

NEW MEDIA PRACTICES IN BANGLADESH

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This article examines the dynamics of new media and web journalism in Bangladesh with an emphasis on uses and practices. While much attention has been devoted to the uses of modern technology by citizen journalist.

In Bangladesh, online audience grows very fast with people getting more news via internet. Country's young generations are actively consuming online news. Any key topics of government are now widely written by bloggers, sharing on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

Keywords: New Media, Citizen Journalism, Social Media, Internet.

Introduction. The Bangladeshi media landscape of recent years is characterized by the continued expansion of the state's role in media activities. The state is directly or indirectly involved in the ownership of some media outlets. Additionally, the state controls media activities by way of regulatory bodies and media-related legislation.

While performing this role during 19th and 20th century when major reshuffle was taken place in print technology, Bangladeshi newspaper industries never faced threat of non-existence unless and until any government tried to interfere to the rights of freedom of speech of a news organization (1). History says that during all these years, print media of Bangladesh was always successful by transforming technological changes of the time. In the rapid changing digital age, the traditional media has also recognized its challenges and adopted technologies to continue their roles in the society. Most of the newsrooms have been

made computerized and adopted necessary new technologies by the end of the 1980s. Before end of 1990s, all the leading newspapers developed their web version keeping in mind growing up of new web-based readership (2). Readers' habits are changing and people want to get news quickly so news outlets should keep up to create more platforms to reach out to target audience. Today the mobile applications (app) of reputed online newspapers in Bangladesh are now available in the Google Play Store and Apple Store.

The most noticeable feature of Mass Media in Bangladesh in recent years is the role of the State in its control. Radio is the channel on which the State exercises its biggest influence, but also television. Three TV channels are entirely owned by the State and the rest of them are pro-government. Print Media is also state-friendly in its majority, and there is an official News agency as well. The lack of true opposition to the State in Mass Media has led to a new scenario where stories about economics play a much more important role than politics-related issues.

Mass Media is also following the path of modernization set by government-led plans such as “Digital Bangladesh” and “Vision 2021” which aim to present Bangladesh as a developed country during the celebrations of its 50 years of independence.

New media. Bangladeshi bloggers, ordinary citizens using mobile phones or digital cameras, and citizen journalists seem to have been increasing making an impact on the Bangladesh news industry.

How do social media and citizen journalism affect news production in Bangladesh? Traditionally when it comes to breaking sensitive and potentially damaging news there has been an approach that includes the use of silence or at least to delay announcing the event. User generated content, digital storytelling and consistently available live streaming is fuelling the news with different events from different perspectives.

In Bangladesh notable examples of citizen journalism reporting from major local events are: Rana Plaza collapsed in April 2013, Shahbag protest in February 2013 and the most recent ferry capsizing in Padma river in August 2014.

It is necessary to lay a theoretical and conceptual framework of New Media. At this point, it is probably convenient to establish a proper definition for the concept "New Media". New Media (3) can be understood as a platform based on the internet where people share information of any kind. It is characterized for being accessible from digital devices and for the large degree of participation that it permits. Related to this is also the concept "Web 2.0", which includes social network, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services and web applications.

New Media presents its own features that set it apart from the logics of traditional or "old" Media. According to the book "Language of New Media" written by Lev Manovich, these are five: numerical representations, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding (4).

New Media offers the possibility of interacting in real time with other people from all around the globe. Events such as the Arab Spring cannot be understood without taking into account the role played by New Media and that is why every world leader is willing to keep up on the latest internet advances in order to stay connected with the average citizens.

Social networks are essential in the process of spreading the news. Among the young population, it is via Facebook or Twitter that they get to know about what happens in the world. Nowadays it is not necessary to go straight to a newspaper website in order to know the latest news; if you participate in social networks, news come to you.

New media platforms in Bangladesh. A new media platform is a type of software that allows the user to create its own content. It is used by firms and newspaper to reach its customers and readers as well as for communicating people

willing to speak about any event happening live, like sports competitions, elections, war or international summit. In Bangladesh, Facebook is the most popular social networking site and newspapers take advantage of it for spreading news. Twitter, Skype, YouTube and Google Plus are not as popular, but are also well-known. The only official news agency of the country uses Picasa for sharing its photo content.

The way of understanding news in today's world has a lot to do with how they are shared and commented by the global community. Blogs are a tool to express the emotion that different events cause. Twitter is a developing network in Bangladesh. Twitter makes journalism better because it forces professionals to do better job. YouTube, on the contrary is much more popular. The interaction here is not as big, since most of users just watch the videos, being much fewer those who comment. Facebook is huge in Bangladesh, and the future looks bright for this social network, since half of its users are under the age of 24. Most of news sites in Bangladesh have a Facebook page and there are links to them in the official sites. This way, bloggers, journalists and students get faster and more often the news through Facebook than by the very online news websites. Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing cities on Facebook. The presence of Picasa (owned by Google) in Bangladesh is especially important given the fact that it is the only social media platform where the news agency BSS can be found. The last important means that deserves to be mentioned is Google+ and Instagram which is not very popular yet in Bangladesh. Very few news TV channels use Skype as a toll of video calling system. The leading private satellite TV channel Ekattor first introduced Skype for their Live interview with studio.

Bangladeshi blogosphere. Blogging is a New Media technology and a platform for immediate, chronological reporting. Many bloggers are professional journalists who also file articles and videos when the format suits. The traditional

Bangladeshi media especially news TV channels invite participation from anyone with a story to share.

The number of bloggers increases every day all around the world and Bangladesh is not an exception. Politicians, singers, artist and many other celebrities are joining to the Bangladeshi blogosphere. Blogs in English are not very common and most of people who blog are youngsters. The blogosphere played a huge impact in the 2014 parliamentary elections, since many people follow blogs to keep updated on what occurs in the political life of the country.

While inaugurated the first-ever Bangladeshi blog on citizen journalism, blog.bdnews24.com on February 11, 2011, that was focusing on the themes of the development of new media technology, impact of new and traditional media on society, and the future of journalism.

Conclusion. New media creates an open invitation to anyone in the world to participate in the journalistic process, and has made journalism more democratic, inclusive and diverse.

The new media opportunities and citizen journalism opened the golden gate to involve, inspire and encourage the unprivileged grassroots youth to participate in development process. The young generation has been inspired widely. Misguided grassroots youth could be saved from militancy, corruption, dogmatism as well as from terrorism by getting news and expressing their life views and experiences in global stages online by practicing citizen journalism.

With blogs and other social media people have started becoming more involved with breaking and disseminating news, forming opinions and having discussions with similar and dissimilar political views.

Within the different media organizations, much censorship has occurred due to editorial positions influenced by political leaning and favoritism to corporate powers. The new media platforms have been able to cater to people's need for fair and unbiased

news coverage in some cases where traditional media has failed, but that platform is still a privilege of the few. Until the media truly believes that the media is there to serve the people over and above all other interests, it will not be able to serve its purpose, to fulfil the people's right to know.

As it mentioned earlier that the Bangladesh government is giving topmost priority to information and communications technology to achieve its vision of 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021. Internet connectivity in Bangladesh is growing rapidly. According to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the number of internet users surpassed 39 million at the end of July, 2014 (5). The country has managed to become a technology-driven modern state, and has now become the ninth largest telecom market in the world.

Country's mobile phone sector is playing a key role of data enabling services across Bangladesh. The high speed mobile internet and cheap smartphones has truly made a data transfer connectivity between people with access to information and services. The number of mobile internet users surpassed 5 million.

That is why the development of the internet in Bangladesh depends on very big degree to the efforts played by mobile phone companies to spread the internet connection among its clients. It is the youngest segment of the population where can be seen a modern trend in the news consumption manners; online media is starting to leave behind traditional print newspapers.

Bangladeshi Media is quite updated on new technologies such as blogging, video sharing and social networks, especially in urban journalistic circles.

New Media is being not practiced enough in Bangladesh due to lack of resources and training. Moreover, in Bangladesh, not all news organization has a new media strategy. I suggest that proper training should be provided to Media workers who are yet to be

transformed from conventional system. Training is vital in this regard.

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