

**Social Media as a Tool of Communication in Bangladesh:
Pattern, Growth and Challenges****Dr. Sukanta Sarkar***Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Gambella University, Post Box-126, Ethiopia,**Corresponding author: **Sukanta Sarkar** sukantaeco@gmail.com**Received:**01-11-2024, **Accepted:**15-11-2024, **Available online:** **Published:** 31-12-2024

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The paper discussed the pattern, growth and challenges of social media platforms in Bangladesh. It has found that number of social media users in Bangladesh are increasing continuously. The rapid development of Bangladeshi media is remarkable. Facebook and YouTube are the leading social media platforms. Facebook is more popular among the young generation, aged between 18-24 years. Nearly 49.3% of users have fallen in this age category. Male are ahead as Facebook users then females. Universities in Bangladesh are using social media platforms for communication with staff, prospective students, alumni, current students, faculty and the community. The community's current affairs news mostly comes from Facebook. The benefits of changing behaviour through social media use are complex and multifaceted. Opportunities in digital platform marketing are also growing and have become important during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most significant consequences of the proliferation of social media is the weakening of social and interpersonal relationships. Bangladesh faces the challenge of transitioning to the digital realm. Low internet penetration has led to less social media use by the population. While the number of social media users is expected to increase with the improvement of internet infrastructure. The incidences of spread of misinformation and fake news creates confusion, misunderstanding and fear among the people. It is a serious issue relating to religion, health and politics. It has severe consequences on society. Therefore, government will introduce new policies for mitigating such challenges and will bring more transparency in uses of social media in the country.

Keywords: e- Facebook, Information and communication technology, Internet, Smartphone, and Social media

Introduction

Social media is an interactive technology that facilitates the creation, sharing, collection, and collaboration of content (such as ideas, interests, and other expressions) across virtual communities (Sarkar, 2024). In terms of social media, the word "social" refers to the platform's ability to facilitate social interaction. Social media can enhance and expand people's networks. Users access social media through web-based or dedicated applications on mobile devices (Sarker, 2021). Social media is used to capture memories, learn, and build friendships. They can be used to promote people, companies, products, and ideas. They can be used to publish, or broadcast news (Sharmin, 2024). LinkedIn, Xov, Baidu Tieba, Tumblr, Weibo, QZone, Pinterest, Instagram, ShareChat, WeChat, VK, Facebook, and Twitter are the popular social media platforms. Social media platforms gained popularity among the young population. Social media became more popular after the invention of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets (Talukder & Tanvir, 2022). Businesses use social media for e-commerce, relationship management/trust management, recruiting, competition, informal employee training/building, advertising, communication, marketing, business and economic purposes. Social media can support entrepreneurship and innovation by sharing success stories and facilitating access (Uddin & Karim, 2023).

Bangladesh is a fast growing country in south Asia. Its area is 148,460 square kilometres and is the eighth-most populous country within the world. It has a land border with India and Myanmar. It has a lengthy coastal line in the southern area (Khan & Abir, 2022). The Siliguri corridor separated Bangladesh from Bhutan. Bengali and English are the major languages in Bangladesh. Dhaka is the cultural, economic, and political hub. Chittagong is the port city and the second biggest metropolis. The nation has eight administrative divisions, and 64 districts (Rahman & Jahan, 2020). It is the 2nd largest economic system in South Asia. Bangladesh is full of natural beauty. Rivers, coasts and beaches, archaeological websites, spiritual locations, hills, forests, waterfalls, tea gardens surround it (Razib & Pinky, 2023). The most common religion in the country is Islam, with approximately 91.1% of the population practicing Islam. Bangladeshi Hindus are the country's second largest religious minority and the world's third largest Hindu community (Sabur, 2019). Buddhists are concentrated mostly among the tribal people of the Chittagong Hills. Christianity is the fourth largest religion at 0.3% of population. The law stipulates that education shall be free and compulsory for all children. Healthcare is a fundamental right of every citizen. Bangladeshi cuisine is as rich and diverse as its location and climate (Yousuf & Yousuf, 2023)

Literature Review

Ahmed et al. (2017) discussed the role of social media for empowerment of women and enriching their personal knowledge. It will increase their collective action and demonstrate gendered power. It increases cooperation among the people and spreads information among themselves. Karmruzzaman et al. (2018) highlighted the significance of social media in ICT-based agricultural development strategies in Bangladesh. Social media can be useful for the key driver of agricultural development. Sabur (2019) explores the scope and hindering factors for success of digital technology in Bangladesh. Accessing information, lack of technological knowledge, high costs and limited coverage are the main challenges for expansion of ICT in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas. Bednarz and Orelly (2020) found in survey that most of the respondents regularly access the internet and use two social networking sites most frequently, i.e. Facebook and YouTube. Product information is sent to these media outlets so that customers can make purchasing decisions for FMCG products. The respondents who showed most interest in social media were mostly male and young. Rahman and Jahan (2020) suggested that there is a need for information on ICT laws and the proper use of social media among the young people are more important. These findings will serve as important recommendations for further research by policy makers/government leaders, NGO leaders, and development experts.

Hoque et al. (2020) found that social media offers a new dialogue where consumers can communicate with companies; share their good and bad experiences with other customers, exchange ideas, and ultimately influence the company's business decisions and customer needs. Marketers are building connections across various social media platforms. Amit et al. (2021) identifies current initiatives worldwide in the field of disruptive cyber technologies that have achieved some success in preventing and combating cybercrime. The findings suggest that Bangladesh can successfully use online/digital technologies to combat violent extremism. Sarker (2021) investigated the communication patterns of high school students with their friends and family. The findings show that the participants' communication patterns with their friends and family have changed significantly, with them preferring to communicate more in the virtual world than in the real world. Hasibuzzaman et al. (2022) emphasizes the need to address various issues such as social and mental health problems in the country and how they affect our lives as a secondary source. They also discussed the evil effects of social media on society. Hossain et al. (2022) found that there are ethical risks when doing journalism on Facebook. The study concluded that for journalists in Bangladesh, social media is a good way to share news and get quick feedback from the audience.

Khan and Abir (2022) discussed the role of marketing communication and its role in the tourism and hospitality industries. This study will enable researchers, academics, policy makers and government officials in the tourism sector to understand the importance of marketing communication. Talukder and Tanvir (2022) drew attention to the role of social media in the spread of radicalism among Bangladeshi youth and the factors behind it. In recent years, issues of radicalism and violent extremism have become a phenomenon in global politics and development planning, while young people are also participating in the content published by terrorist organizations

on social media. Roy Samya (2023) investigated the factors leading to the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 on social media in Bangladesh. Trust in sources can lead to news being shared quickly on social media platforms without proper verification. Other factors such as the time spent on social media platforms and the type of content shared also contribute to the spread of fake news on social media platforms. Uddin and Karim (2023) reported that farmers are connected through social media such as Facebook groups, messaging groups, Facebook pages, and YouTube channels. They prefer social media over traditional agricultural information. They are used for many purposes, from obtaining agricultural product ideas to marketing of products. Razib and Pinky (2023) focused on research on public social networking platforms such as Facebook. Many students are hesitant to share their thoughts on social media. Users are concerned that their posts or shares will be used against them and want to avoid being attacked for their opinions.

Ferdous and Huda (2023) found that failures are not uncommon. Studies show that the negative effects of social media are increasing and there is an urgent need to ensure that social media is used in the public interest. Yousuf and Yousuf (2023) investigated internet use and its impact on children in Bangladesh, considering global internet use. In this era of rapid technological advancement, no one can escape the internet, especially children, who are the largest users of the internet. Hossain and Haque (2023) determined significance and factors that affect the use of social media during COVID-19 pandemic. Social media is a major source of information about COVID-19. Nazmunnahar (2023) found that the majority of social networking site users reported symptoms of mental illness. The paper suggests that management of social welfare and health services would improve the situation. Islam and Bhuiyan (2023) focus on public media adoption in Bangladesh. It is observed that most public institutions in Bangladesh use different social media platforms, Facebook being the most important one. However, social media accounts often function as traditional communication channels with limited public participation. Roy et al. (2023) found that religious intolerance, lack of legal protection, and a culture of injustice are distinct, key factors contributing to media corruption.

Sharmin (2024) highlights the important role that digital media plays today's in workplaces. It changes the traditional boundaries and fosters collaboration and integration. Amin et al. (2024) highlights the importance of media coverage in providing support to cancer patients in Bangladesh, while also emphasizing the importance of addressing issues such as data reliability and private matters. Mosharraf et al. (2024) found that social media use has a positive effect on academic achievement. In support of this theory, mental health was found to have a positive effect on social interaction, good relationships, and academic achievement. Haque et al. (2024) concluded that the popularity of internet and e-commerce technologies can be attributed to their effectiveness and ease of use in real-world applications. It brings together internet/e-commerce technology, marketing communication, and the long-term success of small and medium-sized enterprises. Chowdhury (2024) stated that social media plays a significant role in facilitating communication, sharing information, and curating content among university students in Bangladesh. Over-dependence on social media can lead to addiction and

hinder innovation as students tend to overuse available resources.

From the above analysis it has been clear that social media are playing a vital role in the societies of Bangladesh. Public institutions in Bangladesh use different social media platforms.

Objectives

The objectives of this paper is to study the pattern, growth and challenges of social media platforms in Bangladesh.

Methods and Materials

Author has used descriptive research in the report. Secondary data was used in this study. Secondary data collected from international publications, research articles, www.statista.com etc. A range of qualitative analysis methods, including tabulation, content and textual analysis were used to study the social media status in Bangladesh and challenges in specific.

It is more popular among the youth, especially due to the mass use of smartphones. Majority of the articles/ reports discussed the status of social media in Bangladesh. Few of them discussed the growth and challenges of social media platforms in Bangladesh.

Results and Discussion

Marketing plan helps to promote products and connect with customers. Advertising can be divided into three categories: paid advertising, earned media, and accessible media. Brand awareness, engaging with customers through conversations, and providing customer service are vital for expansion of business. Social media can promote products and connect with potential customers. Social media can influence voters during elections. Activists and scientists use social media platforms to report human rights violations, and share scientific knowledge and research. Social media is currently used as the latest and most important information. Social media can be a tool for supporting youth health because it allows young people to discuss health issues that they find relevant. Although different cultures have different ways of communicating, social media facilitates cultural exchange and communication

Table 1: Number of social network users worldwide as of January 2023, by Regions

Region	User of Social Media	Region	User of Social Media
Asia	2941.01	Southern Europe	189.28
Eastern Asia	1246.98	Western Asia	173.9
Southern Asia	961.81	Northern Africa	166.18
Americas	819.29	Western Africa	105.91
Europe	681.56	Eastern Africa	80.82
South-east Asia	527.23	Southern Africa	49.43
North America	447.82	Central Asia	31.11
Africa	427.05	Northern Europe	29.68
South America	316.78	Central America	28.99
Central and Western Europe	271.29	Central Africa	25.71

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/454772/number-social-media-user-worldwide-region/>, Note: Figure in in millions.

Table 1 discussed the number of social network users in various regions. It has found that Asia has the largest number of social media users. The total number of social media users worldwide has reached 4.33 billion, accounting for more than half of the world's population. Among Southeast Asian countries, Pakistan added 9 million users between 2020 and 2021. In China alone, 85 million new social network users were added in the last 12

months. In January 2021, the number of internet users in Bangladesh reached 47.61 million, an increase of 7.7 million from 2020. The number of active connections is 165.8 million. The number of confirmed cases increased in Bangladesh in January 2021, with 1.7 million cases from January 2020 to January 2021.

Table 2: Social networking services with the most users, January 2024

Network	User's	Origin	Network	User's	Origin
Facebook	3049	USA	FB Messenger	979	USA
YouTube	2,491	USA	Telegram	800	Russia
WhatsApp	2,000	USA	Douyin	752	China
Instagram	2000	USA	Snapchat	750	USA
TikTok	1,526	China	Kuaishou	685	China
WeChat	1336	China	Twitter	619	USA

Source: <https://www.statista.com/>, Note: Figure in in millions.

Table 2 discussed the global leading social media platforms. It has found that the majority of social media platforms originate from the United States. TikTok, WeChat, Douyin, and Kuaishou originated from China and Telegram from Russia. Facebook has the highest number of users, followed by YouTube. Facebook and WhatsApp are popular social media and networking platforms. It is owned by the American technology group Meta. Through WhatsApp, instant messaging and voice/ video calling is possible.

YouTube is an online video-sharing platform. It is owned by Google, and was founded on February 14, 2005. Instagram is a video-sharing social networking service. It is owned by Meta Platforms. TikTok is a short-form video hosting service. It is

owned by Chinese internet company ByteDance. It allows users to post videos of particular length. WeChat is an instant messaging, and mobile payment application platform. WeChat supports different messaging methods, including text messages, voice messages, walkie-talkies, and stickers. Messenger is an instant messaging service platform. Users can send messages and exchange images, videos, stickers, audio, and data. Telegram Messenger is another platform for instant messaging service. Users can post stories, create large public groups, or share a news update with a specific audience. Snapchat is a multimedia instant messaging application and provider. Users can share short texts, images, and videos, often in short messages in Tweeter.

Pattern and Growth of Social Media Platforms in Bangladesh

As of early 2024, the number of internet users in Bangladesh reached 77.36 million, with internet penetration reaching 44.5%. As of January 2024, there were 52.9 million social media users in Bangladesh, representing 30.4% of the total population. As of early 2024, there were 188.6 million active cellular connections in Bangladesh, representing 108.5% of the

total population. As of January 2024, the population of Bangladesh was 173.8 million. As of early 2024, 40.8% of Bangladesh's population lives in urban areas and 59.2% in rural areas. As of January 2024, there were 52.9 million social media users in Bangladesh, accounting for 30.4% of the country's total population. This is a 22.3% increase from 9.7 million users the previous year. Social media has become an increasingly common part of daily life in Bangladesh.

Table 3: Number of users in the Digital media market Bangladesh

Year	Number of User	Year	Number of User
2017	19.85	2021	43.24
2018	24.49	2022	45.88
2019	30.03	2023	51.29
2020	36.88	2024	56.82

Source: <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1435427/number-of-users-digital-media-digital-media-market-bangladesh>, Note: in million individuals

Table 3 depicted the number of users in the digital media market Bangladesh. It has found that the number of social media platforms users in Bangladesh are increasing continuously. It was 19.85 million in 2017, and 43.24 million in 2021, and finally 56.82 million in 2024. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are deeply ingrained in Bangladeshi society and are shaping behaviour patterns and attitudes in new ways. The rapid development of Bangladeshi media is remarkable. With over 40 million Facebook users and counting, interest in these platforms is increasing, making the country one of the most digitally

connected countries in South Asia. From cities to remote corners, smartphones have become ubiquitous devices, opening doors to a virtual world where people make friends, share news and signage. One of the most significant consequences of the proliferation of social media is the weakening of social and interpersonal relationships. In a society that has traditionally valued family and community ties, the rise of virtual connections is beginning to undermine personal relationships. Studies have linked media use to poor mental health, including depression, anxiety and sleep problems.

Table 4: Social Media Statistics of Bangladesh, Dec. 2023 - Dec.2024.

Time	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	reddit	Tumblr	Other
2023-12	93.64	4.54	0.35	0.64	0.29	0.42	0.08	0.02	0.01
2024-01	86.84	10.06	0.59	1.15	0.57	0.61	0.12	0.05	0.01
2024-02	89.02	8.23	0.44	1.31	0.59	0.28	0.11	0.02	0.01
2024-03	88.82	8.25	0.6	1.27	0.69	0.18	0.16	0.03	0.01
2024-04	74.37	20.18	1.79	1.77	0.93	0.3	0.44	0.11	0.01



2024-05	58.64	35.25	2.63	1.8	0.95	0.28	0.34	0.04	0.01
2024-06	70.73	24.37	1.51	1.78	1.06	0.25	0.25	0.03	0.02
2024-07	79.18	12.36	4.6	1.73	1.17	0.36	0.5	0.04	0.02
2024-08	56.4	23.19	12.26	3.63	1.98	1.18	1.16	0.11	0.03
2024-09	78.72	13.03	3.87	1.88	1.14	0.58	0.65	0.04	0.02
2024-10	91.64	4.33	2.46	0.76	0.41	0.19	0.2	0.01	0.01
2024-11	89.92	5.33	1.6	1.35	0.65	0.57	0.55	0.02	0.02
2024-12	93.97	3.14	0.7	1.06	0.48	0.29	0.33	0.02	0.01

Source: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/bangladesh>, Note: figure shows percentage (%).

Table 4 discussed the social media statistics of Bangladesh during December 2023 to December 2024. It has found that Facebook is the leading social media platform followed by YouTube. In the last one year more Facebook used the platform during October to March. On the other hand, April to August are the peak period of using YouTube. Universities in Bangladesh are using social media platforms for communication with staff, prospective students, alumni, current students, faculty, and the community. Misinformation and fake

news are also spreading on platforms like Facebook, eroding trust in news and authoritative information and dividing and separating societies. But there are some benefits to sharing on social media. Many people in Bangladesh are aware of the effects of spending too much time online and are taking steps to manage their online habits. Initiatives such as digital detox camps and grassroots initiatives to promote digital literacy and online behaviour have occurred to encourage people to approach technology with caution and balance.

Table 5: Facebook users in Bangladesh, April 2024

Year	Gender		Total (%)	Year	Gender		Total (%)
	Male	Female			Male	Female	
18-24	29.1	20.2	49.3	45-54	3.1	1.2	4.3
25-34	21.6	9.9	31.5	55-64	1.2	0.4	1.6
35-44	9.0	3.3	12.3	65+	0.3	0.7	1.0

Source: <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-bangladesh/2024/04/>

Table 5 represented gender-wise Facebook users in Bangladesh. It has found that Facebook is more popular among the young generation, aged between 18-24 years. Nearly 49.3% of users have fallen in this age category. Male are ahead as Facebook users then females. As of April 2024, there were 66,766,100 Facebook users in Bangladesh, which is 37.4% of the country's population. The vast majority (64.6%) of them were male. The largest group of users was in the 18-24 age group (32.9 million). The largest gap between men and women was in the 25-34 age

group. Men accounted for 14.4 million. The community's current affairs news mostly comes from Facebook. Most young people in Bangladesh use Facebook to use social media. The benefits of changing behaviour through social media use are complex and multifaceted. While these platforms have changed the way people connect and express their voices, the uncontrolled use of these online spaces has also had negative consequences.

Challenges before Social Media Platforms in Bangladesh

Bangladesh faces the challenge of transitioning to the digital realm. The International Monetary Fund has said that the country's economy has not been in a recession since 1975. Despite Bangladesh's impressive economic growth, internet penetration remains low compared to its neighbours like India. Official government figures put internet penetration at 71.4%, but the International Telecommunication Union estimates the actual rate to be lower than 30%, doubled by transmission. This rate is lower than in other countries. Low internet penetration has led to less social media use by the population. However, it is worth noting that almost everyone who goes online is a social media user. While the number of social media users is expected

to increase with the improvement of internet infrastructure. Grameenphone Ltd., Robi Axiata Limited., Banglalink Digital Communications Ltd., Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd., and Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd. are the leading telecom operating companies in Bangladesh.

The role of digital platforms in business is growing in Bangladesh. Opportunities in digital platform marketing are also growing and have become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital platforms involve a relationship between three parties: the platform, sellers, and buyers. Consumers often see benefits such as greater convenience,

greater choice, and greater transparency. The use of digital platforms helps improve consumer choice, create value and competitiveness, while also enabling participation from all segments of society. There are at least four key factors that will enable Bangladesh to benefit from the rise of digital platforms: (a) the increase in the number of internet users in the country; (b) greater online participation among businesses; (c) other services; and (d) making smartphones widely available to the majority of people. With the widespread use of the internet, many entrepreneurs in Bangladesh are turning to digital platforms to grow their businesses. While credit cards are still not preferred by many, payment methods such as mobile payment and cash on delivery are widely used. The potential for fake news, hate speech and political correctness, negative cultural influences on mental health comparisons, privacy concerns, government censorship and lack of digital literacy often lead to a lack of accountability online.

Conclusion

Social media has become an important part of the daily lives of Bangladeshis, with many using platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Social media has both positive and negative effects on the country. It influences politics, entertainment, and sports, and causes mental health problems and stress in society. For many, social media is a place to get news and updates, providing a quick way to get information about local and global events. Social media has transformed politics in Bangladesh, allowing ordinary citizens to express their opinions, question the government, and voice their views on important issues. Facebook is a common social media platform in Bangladesh. According to metadata, there are 52.9 million Facebook users in Bangladesh which constituted nearly 30% of the country. There are many benefits of social media. Uses of social media in business and trade are increasing. Social media advertising is more effective to reach more people. Traders communicate with their customers and promote their brands.

Social media has also raised important issues for Bangladesh, including mental health issues, privacy concerns, and changes in political and social discourse. Internet and smartphone use in Bangladesh has increased rapidly over the past decade. Key issues related to media in Bangladesh include: (a) significant digital divide and limited internet access in rural areas; (b)

There are many challenges before the online social media platforms in Bangladesh. Many people rely on social media for updated news and information. The incidences of spread of misinformation and fake news is not new. Such news creates confusion, misunderstanding and fear among the people. It is a more serious issue relating to religion, health and politics. It has serious consequences on society. So, proper checking or authentication of information is more important. Reliable news organizations and Fact-checking organizations can play vital roles in this regard. Jointly reviewing information before sharing it can reduce the spread of misinformation. Lack of access to computers and unreliable internet access at slow speeds; preventing digital platform companies and employees from evading taxes is a threat to the security of digital platforms.

concerns about legal restrictions on the dissemination of news; (c) security concerns; and fake news, (d) language barriers and concerns, especially among young people; and (e) excessive use of social media. Spending too much time on social media can lead to cyberbullying, social anxiety, depression, and age-related inappropriate behaviour. A comprehensive review of governance processes, technology and business processes found that cybersecurity risks, governance issues, and housing restrictions were key issues. Here people can share their ideas and connect with politicians. This also helps ensure transparency and accountability in government.

The protests in Bangladesh demonstrate the use of social media to spread lies and manipulate public opinion. Social media is useful for promoting transparency and dialogue with the public. Given the importance of the digital platform sector to Bangladesh, the following policies can be recommended to support the development of the sector: (a) developing a national digital platform sector strategy; (b) providing people with language, and skills, (c) developing national digital platform sector standards for the use of information generated by digital platforms; (d) attracting foreign investors for the development of digital platforms; and (e) understanding of digital technologies.

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