisan interests. Likewise, Zhao (2018) reveals how China adopted and misread the propaganda model. It was not only applied in Western media criticism, but also as a state strategic communication model. Its binary structure reveals how media discourse can be utilized as a tool of mass deception, constructing public opinion through selective framing and ideology filtering out. Such findings are fertile ground to venture into Bangladesh’s political media landscape, where Sheikh Hasina’s collapse reporting can also illustrate elite-driven narrative-building.

Accordingly, Azim and Zaman (2024) document how a quota reform movement led by students came to be transformed into a national movement, predicting how state-aligned media in the initial period referred to protesters as “anti-Liberation” razakars (collaborators), a means of discrediting the opposition. The study describes the extent in which independent media and social media responded by bringing attention to protesters’ narratives through viral videos, memes, and graffiti that revealed state violence. Similarly, Jackman’s (2021) study of previous student protests discusses how media blackouts and propaganda were employed to suppress the resistance, providing a precedent for the 2024 crackdown. Chowdhury (2025) expands this by detailing how Hasina’s cult of personality, perpetuated through state media, collapsed when

grassroots art and digital dissent exposed regime failures. The graffiti slogan “We are free - 5.8.24” (Azim & Zaman, 2024, p. 952) and the martyrdom of protesters like Abu Sayed (Chowdhury, 2025) became symbols of resistance that mainstream media initially ignored.

Besides, Ahmad’s (2025) study frames the July Revolution as a youth-led movement against authoritarianism, emphasizing the Awami League’s violent suppression of protests and the subsequent rise of an interim government. This narrative aligns with a critical discourse that exposes state-sponsored repression. In contrast, Chowdhury’s (2024) Sufi-centered analysis underscores the intersection of political and religious resistance, portraying the revolution as a moral uprising against corruption, with media amplifying the voices of marginalized groups like Hefazat-e-Islam. Meanwhile, Barman et al. (2024) are balanced in presenting the socio-political rationale for quota reform protests without giving attention to more serious critiques of Hasina’s regime, implying media bias in depoliticizing protests.

METHOD

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on an interdisciplinary framework, borrowing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as formulated by Dijk (1998) and Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) Propaganda Model, to counter the meaning structure, manipulation, and media hegemony underlying the construction of Hasina’s political downfall. By way of example, CDA theorizes discourse as both representative and constructive of ideology as a social practice. Dijk (1998) illustrates that ideologies are not abstract and remote; they are internalised systems of belief embedded in daily language and social thinking. His model situates ideology at the nexus of discourse, cognition, and society, emphasizing that control over public discourse is a key mechanism through which elites reproduce dominance. Language, in this model, is not neutral, it is inherently political. It constructs “us” and “them” categories, organizes meaning hierarchically, and fosters ideological polarization (Dijk, 1998). Within this framework, media discourse about political figures such as Sheikh Hasina can be examined as a site where symbolic violence is enacted through metaphors, presuppositions, lexical selection, and syntactic structures.

However, discourse does not emerge in a vacuum rather it is produced, disseminated, and consumed within a complex political economy. This is where the second pillar of this study, Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) Propaganda Model (PM), becomes indispensable. The Propaganda Model outlines how corporate mass media operate through a series of filters that shape what counts as news. These filters include concentrated media ownership, the role of advertising as a revenue stream, reliance on official sources, the disciplining effect of flak (organized criticism), and overarching ideological frameworks such as anti-communism or, in the post-9/11 era, pro-democracy and anti-authoritarianism. Through these filters, information unfavorable to elite interests is marginalized, while narratives that support the status quo are amplified.

The coupling of the Propaganda Model and CDA provides this study with a broader theoretical scope. While CDA allows for micro-level analysis of language, with a focus on how meaning is created through textual structures, the Propaganda Model offers a macro-level description of the structural limitations and institutional interests shaping discourse creation. Together, they reveal not only how Sheikh Hasina is represented, but also why the representations are so uniform in this media coverage.

SAMPLING AND PROCEDURE

This study employed a purposive qualitative sampling strategy, selecting a corpus of 41 articles published in *The Daily Star* between 5 August 2024, the day of Sheikh Hasina's political fall, and 31 May 2025. *The Daily Star* was chosen for its prominent status in Bangladesh's English-language media landscape, its transnational reach, and its influential role in shaping elite and donor-facing political discourse. The selected articles span editorials, news features, and opinion pieces, capturing a spectrum of discursive forms. Each article was manually cleaned and curated to ensure textual integrity for analysis, with extraneous metadata and visual elements removed. The final dataset was prepared for systematic interpretive engagement.

Texts were imported into NVivo software for qualitative coding. For instance, when I tagged recurring metaphors of a nation as a "sick patient" needing a cure, I was uncovering the "Fear Ideology" filter at work, mobilizing visceral anxiety. The systematic silencing of pro-government voices in my codes revealed itself as the "Sourcing" filter, creating a curated reality dependent on elite narratives. By mapping how criticism was framed not as debate but as destabilizing "flak", and how the entire event was naturalized as an "inevitable political cycle", I exposed the very gears, "Flak" and the creation of a "Common Enemy", that turned a complex political contest into a foregone conclusion, manufacturing consent not through overt lies, but through the very architecture of the story itself.

Then, these themes were analyzed through a dual-theoretical lens: Critical Discourse Analysis, following Dijk's (1998) focus on ideological structures, actor representation, and discursive polarization; and the Propaganda Model (Herman & Chomsky, 2008), which contextualized the narratives within broader institutional constraints. Interpretive rigor was maintained by triangulating discursive codes with broader socio-political contexts and theoretical constructs. The ultimate aim was not to describe reportage, but to uncover how media discourse, through subtle linguistic and structural strategies, functioned as a mechanism of ideological reproduction, framing Hasina's fall within a consent-manufacturing narrative shaped by elite interests.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

THE INEVITABLE UNRAVELING

The results reveal that ownership and institutional alignment, the first filter in the Propaganda Model, frames which voices are amplified and which are silenced. In the earliest framing article, published on August 5, 2024, the headline simply announces: "Sheikh Hasina has left Gono Bhaban for 'safer place'". The accompanying body offers:

She wanted to record a speech. But she could not get an opportunity to do that (August 5, 2024).

This solitary line of explanation from an unnamed source subtly reduces the agency of the ousted Prime Minister to that of a silenced actor, stripped of her voice at the most crucial moment of her political life. This absence contrasts starkly with the saturation of voices from the military, foreign media, and opposition-aligned commentators. The paper devotes entire paragraphs to the Indian media's tracking of her flight path:

Hasina's C-130J transport plane was monitored by the Indian Air Force from its entry into Indian airspace till its landing at Hindon base, defence sources said (August 5, 2024).

Such detail-oriented coverage of her escape, rather than her political defense, signals a shift in narrative ownership from the subject to the observer. The Prime Minister's departure is told

through the eyes of geopolitical actors, military officials, and even jubilant protesters, but never her own.

According to Herman and Chomsky's (1988) first filter, ownership dictates what stories are told, who is allowed to speak, and how narratives are shaped. In the case of *The Daily Star*, its position as a privately owned, donor-aligned outlet with historical ties to Western embassies, and transnational funding streams profoundly influences its editorial stance. In terms of social structure, media ownership aligns with existing elite power blocs, reproducing the class and geopolitical interests that fund and sustain them. During the period studied, *The Daily Star* consistently aligned its narrative with Western diplomatic discourses and regional interests, particularly India's strategic preferences, rather than the domestic popular mandate.

This alignment is not passive. It is part of a broader social process of legitimizing regime change by shifting the Overton window, what is considered reasonable, moral, and politically acceptable. When the press echoes elite ideologies, it helps to naturalize political transitions not through public deliberation, but through pre-structured consensus. Discourse here becomes the *infrastructure* of power: it builds the scaffolding for collective acceptance. In this sense, media discourse functions as mass deception. It veils the interests of its owners by presenting their ideologically loaded narratives as neutral reporting. Because, "all language use involves ideology, and so ideology is ubiquitous" (Lukin, 2019, p. 16). Readers internalize these discourses as common sense, unaware that the discursive field itself has been narrowed.

Besides, editorials and reportage systematically supported the legitimacy of the interim government, while marginalizing or omitting voices associated with the Awami League or pro-Hasina intellectuals. In an article dated August 5, 2024, titled "Hasina's ouster a seismic event in Bangladesh history: ICG", the report opens with:

"The army has an important role to play in ensuring security and stability. The interim government that will now assume power should carry out a credible investigation into the tragic events of recent weeks, and ensure the thousands of protesters and opposition figures who have been detained are released," the Brussels-based global think tank said in a statement today.

The uncritical acceptance of "stability" as a virtue echoes the interests of media owners embedded in the country's financial and trade elite, for whom political predictability, regardless of democratic legitimacy, is paramount. The editorial direction thus subtly reinforces Herman and Chomsky's notion that media ownership structures do not require direct censorship; rather, ideological compliance is built into the institutional DNA of the outlet.

Here, consent is not wrestled from the populace through coercion, but quietly manufactured through the gentle, persistent hum of legitimacy. This discursive orchestration does not merely reflect social structures, it reproduces them. The media does not need to silence through bans when it can seduce through narrative. Discourse, then, figures centrally in social change not by heralding revolution, but by naturalizing the new regime, crystallizing elite consensus into public doctrine, and making the exceptional appear inevitable. This is deception not by distortion, but by design.

ARCHITECTURE OF ABSENCE

Advertising and sourcing underscore how narratives are shaped by elite affiliations. Most of *The Daily Star's* coverage depends on Western media and state actors. In the flagship article "Hasina's Ouster Grabs Global Headlines" (August 5, 2024), the paper reports:

The CNN News 18 said she had landed in Agartala... BBC also reported widespread looting and arson across the country since the ouster... According to AFP, security forces, who had supported Hasina's government throughout the unrest, did not intervene to stem Sunday's protests which claimed at least 94 lives.

This multiplicity of foreign sources is uncritical and uncontextualized suggesting, as Chomsky and Herman argue, that source affiliation becomes a proxy for truth.

In contrast, statements from Hasina's camp, even from her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, are framed emotionally and defensively. In a revealing quote from August 5, 2024, Joy laments to the BBC: "She's very disappointed that after all her hard work, for a minority to rise up against her... When she took over power it was considered a failing state... Until today it was considered one of the rising tigers of Asia" (August 5, 2024). He spoke in an elegiac tone, which the framing makes ineffective: a domestic lament in the presence of a judicial judgment. This is the macrostructure of CDA where the meaning of an utterance is regulated by the embedded arrangement and what other voices enclose it (Dijk, 1998).

The reliance on elite sources is yet another significant filter of the Propaganda Model and it depicts how discourse repeats the existing institutional hierarchies. Only diplomats, the military leaders, the Western analysts, and the international news agents are taken to have power. Thereby, the truth is institutionalized: the truth is that which strong actors are saying to be true. By doing so, this sourcing prejudice creates a stratified social hierarchy of plausibility.

Consequently, the public not only consents to elite narratives but internalizes their structure understanding politics through the eyes of Washington, Delhi, or Brussels rather than Dhaka. This form of discourse serves as mass deception by elevating the interpreter above the subject. Rather than presenting a contest of interpretations, the media pre-selects the dominant lens through which events are understood. In doing so, it collapses multiplicity into singularity: one truth, one narrative, one "reasonable" outcome.

While less overt than other filters, advertising incentives shape *The Daily Star's* narrative tone, particularly in its business and development reporting. For example, in the September 19, 2024 piece "World Bank ready to be part of key economic reforms in Bangladesh: VP", the article reports:

Professor Yunus said the government would implement ILO conventions in labour reforms, which will boost foreign investors' confidence in Bangladesh ...

The phrase "boost foreign investors' confidence" implies a collective economic endorsement of the regime, with no critical assessment of who the investors are or what interests they represent. These references suggest a deeper economic filter. This therefore contributes to what Herman and Chomsky describe as the commercial logic of non-confrontation: stories that could dissuade investment, raise alarm about repression, or destabilize the illusion of order are systematically underreported or euphemized. Within this configuration, mass deception emerges not through fabrication but through omission and euphemism. By foregrounding optimism and suppressing dissonance, such discourse manufactures legitimacy and perpetuates hegemonic social orders under the guise of objective reportage. It is less a reflection of change than a mechanism to stabilize perception in service of institutional continuity.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that media reliant on officialdom for news are structurally dependent and ideologically complicit. This dynamic is apparent in articles where the interim government's statements are printed without interrogation. For instance, in the January 15, 2025 article "Constitution reform commission proposes new principles for Bangladesh", the piece states:

The commission advocated for expanding the scope of fundamental rights and ensuring their constitutional protection through a comprehensive charter.

Nowhere in the article is this claim questioned, nor is there inclusion of opposition views, legal scholars, or dissenting civic actors. It only reports what the reform commission has recommended. The consequence is not just a narrative skew but an epistemic monopoly where the state becomes both actor and interpreter of national events. Dissent is not denied, but preemptively excluded from being *newsworthy*. Thus, the power of discourse lies not only in

what is said, but in its capacity to define what counts as sayable. In the case of Bangladesh's interim governance, media discourse does not merely report events, it crafts the boundaries of political legitimacy. In this way, mass deception is not the product of outright lies but of carefully curated truths that sculpt social change in the image of elite interests.

FLAK AND THE SPECTER OF INSTABILITY

Flak manifests most clearly in the paper's deference to military narratives. Far from critically interrogating the army's constitutional role, *The Daily Star* often reiterates its statements with solemnity. For instance, in the article "Hasina Falls, Flees", published on August 6, 2024, the tone borders on reverent:

Bangladesh's iron lady of 15 years bowed out to a people's uprising yesterday...
General Waker-Uz-Zaman confirmed the rumours of Hasina's resignation... Millions took to the streets... while many found it hard to believe that Hasina's absolute hold... could crumble, faced with a three-week campaign initiated by students (August 6, 2024).

Here, the military chief is cast as a narrator of events rather than an actor within them. The ideological square in this instance casts the general as a hero, and Hasina as a relic whose time had passed. This rhetorical move is not unique. In studies of the Arab Spring, Lynch (2012) notes that media alike framed Mubarak's fall in close to similarly moralistic terms, rarely questioning the post-revolution power consolidation that followed. *The Daily Star* replicates this logic, positioning the transition as both moral and overdue.

A particularly vivid moment comes when describing public reception:

Hundreds thronged around the general's convoy and some even rode on his car...
hailing the army chief like a triumphant hero (August 6, 2024).

This is a linguistic act of re-legitimation. The military does not merely assume power rather it is welcomed, even cheered into it. Absent is any critique of constitutional disruption, raising parallels with Entman's (2004) critique of U.S. media's role in narrating peacekeeping interventions.

In *The Daily Star*, flak is not necessarily explicit; it is discursively internalized manifesting through editorial tone, quote selection, and the uncritical reproduction of power-sanctioned narratives. The military, in this discourse, is not a disruptor of constitutional order, but its savior. This serves a key ideological function. The discourse reduces the complexity of regime change, an act with immense constitutional and geopolitical implications, into an inevitable and even festive event. Here, language acts as both a symbolic shield, protecting the military from critique, and a symbolic sword, discrediting the civilian regime that preceded it.

Critiques of Hasina-era excesses are reprinted to reinforce the legitimacy of the current order, while any criticism of the interim regime is deflected, minimized, or couched in diplomatic language. In "Hasina did not resign: Joy" (August 10, 2025), Wazed is quoted extensively:

"Let's forget the past. Let us not pursue the politics of vengeance. We are going to have to work together, whether it's a unity government or not."

This acts as preemptive flak against those who might demand accountability, truth commissions, or justice for the hundreds killed in 2024 and backward. Rather than engaging such calls, the paper recycles elite discourse urging restraint, civility, and silence. The cumulative effect is not to ban critique outright, but to delegitimize it through discursive tone equating demands for justice with emotionalism or backward-looking bitterness. Thus, flak is operationalized not as censorship, but as rhetorical pressure to conform.

METAPHORS OF SICKNESS AND CURE

Dominant ideology is where the Propaganda Model and CDA most vividly converge. The prevailing discourse of *The Daily Star* constructs Hasina's departure not as a political crisis but as a moral necessity. In Dijk's terms, this is the polarization strategy, whereby discourse magnifies the faults of the 'other' while celebrating the 'self'. In this case, the protestors are framed as agents of hope and democracy, while Hasina is depicted as the final vestige of repression.

This discursive polarization becomes particularly clear in "Hasina's Ouster a Seismic Event in Bangladesh History: ICG" (August 5, 2024), which quotes International Crisis Group's Thomas Kean:

Hasina sealed her fate when she decided to respond to the protests with brutality and arrogance rather than pursue serious dialogue with protest leaders (August 5, 2024). As Richardson (2007) states, "the way that people are named in news discourse can have significant impact on the way in which they are viewed" (p. 49), therefore, Kean's statement, highlighted prominently, frames Hasina not as overthrown, but as self-destroyed. The metaphor "sealed her fate" renders regime change inevitable, even poetic. It is the ultimate consent manufacturing maneuver. This same article reinforces the ideological frame by linking Hasina's rule with systemic dysfunction: "The protest movement gained such widespread support... the country has not held a competitive election in 15 years". The implication is clear: her departure was overdue, and democracy awaits restoration. This emotional orchestration is not benign. As Ahmed (2004) argues in her work on the politics of emotion, public feeling is often mobilized to suppress dissent: when a change feels good, it is less likely to be questioned. In this case, joy becomes both evidence and justification for Hasina's removal.

Yet these framings elide the very mechanisms through which regime change occurred. *The Daily Star* makes only oblique references to the military's coercive leverage, the lack of any formal resignation, or the diplomatic pressures described by Joy. In his interview with *Reuters* on August 10, 2024, Joy stated:

My mother never officially resigned... As far as the constitution goes, she is still the Prime Minister of Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, August 10, 2024).

Such statements, though present, are marginal in both space and rhetorical weight. They are buried beneath the avalanche of triumphalist framing, suggesting that they exist more for formal balance than genuine contestation. Hence, this "denotative level is also connotative, persuading us that we need to change in order to match up to the reality around us" (Fulton, 2005, p. 6).

Because Fulton (2005) claims that "in a world dominated by print and electronic media, our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative" (p. 1), this story recreates regime change as popular justice as far as social processes are concerned. Protesters are portrayed as the agents of democracy and Hasina as the remnant of repressions. Ultimately, it is true. The language is not a simple dialogue of what we report the language is an interpretation of the historic power of correcting that it is a political form of power.

Since it is a social change driver, the discourse justifies the military supported transition by putting it not as intervention but redemption. The media turns power changes won through contention into democratic victories by accentuating order, unity and popular revelation and leaving out coercion, flak or geopolitical pressure. By so doing, *The Daily Star* does not just narrate the fall of Hasina; it is creating the ideological landscape in which the fall will seem to be morally right. The consent is not required but discursively constructed.

NATURAL POLITICAL CYCLE

The most ideological filter emerges through the consistent dichotomizing of Hasina's era as repressive and the new regime as redemptive. In the March 18, 2025 editorial "Are we

looking at a second republic or a fourth?”, the news posits: “...to redefine the state structure by reconstructing the constitution, ostensibly to prevent future authoritarian rule. But framing this moment as the “birth” of a second republic ...”. This ideological binary, old regime as autocracy, new order as democracy-in-waiting, is maintained throughout the whole times. Here, “the ‘reality’ we are shown is itself constructed” (Fulton, 2005, p. 6). Even when critiques of the interim government emerge (such as delays in election planning or reform progress), these are framed as “growing pains” or “teething issues”, never as systemic problems. This can be described as an ideological common sense, a default worldview that limits what is thinkable. “News reporting mythologises, and therefore normalises, the existence of universal truths and an objective reality that can be retrieved and represented without ideological mediation” (Fulton, 2005, p. 7). Thus, Hasina’s fall is not up for debate; it was necessary. The interim regime’s flaws are forgivable; it is progress. Any deviation from this line risks being branded as obstructionist or nostalgic.

In *The Daily Star*’s reporting on Sheikh Hasina’s fall, the use of passive voice and visual-emotive language reveals how discourse both reflects and shapes the socio-political order. Consider the phrase: “Over 300 people have been killed in violent clashes” (August 5, 2024). This construction deletes agency, no actor is named. The grammar removes accountability, rendering political violence as a tragic inevitability rather than an orchestrated act. Because, “media plays a distinctive role in the patterns of violence and non-violence” (Lynch, 2014, p. 101). This is where discourse operates within social processes: it encodes silence into language, enabling media and audiences to navigate crisis without confronting its causes. Within social structures, this strategy protects institutional power. When reporting on legal responses to the killing of Abu Sayeed, the paper states: “Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate ... recorded the statement of the complainant ... asked the officer-in-charge... to register the complaint as a First Information Report” (August 14, 2024). The language is procedural, sterile. It gives the illusion of justice without engaging the political forces behind the violence. Bureaucratic discourse thus performs the role of ritualized legality, shielding state actors from scrutiny while upholding the myth of institutional neutrality. Because, “the media are now the major controllers of narrative production and consumption ..., the stories that seem the most “natural” are the ones to which the media have accustomed us” (Fulton, 2005, p. 1).

Visual rhetoric comes into point in the context of social change. The protestors were seen inside Gono Bhaban and the report reads: waving to the camera... looting furniture... relaxing on beds (August 5, 2024). In this case, the media discourse produces consent by way of emotive optic, the happiness on screen is translated to the morality off screen. The feeling that it was liberation must have been right. These tactics putting together form some kind of mass deception. They are not lying; they exclude, rebrand and anesthetize. Neither is consent sought, it is crafted sentence by sentence. The media has a greater effect as it narrates change rather than reports change, through the silent machinations of grammar and imagery.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that media discourse is not merely a mirror of a reality, as it is an ideological process of forming political validity through selections of narratives in a strategic way. By reporting on the fall of Sheikh Hasina, *The Daily Star* exemplifies how even seemingly free media might be used to further the elite and transnational agenda at the expense of local political agency. The study concludes that the elimination of Hasina is a correction, rather than an event in dispute. By sourcing in a strategic way, from Western agencies, diplomats, and the military, the outlet institutionalizes external authority as fact. Fulton (2005)

wrote “our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative” (p. 1). Thus, while statements from Hasina supporters are rendered emotional or peripheral, guaranteeing their discursive marginality. As Foucault (1972) noted, discourse carries power, and it is doing that work here to remap the political landscape in the guise of objective news reporting.

As Dijk (2013) wrote “news should be studied primarily as a form of public discourse” (p. vii), the coverage of the army in the studied outlet is the most insightful. The army chief is depicted as a source of stability. Its officials are quoted uncritically, whereas demonstrators are portrayed as harbingers of democratic renewal. The absence of the terms “coup” or “intervention” is a reflection of an even more basic editorial policy: legitimization by omission.

This ideological fact of such coverage is to establish a dichotomy between a discredited past and a prospective that is projected as bright. The regime of Hasina is the perfect example of oppression and retrogression as compared to post-transition that is full of words, and full of positivity. This opposition is still present despite the emergent challenges in the form of perceived deficiencies but not actual deficiencies. Media does not only report events but scripts them into a pre-determined drama entitled restoration democracy. Counter-discourses to this, including Hasina’s alleged constitutional legitimacy as argued by her son, are tokenized and marginalized to celebratory regime change narratives. Acts of violence are contextualized to obliterate perpetrators and state action, consolidating impunity.

However, there are some limitations to this research. It concentrated solely on text reporting in a single media source during a short period of time, restricting its generalizability to wider media settings. Future studies can enrich the analysis by incorporating a comparative corpus of local and international media, diverse content formats such as editorials, visuals, and social media, and a longitudinal perspective to trace discursive shifts over time.

Ultimately, this research contends that media are not passive narrators of democratic journeys, but active cartographers of legitimacy. In scripting Hasina’s erasure and scripting a narrative of “inevitable renewal”, *The Daily Star* exemplifies how the architecture of discourse can displace the architecture of law. The danger lies not in distortion of information alone, but in *carefully managed* information where the illusion of neutrality becomes the most potent form of bias. If “language is the house of being”, as Heidegger (1998, p. 239) once wrote, then this house has been renovated to accommodate new tenants, leaving the old residents visible only as ghosts in the margins.

Acknowledgement

The abstract of this study was presented at the 2nd International Conference of Communication and Media Digital 2025 hosted by Universitas Islam Riau, Jl. Kaharuddin Nst No. 113, Simpang Tiga, Kec. Bukit Raya, Kota Pekanbaru, Riau 28284, Indonesia on December 10, 2025.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, S. (2025). Political dynamics of the July Revolution in Bangladesh: Party roles and responses. *CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(1), 26-43. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14959746>
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Azim, F., & Zaman, T. (2024). Awaiting a new dawn in Bangladesh. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 25(6), 951-961. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2024.2407264>

- Baranova, S., Kobayakova, I., & Brovkina, O. (2023). Lexical and stylistic derivation in mass media discourse. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(4), 58-66. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i4.5988>
- Barman, H., Mandal, P. S., Das, M., & Roy, K. (2024). Bangladesh at a crossroads: Protests mount over government job quotas and leadership's response. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*, 10(4), 159-172. DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v10.i4.2024.159-172
- Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707-731. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x>
- Boeva-Omelechko, N., Posternyak, K. P., Zheltukhina, M. R., Ponomarenko, E. B., Talybina, E. V., Kalliopin, A. K., & Ovsyannikova, M. N. (2019). Two images of Russia in British political mass media discourse of 1991 – 1993 and 2013 – 2019: Pragmastylistic Aspect. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 9(4), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcm/5952>
- Chowdury, D. S. R. H. (2024). The role of political parties in Bangladesh's July Revolution of 2024: Insights from Sufi perspectives. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(11), 2077-2093. <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2024.8110166>
- Chowdhury, N. S. (2025). The return of politics in Bangladesh. *Journal of Democracy*, 36(1), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2025.a947884>
- Dijk, T. A. V. (2013). *News as discourse*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dijk, T. A. V. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.
- Ecke, J. (2012). Manufacturing consent in the age of YouTube: The case of Kony 2012. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of International Studies*, 8(1), 131-144.
- Entman, R. M. (2004). *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fulton, H. (2005). Introduction: The power of narrative. In H. Fulton, R. Huisman, J. Murphet & A. Dunn (Eds.), *Narrative and media* (pp. 1-7). Cambridge University Press.
- Gryshchenko, O. (2024). Discourse: Knowledge, news, and fake intertwined. *Philological Review*, 1, 4-11. <https://doi.org/10.31499/2415-8828.1.2024.306854>
- Gu, C. (2019). (Re)manufacturing consent in English: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of government interpreters' mediation of China's discourse on PEOPLE at televised political press conferences. *Target*, 31(3), 465-499. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.18023.gu>
- Heidegger, M. (1998). Letter on "Humanism" (F. A. Capuzzi, Trans.). In W. McNeill (Ed.), *Pathmarks* (pp. 239-276). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon.
- Jackman, D. (2021). Students, movements, and the threat to authoritarianism in Bangladesh. *Contemporary South Asia*, 29(2), 181-197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2020.1855113>
- Kenzhekanova, K., Zhanabekova, M., & Konyrbekova, T. (2015). Manipulation in political discourse of mass media. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(4), 325-332. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n4s1p325>
- Lynch, M. (2014). *The Arab uprisings explained: New contentious politics in the Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Lynch, M. (2012). *The Arab uprising: The unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Lukin, A. (2019). *War and its ideologies: a social-semiotic theory and description*. Singapore: Springer.
- Pepermans, Y., & Maesele, P. (2018). Manufacturing consent: Rereading news on four climate summits (2000–2012). *Science Communication*, 40(5), 621-649. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547018798119>
- Proffitt, J. M. (2007). Challenges to democratic discourse: Media concentration and the marginalization of dissent. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 29(1), 65-84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714410601090696>
- Rahman, S., & Marjan, S. M. H. (2013). Role of mass media in setting agenda and manufacturing consent: A study on wars to rise of radical group (Hefajat-e-Islam) in Bangladesh. *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*, 4(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000171>
- Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analysing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schirmacher, B., & Mousavi, N. (2023). Introduction: The dynamics of truthfulness and media. In B. Schirmacher & N. Mousavi (Eds.), *Truth claims across media* (pp. 1-24). Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shesterina, A., Kaminskaya, T., & Zvereva, E. (2024). Media discourse as a research and media educational problem: Approaches and scientific schools. *Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)*, 20(3), 519-527. <https://doi.org/10.13187/me.2024.3.519>
- Steppat, D., Herrero, L. C., & Esser, F. (2021). Selective exposure in different political information environments – How media fragmentation and polarization shape congruent news use. *European Journal of Communication*, 37(1), 82-102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211012141>
- Vaccari, C., & Valeriani, A. (2021). *Outside the bubble: Social media and political participation in Western democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zhao, Y. (2018). Edward Herman and manufacturing consent in China. *Media Theory*, 2(2), 154-163. <https://hal.science/hal-02047715v1>

About the author

Hasan Shaikh is currently pursuing an MA in English Language Teaching (ELT), a thesis based program, at Khulna University, Bangladesh. He was the Regional Winner (Asia) in Linguistics at The Global Undergraduate Awards 2024. His works have been published in several international peer-reviewed journals. His research interests include discourse analysis, media linguistics, and political communication. Email: hasanshaikhrampal@gmail.com