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HOW NEWSPAPERS' SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS IN BANGLADESH USE OFFICIAL  
SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
The School of Journalism and New Media  
at  
The University of Mississippi

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Ahmed Shatil Alam

May 2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

For the last several years, the newspaper industry in Bangladesh has been using social media for disseminating news and connecting with readers. But the question remains how the social media journalists are using these social media accounts and what roles they perform every day in the newsrooms. This exploratory study sheds light on both issues through the lens of the Gatekeeping Theory. Following interviews with 13 social media journalists who worked for 11 national newspapers in Bangladesh, the study found that the overall traditional gatekeeping roles of these journalists had undergone substantial changes as they were heavily concerned about audience demands and reactions. Social media journalists also feel pressured from their bosses, advertisers, and the audience to maintain their gatekeeping roles. These journalists even considered their jobs as “marketing” or “selling” of news and experienced volatile treatments from their colleagues in the newsrooms. Although they are in charge of multiple jobs alongside managing the newspapers’ websites, most of them had no prior training of any sort in social media management.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My deepest and most sincere gratitude goes first and foremost to the almighty Allah who has kept me safe during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed thousands of lives, infected millions of others, created disarray in societies, locked down billions of people in quarantines or in isolation, and has brought the entire world to a standstill.

It was not easy for me to finish this last and crucial task of my graduate study program at a time when we hear of people dying in hundreds across the globe every day. But, I have at last managed to finish it on time with the support of my thesis committee members, my school, family, and friends.

I would like to convey my utmost level of gratitude to my thesis committee chair Professor Iveta Imre, Ph.D., for guiding and mentoring me for the last six months in completing the task. I am also immensely grateful to my two other thesis committee members – Professor Joseph Atkins and Professor Kristen Swain, Ph.D., for their kind support in all aspects of my thesis project.

I express my gratitude to Professor Debora Wenger, Ph.D., for her generous support and guidelines during the conceptualization of the study. Besides, I am thankful to all the people associated with my beloved School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi and to the school itself for all care and support it has provided me with since the Fall of 2018 when I joined as an international student from Bangladesh.

All my family members deserve my appreciation as they relentlessly helped me psychologically and in other ways while I was working on the thesis project. They were a thousand miles away from me but they were always just a phone call away to support me.

My utmost gratitude goes to my friends Khadimul, Mahfuzul, Kazi, Wahida, Anik, Deepto, Foyez, Mohiuddin, Ananta, Tashfin, Jahid, Shahriar and Oyan who helped me in their own ways to complete my thesis project.

Last but not the least, I am extremely thankful to all my journalist colleagues who helped me to find and communicate with the participants of this project over the course of the study alongside the participants themselves who took time out from their busy schedules to sit for interviews with me to share their thoughts and experiences so that I could go one step further in reaching my academic goals. Every minute you spared for this study has contributed to the fulfillment of this project. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking part in this project.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The importance of social media has already been established with its booming usage by billions of people all over the world. The users of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and others are increasing significantly in number every day (Kemp, 2019). At the same time, social media has become a source of news for both the readers and news producers (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019) and the usage of social media by adults for news consumption has seen great momentum in the USA, Europe and other countries (Shearer, 2018, Newman et.al. 2016 and Sumida, Walker, & Mitchell, 2019). A Pew Research Center study in 2018 revealed that social media had become more popular than newspapers. Twenty percent of adults in the USA said that they often consumed news on social media compared to 16 percent of adults who said that they read news via the print media (Shearer, 2018). In 2017, the number of citizens who read news on social media was almost equal to those who read print newspapers (Shearer, 2018). The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism revealed almost similar findings through a cross-national research report conducted in 2016. The study report (Newman et al. 2016) revealed that 51 percent of the respondents claimed to consume news via social media and that Facebook was the most important social media platform for sharing, finding, and reading/watching news. Given the situation, the news organizations, whether they were based in the western or eastern part of the world, were concentrating more on providing news to their audience using social media platforms.

## **OBJECTIVE:**

With the rising popularity of news consumption on social media, news organizations across the globe recruited social media journalists to manage their social media presence. These types of jobs were now seeing expansions and experiencing a growing momentum. Studies on the ways news organizations used their social media accounts with the aid their teams of social media journalists and their roles have already been conducted particularly in the western part of the world but no such study has been conducted on the media industry of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's news media industries such as the print, broadcast or even online/digital industries have been using social media platforms on realizing their importance and following the global trend dictated by news industries around the world. As the newspapers in Bangladesh opened their social media platforms, they needed to employ journalists to manage their social media accounts. Therefore, the study aims to investigate how social media journalists in Bangladesh's newspapers used their newspapers' social media accounts and what roles they performed in newsrooms.

In short, all of these journalists were playing important roles as gatekeepers as they were the last persons through whom information, contents or news articles reached the audiences (White, 1950). The study was, therefore, conducted with the support of the Gatekeeping Theory of Communications. Coined by psychologist Kurt Lewin and later used by David Manning White in 1950 for the first time (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014), the Gatekeeping Theory is necessary to investigate and understand the roles of any gatekeeper in the news media industry. Emphasizing the importance of the theory, Shoemaker et al. (2009) stated that without gatekeeping, the journalists' job of selecting information and subsequently making use of it to craft a piece of news would be "impossible". The researcher also mentioned that gatekeeping roles included selecting, writing, editing, etc. different types of information and turning them into news and then delivering

it to the masses. These roles played by social media journalists were revealed by earlier studies such as (DeVito, 2014 and Curries, 2012). This is why the author of this study investigated the roles of social media journalists and the ways they worked across social media platforms to disseminate information to audiences in Bangladesh's print newsrooms through the lens of the theory.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA: DEFINITION AND EVOLUTION**

Merriam Webster dictionary first used the term social media in 2004 (“Social Media,” n.d.), defining it as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users created online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” (“Social media,” n.d.). The term was not added to the English language until 2011 although it first came into use in early 2000 (DeVito, 2014). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) used the historical backgrounds and technical specifications of social media to define and classify it as “a group of Internet-based applications” that permitted creation and exchange of user-generated content and was built on “the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

As access to internet expanded across the globe, social media became a popular concept. Bruce and Susan Abelson founded the first social media site, Open Diary, where online diary writers united as members of a community (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). It was launched in 1998 but shut down operations in 2014 (DeVito, 2014). Other sites such as MySpace and Facebook followed which were opened in 2003 and 2004 respectively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Friendster, however, was the first of its kind which was later trumped out by Facebook and MySpace (Sundheim, 2011). Friendster started in 2002, but was closed due to technical difficulties which included that users “could barely log into the website for two years” (Riese, 2017).

Myspace was launched officially in January 2004 (Riese, 2017). It became hugely popular among people who connected with friends by sharing texts, photos and multimedia contents while some news organizations used the platform ("MySpace," 2004) to share audio, video and other types of contents. The site still claims to have 1 billion users worldwide (Spangler, n.d.).

Facebook was launched in February 2004. According to Statista, it had 2.45 billion active monthly users aged 13 or over worldwide in 2019, making it the largest social media site ("Facebook users worldwide 2019," n.d.). One of Facebook's backbone is Newsfeed, which started in September, 2006. Facebook also hosts photo and video uploading options, likes (a reaction button that now incorporates other emoticons), gaming apps, events, and even a private message platform called "Messenger" (Riese, 2017). It has now become highly popular among news organizations (DeVito, 2014; Curries, 2012 and Tandoc and Vos, 2016) which now post stories, photos, audio and video contents, graphics and live videos on the platform to disseminate news to people across the globe. A 2018 Pew Research Center estimated that 67 percent of Facebook users in the USA read news on this social media site (Shearer & Matsa, 2018).

In 2005, social media platform YouTube hit the market. The site saw enormous growth with 20 million monthly visitors in 2006 (Riese, 2017). YouTube is gaining ground rapidly in news consumption as 38 percent of its users shared that they got news from YouTube in 2018 compared to 32 percent of users in 2017 (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). News organizations now disseminate their video contents, even live programs on YouTube (DeVito, 2014; Curries, 2012 and Tandoc and Vos, 2016). Many other organizations now have their own YouTube channels to broadcast news, documentaries, snippets and even analysis while some are connecting with audiences through a feature called YouTube Direct (Rick, 2009).

Twitter was launched on July 15, 2006. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined Twitter as “a microblogging application” through which users could send text messages, called Tweets, of up to 140 characters. Twitter later doubled its text message limit to 280 characters for every post, according to Editors (2019) and added the hashtag or ‘#’ to connect the tweets and discussions over a topic in one place (“Getting started,” n.d.). Along with the text message option, users can upload pictures, short video/s, retweet” (sharing others’ posts), and “retweet with comments” (sharing posts from other Twitter accounts with comments) (Editors, 2019). Different news organizations, including local and national or print and broadcast outlets, use Twitter differently. Local and broadcast organizations post more multimedia packages than newspapers in the USA (Armstrong and Fangfang, 2010).

Different news organizations such as ABC, Buzz Feed, ProPublica, etc. are using various techniques as well to disseminate their information to their audiences, including live tweets during live events, broadcasting of live video on Twitter to provide analysis, threading multiple tweets while sharing texts of more than 280 characters on live or ongoing events (Patel, n.d.). The other ways in which the news organizations are using Twitter comprise posting tweets with images, screen grabs, maps, charts, and graphics to illustrate a story better to get improved audience engagement or creating moments comprising a title, description, Tweets and a selected cover image to tell stories (Patel, n.d.).

Instagram was first launched as an image sharing site in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Riese, 2017). It later introduced a 15-second video sharing option in 2013 and launched “IGTV” — its long-form video service — for users in 2018 (Taylor, 2013 and Newcomb, 2018). News organizations are now using this platform to share photos and short length videos. Many news organizations such as BBC, National Geographic, and New Yorker Magazine are now

sharing their news and feature contents with the aid of tools available on the social media site ("top media publishers on Instagram," 2020).

LinkedIn, a social media site for professional connections, was officially launched in 2003. It facilitates browsing for jobs and sharing of professional experiences, instant messaging, posting of text and multimedia contents, reactions to posts by "like" or other emoticons and uploading of resumes, CVs, professional experiences, tips, accomplishments, awards, recommendations, and referrals from colleagues, among other things (Johnson, 2019).

Reddit, known as the front page of the internet (Riese, 2017), was initiated in 2005 by Steve Hoffman and Alexis Ohanian ("Homepage - Reddit," n.d.). It features common social media options like posts and comments along with an exclusive option called "vote".

Snapchat started operations in 2011 and is currently being used by 180 million people worldwide every day (Riese, 2017). It allows sharing of photos, individual or group chats and users have recently also been able to read news articles from the New York Times, Harper Bazaar or others through the platform ("What is Snapchat?," n.d.).

All the above mentioned social media platforms are also used by news organizations to engage with more audiences. As is the case with Facebook, media organizations are now sharing their contents, including both text and multimedia, on LinkedIn. A Pew research showed around 30 percent of LinkedIn users in the USA were now consuming news on the site (Shearer and Matsa, 2018). In some cases, the news organizations were found to post job vacancy advertisements and recruiting employees through the social media. Like Facebook and others, Reddit is also being used by national, regional and even international news organizations and magazines such as Washington Post, National Geographic, Dallas Morning News, BuzzFeed News and Virginia Pilot.

News organizations are sharing their website news links with a highlight about the news article on their Reddit accounts ("News media organizations with a Reddit presence?," n.d.)

Snapchat has become a major news source for the younger generation and is now just behind Facebook as a news source among the young US population (Locklear, 2018). News organizations such as CNN, MSNBC, Washington Post and ESPN are producing recorded and live video contents which can be found for 24 hours on their Snapchat accounts (Bipat T et. al. 2019).

WhatsApp, according to what it said on its website, was started as an alternative option to short messaging services ("About WhatsApp," n.d.) and now hosts more than 1 billion users across the globe. Users can send and receive photos, videos, documents, and location as well as voice calls along with text messages ("About WhatsApp," n.d.). A recent study (Boczek and Koppers 2020) on German news outlets' use of WhatsApp found that these organizations used their own WhatsApp channels to connect and share news contents with audiences. Audiences in many parts of the world are also now sharing news contents over WhatsApp groups they belong to or with peers.

The overall growth of social media usage over the years has been evident and as per a Pew Research study (Shearer & Matsa, 2018), the popularity of consuming news via social media has been increasing at the same time as well. Different social media platforms are offering a wide range of features which are being used by news outlets across the globe. These features also enable the news outlets to disseminate the news and contents they generate to a wider audience groups who use social media regularly.

## *INTERNET BOOM, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND DIGITALIZATION OF BANGLADESH*

### *MEDIA:*

Bangladesh has seen a significant rise in its number of internet users in the last couple of years (“Bangladesh: Freedom House,” n.d.). In 2018, 18 percent of the country’s 160 million citizens were using the internet with the aid of mobile phones, broadband, WiMAX, and PSTN services (Murtuza, 2018). The internet regulatory authority of the country, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, stated that 57.2 percent of the total population now actively subscribed to the internet. This means that the country was estimated to have more than 91.2 million internet users as of 2019 (Unctad, 2019). The number of internet users in the country amounted to more than 96 million at the end of June 2019 (“Bangladeshi Internet users reach nearly 100 mln,” 2019, July 29).

According to available data, 18 percent of the total population of 30 million people who had access to the internet used one or another kind of social media platform in Bangladesh. Among the social media users, the majority used Facebook (“Social media users 30 million in Bangladesh: Report,” 2018 March 23). This rise in the number of internet and social media users had created a significant impact on the media landscape of Bangladesh. The media industry was now opting for “increasing digitalization” (Azad, 2020). Both large and small newspapers had their own websites to disseminate news to their readers while some of the large ones were running their own Facebook pages, Twitter and Instagram accounts and even YouTube channels (Azad, 2020).

Prothom Alo, a Bengali newspaper, is one of the most circulated newspapers in Bangladesh, whose online portal, Prothomalo.com, is claimed to be the most accessed Bangladeshi website in the world (Azad, 2020). The newspaper’s Facebook page has 14 million followers. Among the English dailies, The Daily Star is one of the most popular which went online with its

website in 2006, but experienced a significant uplift when its digital section expanded and developed with the recruitment of more staff members. It has diversified the content surface on its website and at present boasts of a 3-million follower base on its Facebook page and other social media handles. The newspaper experienced significant growth in its revenue earnings in 2017 and grew by 53 percent compared to 2016, thanks to its digital wings (Azad, 2020).

Newspapers like New Age had 704 thousand followers, Dhaka Tribune had 1.3 million followers, Samakal had 1.8 million followers, Ittefaq had 2.6 million followers, Jugantor had 6.6 million followers and the recently launched, The Business Standard, had 30 thousand followers as of January 2020. Many of these newspapers also have accounts on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms.

The other newspapers have their online versions and accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as well (Gayen, 2019).

Bangladesh as a country has seen a significant growth in its overall number of internet users (“Bangladesh: Freedom House,” n.d.), and this is creating a heavy impact on the media industry, if not whole then largely, to introduce mechanisms to disseminate their news and contents to the millions of audiences who roamed about the cyberspace as well as across social media (Azad, 2020 and Gayen, 2019). Although, it is not clear how many media outlets in Bangladesh owned social media accounts, but Gayen (2019) estimated that almost all newspapers used social media platforms for producing and disseminating “contents”.

### **WHO IS A SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR? EMERGENCE, GROWTH AND IMPORTANCE:**

The Economist, one of the largest print news organizations in the world, was largely facilitated by its social media activities undertaken under a new social media strategy that helped

the magazine to attract more readers to the website than before and helped it to earn more revenue (Southern, 2019). Southern (2019) also wrote that the growth of traffic took place when The Economist expanded its' social media team.

Social media teams started to grow in numbers in the newsrooms in the second decade of this new century when social media started to gain popularity (Alejandro, 2010). The first social media teams in newsrooms emerged in the largest media organizations of the world. The decade in its early years saw the newsrooms in large organizations — the BBC and New York Times in 2008 and USA Today in 2009 — arming themselves with social media teams (DeVito, 2014). The presence of social media editors under different names, including as Audience Development Managers and Community Managers, was found in the newsrooms of other countries as well (Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc Jr, 2018).

DeVito (2014) noted that in the very early stages of social media usage by news outlets, these journalists in the newsrooms of many organizations were also called Online Editors who were primarily responsible for communicating with readers over the comment section of their websites and with readers of social media accounts to build organization-audience interactivity. According to Aybar. B (2019), due to the evolution of the social media, a new job market was established in the field of journalism. Media organizations badly needed to connect themselves with their audiences digitally and what could be a better option than social media, argued Aybar (2019). She also wrote that the available positions in the newsrooms for these jobs came under the designations of Social Media Manager, Social Editor, Social Media Specialist, and Digital Media Manager who were basically responsible for audience engagement. Terming these jobs more or less as marketing, Aybar wrote that the media organizations also wanted to capitalize on the ability of the social media to allow the media organizations to build their brand identity.

Social media editors in the newsrooms, according to the American Press Institute, could be termed as “social engagement” or “audience development” teams comprising an individual or a number of people who had other duties in newsrooms (Elizabeth, 2017). Adriana Lacey, the Los Angeles Times audience engagement editor, opined that social media editors were responsible for the “frontline” activities of the overall journalism process and faced audiences on behalf of their organizations. Lacey, a former New York Times journalist, said that the intersection between journalism and social media was certain and therefore journalists and news organizations of the era should embrace their presence on social media where their readers were. She also said that the social media editors could not take a break when they were online (Aybar, 2019). Newman (2009) wrote that the social media activity in the newsrooms started when journalists were dabbling on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter during unrelated editorial jobs and later with time, these activities were defined as social media editor’s job responsibilities by the employers.

In 2011, Facebook started its public figure subscription option and news links accompanied by hashtags and others have become more visible on the social media site ever since. In 2014, Facebook became the largest news machine in the world which made the outlets expand their resources to grow their pages and promote themselves (Constine, 2018). It is not clear how many news organizations right now have their own pages on Facebook, Twitter or other social media platforms, but it can be easily hypothesized that the number would be gigantic as almost every news organization in the world would love to have its presence felt on social media platforms to become more engaged with audiences. Quoting former BBC journalist Nic Newman, a digital strategist, Fischer (2014) wrote that in order to uphold the brand value and the traditional journalism values, the newspapers should use social media. Academics, journalists, media strategists and researchers echoed him in recent years and advised the news outlets to become more

serious about social media usage (Elizabeth, 2017; Fischer (2014). Social media experts also stressed the importance of strengthening and reinventing social media teams to get more traffic and to battle with emerging issues such as misinformation and fake news (Elizabeth, 2017 and Alejandro, 2010). Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc Jr. (2018) showed that in the newsrooms of the USA, a new job title was strongly gaining ground and that was of the “engagement editor”, who was also called the “social media editor”. Both titles entailed the same job profiles in the newsrooms, mostly audience-oriented tasks.

Craig and Yousuf (2013) noted that the social media editors were playing a “key role in the development of standards and best practices in journalistic use of social media”. The researchers also found that the social media editors’ role also included some major tasks in the newsrooms such as development of strategy and training of staff members. These editors were also playing central roles in the evolution of journalism in the social media era. The social media editors were basically responsible for their news organizations’ social media accounts; it did not mean they just posted and shared but rather they planned strategies, kept track of emerging social media activities to maintain their organizations did not fall behind, ensured the authenticity of the information and shared on the social media accounts they handled and in some cases also helped and trained others in the companies (Inc, 2017). The editors were also found to be managing the news outlet’s social media accounts, creating content, managing readers, analyzing trends, and assisting editorial decision-making (Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc Jr, 2018). Cohen (2018) stated that these journalists were also called digital journalists who often produced and aggregated content for their own organization’s websites and later turned that content into posts for social media platforms. They also tweeted with links to articles and monitored how readers became engaged.

Their other jobs were to schedule posts and monitor social media feeds by using social media management tools.

In an interview with Denham (2013), Matthew Keys, deputy social media editor at Reuters in New York, shared that he monitored the Twitter account of his organization in the morning at the beginning of his day and then posted some of Reuters's top news stories on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Google Plus throughout the day and subsequently monitored the wire for any breaking news. And if he got any breaking news at any wire service, he immediately posted them on Reuters's social accounts. Matthew Keys also shared that on their team, they basically had two members, including him and his superior Anthony De Rosa. His organization also had some other staff members who worked in the UK and India and posted social contents when Matthew and Anthony were off-shift. In this 2013 interview, he also said that social media would be helpful for journalism as here journalists were playing the role of the channel and communicating with the audiences or people. Thus, he stated, the walls between the journalists, newsrooms and the general public would come down one day and the traditional role of journalists in the newsrooms would be re-defined. The journalists would come closer to people which might yield much benefits for the journalism industry (Denham, 2013).

Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017) wrote that the social media editors also posted shorter versions of contents, which got printed or published online, on social media platforms. The headlines of the contents published on social media were often given attractive and fashionable headlines to get better SEO results. Besides, sometimes these editors picked up tidbits from the content to share on their social media accounts as they thought a certain portion might be more "shareable" and "searchable". Among the existing social media editors, only a few worked on news stories or pitched stories while most of them were involved in editorial meetings deciding

which news stories would be posted on the social media accounts along with other contents such as videos, photos, galleries, etc. After conducting a study on these editors and the other members of the social media teams of different news outlets, Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017) also found that the social media editors' jobs stood somewhere between marketing and journalism. Lew in (2018) agreed with almost all the aforementioned roles of the social media editors and said that "posting links" was one of the major works they did when they did not have enough time to communicate with large-scale audiences. She, however, argued that posting links in a way portrayed these journalists as less creative link-masters or taskmasters and made them mentally and morally isolated in their own newsrooms. Mandy Velez, a social media editor of a media outlet based in the USA, shared that the social media journalists sometimes shared "paid-contents" to increase revenue earnings as journalism was still a "business", and in that case, they should inform their audiences by tagging posts as "sponsored" or badly risked affecting the relationship between the organizations and their audiences. She also said that if a social media editor posted anything without stating whether it was sponsored or not, it would be "unethical" and cause a breach in the relationship between audiences and the media outlets, which was founded upon authenticity and unbiasedness (Aybar, 2019).

For the last two decades, with the development and expansion of social media platforms, news outlets have started to use them for "audience engagement" and other reasons. To maintain the social media accounts, media outlets have appointed social media journalists (Alejandro, 2010) who are also known as digital journalists (Cohen, 2018) and also by other names. Their job responsibilities vary from posting contents, information, news to their audiences to marketing the news produced by their organizations to help journalism maintain its brand and traditional values

(Fischer, 2014) and thus the social media presence of media outlets have become more of a necessity (Assmann and Diakopoulos, 2017; and Aybar, 2019).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GATEKEEPING THEORY**

This study has been conceptualized through the lens of the Gatekeeping Theory which was put forward by psychologist Kurt Lewin after World War II. The theory originated while Lewin was conducting a study to investigate the food choices of a family, how food reached the family table from its sources and who took the decision regarding the journey of the food from its sources to the dining table. Lewin (1943), through his theory model that included “channels”, “gates” and “gatekeepers”, suggested that “the theory could be used to study the selection and movement of several social artifacts, including news items” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 178). According to many researchers, including Shoemaker and Reese (2014), the first-ever study on the Gatekeeping Theory was conducted by David Manning White in 1950. The study (White, 1950) investigated how a newspaper wire editor made decisions on news selection for print. The study was named “The Gatekeeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News and Warren Breed’s Social Control in the Newsroom”. White’s article, published in the *Journalism Quarterly*, also investigated “the personal reasons given by a newspaper editor for rejecting potential news items”, (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 178). White (1950) introduced the media gatekeeper as “Mr. Gates” and how this person “operates his gate” in the complex methods of communication (White, 1950, p. 383). Conducted in February 6-13, 1949, White’s study found that a wire editor of a newspaper, whom he called “Mr. Gates” (White, 1950, p. 384), rejected news stories on the basis of “highly subjective value-judgments” (White, 1950, p. 386). White’s study, also found that the wire editor faced difficulties “of making choices of one piece of copy over another” (White, 1950, p. 387).

Realizing the importance of the theory, Shoemaker et al. (2012) addressed the Gatekeeping Theory as “complex processes in mass communication” which were once seen in a simplistic way (Shoemaker et al., 2012). Journalists availed information from a variety of sources that ranged between human-oriented to technological sources and made crafting of a news article from tons of information a difficult job. Without gatekeeping, the journalists’ job of selecting and subsequently making use of that information to craft a piece of news would be “impossible”, (Shoemaker et al. 2009). While defining the gatekeeping process, Shoemaker and her co-researchers asserted that gatekeeping was the “process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news”, (Shoemaker et al., 2009, p. 73). Pamela Shoemaker, one of the most influential advocate of this theory, in (1991) wrote a book called ‘Gatekeeping’ in which she called gatekeeping “the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person in a given day” (Shoemaker, 1991, p.1).

According to DeJuliis (2015), through this definition, Shoemaker shone the light on how gatekeepers took actual decisions. Shoemaker and Reese in their book (1996) noted that journalists’ characteristics and personal backgrounds such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious upbringing, family orientation, etc. indirectly impacted their personal values, judgment and attitudes. Thus, these factors also played a significant role in shaping their professional roles and ethics. And the professional roles and ethics had a “direct effect on mass media content” the journalists produced. They also found that the journalists’ educational background also influenced the news stories generated by them (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Shoemaker and Reese (1991), however, wrote that there might not be any “direct influence of

“communicators’ characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences on media content”, but they also asserted that such factors influenced both personal and professional attitudes and roles and the content might be affected by that influence (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, p. 80). They also pointed out that the professional role determined how the news story would be crafted by a communicator and “what the communicator thinks is worth transmitting to his or her audiences” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, p.81). Shoemaker (1991) suggested that in order to understand gatekeeping, we must investigate personal characteristics as Mr. Gate did not apply organizational rules in the same manner.

As Shoemaker suggested, the following researchers tried to investigate how personal characteristics, experiences, gender, etc. had a relationship with the decisions of gatekeepers to develop media content. Chang and Lee (1992) conducted a national level survey on newspaper editors where they investigated the editors’ attitudes in selection of foreign news to publish for the newspapers they worked for. The results found that during the gatekeeping phase, the gatekeepers’ individual characteristics played important roles. Bleske (1991) investigated whether gatekeeping had changed while conducting a study on female gatekeepers’ roles instead of male gatekeepers. The female gatekeeper whom Belske (1991) called “Ms. Gates” tended to use news stories on women and stories with best writings for the last remaining blank spaces and front pages respectively, which were not found in the study of “Mr. Gates” by David Manning White. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and Shoemaker (1991) before them noted the similarity in the gatekeeping process that had started in the newsrooms. This process suggested how a piece of raw information became a complete news item that was ready to be published and transmitted to audiences on time. According to them, the process actually happened in two stages — the first step involved gatherers or reporters gathering information and shaping it into a news story and

the second stage involved copy editors or news processors working on and editing the copy and turning it into a complete news story ready for transmission to audiences. These ideas, however, were rooted in another study conducted in 1969. In his study, Bass (1969) elaborated on the idea of gatekeepers and their activities and functions in newsrooms during the news developing stage and explicitly noted that both the news gatherers or reporters and news processors or copy editors were gatekeepers (Bass, 1969, p.72). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) defined “news items” as contents that mass media published once the gatekeeping process ended. They compared gatekeepers to consumers as there were similarities in the consumers’ decision-making process and gatekeeping in the way that “gatekeepers are consumers, producers, and distributors of messages” (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009, p.39). There were some factors that influenced the gatekeepers in the gatekeeping process, according to Shoemaker and Vos (2009). These were thinking, decision-making and characteristics of the gatekeepers (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009).

Shoemaker and Vos in their book (2009) wrote that researchers were facing challenges to conduct studies on the 21st century’s ever-changing media landscape by applying the Gatekeeping Theory (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009, p. 130). They said that another challenge was “adapting research methodology that keeps pace” (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009, p.130). They stated that “online content” had a characteristic of “continuous change” and that this characteristic was creating challenges for researchers as well. Online content changed in real-time and allowed any audience or reader in any part of the world to experience the event as it happened (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Several studies — Singer (1998), (2001), (2006), (2008) and Cassidy (2005) as Brill (2001) — noted that the gatekeeping roles had been experiencing changes from its traditional roles in the internet-based media landscape. All of them studied and found that a significant level of shift had occurred in the journalists’ gatekeeping role at online news outlets compared to the

traditional print arena. All these studies found that gatekeepers in the traditional print arena used to give the information or make them accessible to audiences as their one of their primary functions, while in the digital age the journalists were now more involved in interpreting, communicating and even embracing marketing functions. Online era journalists were also less involved in one of the core works of a print era gatekeeper or journalist — investigating or verifying the information coming from various sources.

The internet made two major shifts in mass communication by defying the idea of a “gate” and the journalists’ power to “limit what passes through” the gate. Online editors, therefore, accommodated the internet’s participatory and interactive natures. A study conducted on the campaign coverage in 2004 also found that online journalists changed their course of gatekeeping in three preliminary ways such as providing “personalizable contents”, offering “blogs” over their websites and moderating “chats or message boards or forums” on politics (Singer, 2006). By practicing these roles, as Singer (2006) wrote, the journalists “re-conceptualized their gatekeeping role” and did far more than their colleagues used to do in 2000. After analyzing six Colorado newspapers which had just gone online, Singer in (2001) found that the online journalists were mostly replicating their print version contents over the websites. Singer also noted that as the papers went online, “Mr. Gates may find himself out of a job”, (Singer, 2001, p. 66). She wrote that in the networked era of media, the gatekeepers almost gave away one of the core ethical values and roles of a journalist — ensuring authenticity bypassing traditional gatekeeping role — editing processes as they continuously emphasized on delivering the information to their audiences as early as possible. Journalists in the postmodern media era were facing challenges to keep up with their three other important and basic values of journalism — accountability, objectivity and autonomy as Singer hinted (Singer, 2008).

The roles of journalists were re-established by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), who found that interpreting was considered by journalists as their primary role and argued that the journalists were less concerned about their other roles as news gatherers or disseminators of information to the public as conceptualized by earlier studies. Many of the studies and academic works, however, could not accommodate the roles of online journalists precisely as gatekeepers due to the fact that “they were conducted before the development of the World Wide Web” (Brill, 2001). After conducting one of the early studies on online journalists, 12 online journalists from newspapers based in the USA, Brill found that although online journalists were equipped with almost all the skills as print journalists and considered their work similar to that of print journalists, online journalists had to stay highly concerned about competing with other media, audience understanding and facilitating larger audiences with contents. She defined these characteristics as “marketing function”. She also asserted that online journalists set their production schedules. Later, both the findings of Singer (1997) also supported the contemporary study and stated that journalists in newsrooms defined gatekeeping differently and considered their role as credible interpreters in a new media environment where unprecedented amounts of information were available. A decade later, Cassidy (2005) studied how online journalists and print journalists differed from each other in perceiving their roles in newsrooms. The study revealed that online journalists considered themselves to be less of investigators or interpreters than their print counterparts, and they played much higher roles as disseminators than the latter.

A number of academic studies (Currie, 2012; DeVito, 2014; Alejandro, J., 2010; Tandoc and Vos, 2015) have investigated the changing climate in Western news organizations but such research in South Asia newsrooms is rare. These studies on news media outlets across the Western world revealed how social media had become an important as well as an integral part of newsrooms

for keeping up engagements with their vast number of audiences who were roaming on social media platforms and in order to maintain the activities of these teams, the news outlets hired a number of journalists whom they called social media journalists. These social media journalist posts, which are relatively newer than their other counterparts in newsrooms, roles, ways of work, lifestyles, journalistic activities etc. were also discussed and analyzed by these studies mentioned above.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

To meet their audience on these new platforms, news organizations hired a group of editors to keep their relationship with their audiences warm (Currie, 2012 and DeVito, 2014). These editors of newsrooms were dubbed as Social Media Editors, Audience Engagement Editors, Community Editors, and had been recruited since 2009 (Currie, 2012; DeVito, 2014; Alejandro, J., 2010). The usage of social media and other emerging technologies in the newsrooms were changing the journalists' role in getting the audience feedback (Tandoc and Vos, 2015) and thus the traditional gatekeeping roles of these editors were undergoing a change as they were now marketing the news and setting strategies for engaging with audiences (Curries, 2012; and Tandoc and Vos, 2015). According to the theories on news media, traditional gatekeeping always emphasized editorial independence. The theories also pointed out that the journalists had to protect their work and roles from forces like the government, advertisers and audiences as these elements acted as possible influencers on the traditional gatekeeping process (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). This study has investigated how the social media editors or the journalists in Bangladesh who managed their respective newspapers social media presence and the roles they played while working in the newsrooms.

Because Gayen (2019) and Azad (2020) estimated that a significant number of media outlets, more precisely a majority of newspapers, in Bangladesh had their own social media presence which was maintained by social media journalists in the respective newsrooms and therefore, studying their ways of using the newspapers' social media platforms and how they conceived their overall roles were necessary. Besides, according to the author's knowledge, no such research has so far been conducted before this study to investigate, discuss and analyze the emerging issues in the newsrooms of Bangladesh and the fact prompted the author to conduct this study which would help to enrich the knowledge on social media in the journalism and communications academia.

**RQ 1:** How the social media editors/journalists of Bangladesh newspapers manage their organizations' social media accounts?

**RQ 2:** What roles the social media editors perform in newsrooms?

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHOD**

### **METHOD**

The purpose of the study is to investigate and discover the functions and gatekeeping roles of social media journalists and editors in the newsrooms of newspapers in Bangladesh. In order to find the answer to these questions, the study followed a qualitative research method where the author interviewed social media editors and journalists who worked in the newspaper industry of Bangladesh. The author applied a long-interview method as the inquiry instrument since the method has descriptive and analytical strength.

McCracken in (1988) states —

“The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share certain characteristics. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world” (p: 17).

He also further noted that “qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much intensive than extensive in its objectives” (McCracken, 1988). This study tried to investigate and find out the emerging issues experienced by social media editors in their gatekeeping roles in the print newsrooms in Bangladesh. Earlier, DeVito (2014) applied the method while conducting a study on social media editors in the broadcast newsrooms in the USA.

In the study, which is a first of its kind as per the author's knowledge, participants described the issues they faced, their daily activities and the other functions they performed in their gatekeeping roles in the newsrooms of the print media. The long-interview method creates a dialogue between the author and participants, where the data emerges with the voices of participants (DeVito, 2014). In this process, the participants act as experts and from the data, different categories emerge (Angen, 2000).

Methodological accuracy is maintained in qualitative research through the usage of checkpoints which include carefully coded data and themes identified and documented for consistency and reliability (Lindolf and Taylor, 2002). The author applied the method in order to understand human behavior and how these are managed as well as what reasons work behind them. Because, studies that use the method analyze the data from a holistic standpoint and maintain methodological rigor and transparency. A major advantage of "qualitative methods in exploratory research is the use of open-ended questions" as they allow participants to respond and elaborate their own understandings in their own words (Readings, P.4).

### **THE LONG INTERVIEW METHOD:**

According to McCracken (1988) for qualitative research, a long interview is a powerful instrument and is very popular and widely used by qualitative researchers. This inquiry instrument is highly effective for analytical and descriptive reasons as it helps a researcher to travel into the participants' minds and explore their understanding of the issues being asked about.

"The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can take us into the life world of the individual, to see content and patterns of daily experience. The long interview gives us the

opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (McCracken, 1988; P9).

The importance of the instrument in social scientific studies is enormous as it facilitates endless applications and these studies are enriched through the clarity of beliefs and experiences of the participants or actors in question. The application of such an instrument is, of course, endless. Every social scientific study is improved by a clearer understanding of the beliefs and experiences of the actors in question.

“Without a qualitative understanding of how culture mediates human action, we can know only what numbers tell us. The long qualitative interview is useful because it can help us to situate these numbers in their fuller scholar and cultural contexts” (McCracken, 1988; P9).

McCracken also put emphasis on both the qualitative method instrumented with the long-interview inquiry strategy as “obligatory” and “compelling”.

“It is difficult to imagine a study of ‘friendship’, for instance, that does not inquire into how people define a friend, how they experience a friendship, and the silent assumptions that operate in every social situation to dictate how friends and nonfriends act. The long interview lets us map out the organizing ideas of friendship and determine how these ideas enter into the individual’s view of the world” (McCracken, 1988; P10).

These methods help us to better understand how friendship or any social relationship and activity work partially or as a whole of someone’s daily experiences. This method helps to understand what and how a person or individual sees his or her experiences and thus it allows researchers to see the same things through the interviewee’s eyes.

The long interview method, however, is time-consuming and the participants might not feel comfortable to sit and be interviewed for a long period of time. The same disadvantage is also faced by the researchers as well because it is often difficult to get a proper schedule and appointment from the participants. The author's understandings in this regard contend with McCracken (1988), where he noted both issues. "But few respondents are willing to sit for all the hours it takes to complete the portraits...Few social scientists have this much time at their disposal" (P. 10).

The participants of the study are all journalists by profession. Since journalists are more habituated to taking interviews, they were a little uncomfortable about being interviewed by the author. It has to be mentioned that the author's earlier experiences as a reporter in the field of journalism contributed in making the whole process easier.

### **TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:**

During the entire length of the study, the author was not located in Bangladesh as he was pursuing his graduate degree at the University of Mississippi residing in the USA. On the other hand, all the participants were based in Bangladesh where they worked for different newspapers. The author, therefore, had to apply the method of telephone interviews to get the participants' testimonies on their daily work activities and gatekeeping roles in the newsrooms.

McCracken (1988) wrote that the qualitative long interview methods were time-consuming which, however, allowed authors to do as they wished to investigate and maximize the data. During the study, the author found that the participants were either busy at work or over other personal works and therefore, the only way to communicate with the participants was through the telephone-based interview method. The interviews were on some occasions rescheduled, postponed and even

cut off in the middle as the participants were either busy with their work at office or in their personal lives.

A few decades back, the telephone interview method was not much used by many academic researchers due to two basic reasons: problems of sampling and reliability and validity of the telephone interview, as described by Horton and Duncan (1978). They, however, also mentioned the advantages of the telephone interview method in social science research. Some of the important features mentioned as advantages of the telephone interviews by them included speed, cost-effectiveness and mobility. According to them, when researchers were conducting interviews on a group of people located in geographically wider and farther areas, then this method could be more productive. “The telephone technique involves no travel, lodging, or meals expenses that tend to make field interviews prohibitively expensive” (P. 266). The method is also more fruitful than other methods as it costs less and gets a better response rate.

The author also used some social media applications to interview the participants as the participants often showed less interest in talking over phone and were more comfortable with social media applications such as Facebook Messenger and Skype. The author used Skype’s record option while conducting the interviews with six of the participants over Skype. The others were conducted via Facebook Messenger and the conversation was recorded via CallNote, a recording application. The sound clips of these conversations were recorded on the author’s laptop.

### **NON-PROBABILITY SAMPLING:**

Since the population was undefined, therefore, as Battaglia et al. (2008) suggested, the non-probability sample method was applied. In non-probability samples, “subjective methods” are carried out to decide which elements would be included in the sample. The other importance of

this method of sampling is that it is less expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, considering that the author received no funding for this study which is an integral part of his course work, the study followed this method in recruiting the participants (Battaglia et al., 2008).

A common non-probability method is the snowball sampling technique which is often used in the recruitment process of research works in social science. The snowball sampling method is used in two contexts, as Battaglia (2008) noted: firstly, when the population is rare or undefined and secondly, when members of the population have mutual relationships or know each other. “In both cases, respondents are expected to know about the identity of other members of the same population group” (P. 824).

Following these techniques, the author at first contacted his former colleagues working in different newspapers and they suggested the names of some of the journalists who worked on the respective social media teams in different newspapers’ newsrooms. Later, the persons recommended were contacted by the author and some of the early contacts also provided the names of other journalists working in the same genre at other newspapers. “The process continues until an adequate sample size has been obtained or until no new names are elicited from the process” (Battaglia et al., 2008). In the end, the author was able to interview 13 participants who worked on social media teams and were responsible for managing social media accounts that belonged to their newspapers.

### **RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE OF PARTICIPANTS:**

The study interviewed participants who were responsible for their social media teams and for managing social media activities in the newsrooms of newspapers in Bangladesh. The activities in the newsrooms of the newspaper industry in Bangladesh were relatively new and were

undergoing a developing scenario. The participants' job titles were diverse and included the likes of Digital Head, Online In-Charge, Web Editor, Deputy Editor, Senior Sub Editor, Sub Editor, Trainee Online Journalist, etc. None of them held job titles of Social Media Editor, Social Media Journalist, Digital Journalist or Digital Editor but all of their job responsibilities were related to the social media accounts in newsrooms.

Initially, the author contacted 17 journalists to discuss their roles and the ways social media accounts were used in 14 national newspapers in Bangladesh. All of them were contacted via email, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and phone between December 2019 and January 2020. Later, 13 of them consented to volunteer in the interview process. Finally, 13 participants from 11, 10 were male and One was female, national newspapers were interviewed between February 10 and March 3 of 2020. The newspapers were The Daily Star, New Age, Dhaka Tribune, The Business Standard, Kaler Kantho, Prothom Alo, Daily Samakal, Daily Ittefaq, Desh Rupantor, Jugantor, and Daily Naya Diganta. The first four of them were English and the rest were Bengali language national dailies. Prior to that, they were contacted and were provided with the consent form (Appendix A). The consent form along with the questionnaire consisted of a total of 36 questions, including eight ice-breaking questions, and were sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Mississippi for approval so that they could be used in the study.

The participants initially received the consent form via emails. They were interviewed in their offices or newsrooms and at homes as well. Among the 13 participants, seven participated in the interview from home while the rest participated from the newsrooms during work hours. The author conducted all the interviews from his home. In most cases, the author took the interviews at midnight to match the time zone of the place of work or residence of the participants in Bangladesh, which has a time difference of 11 hours with Mississippi, USA. Before starting the

discussions with the participants guided by a questionnaire of 36 questions (Appendix B), the author also informed all the participants via social media messengers and emails that the conversation will be recorded. McCracken (1998) considered a discussion guide to be a requisite for the long interview method. He stated that a guide was there to set a direction for the interview so that the material was dealt with in the same way for each participant and thereby helping the interviewer to focus on the words of the interviewee (p. 24). The discussion guide serves the purpose of a starting point for a conversation in which mainly the participants ascertain the course of the interview.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The recorded sound clips were listened to and then transcribed first in the conversation language, Bengali, as the interviewees showed their comfort in being interviewed in the language. The transcription was done following the verbatim method. Following that, all 13 transcriptions were translated into English. As Van Nes F et al. (2010) wrote, translation itself is an interpretation and therefore the actual meaning may get lost in the process. Keeping the issue in mind, the author was very careful while transcribing the interviews.

After the transcribing all 13 interviews, the author analyzed them line-by-line and marked the individual level basic information and common statements which later helped the author to find some themes and categories to develop a representation of meanings. The marked portions of the transcribed interviews were later saved on a Microsoft Word File under some key concepts and codes following the open coding method. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that open coding was an analytical process “through which concepts are identified” and their elements, properties and dimensions were revealed in the data (P 101).

The Microsoft Word File later helped the author to find some important themes and categories that emerged from the data. The themes comprised “role in newsrooms of social media journalists”, “how the social media journalists use social media accounts” and “how they get treated by colleagues from other departments”. These themes were described in some categories such as “posting contents on social media”, “marketing or selling news”, “strategy”, “moderation policy”, etc. Besides, another theme was also described, which elaborated the basic information about the participants. The basic information included experiences with journalism, job titles, experiences with social media teams, etc.

Newspaper	Language	Participants	Designation of Participants
The Daily Star	English	One (P2)	Head of Digital
New Age	English	Two (P8 and P12)	Senior Sub Editor, Graphics Designer
Dhaka Tribune	English	One (P10)	Trainee Online Journalist
The Business Standard	English	One (P7)	Deputy Web Editor
Prothom Alo	Bengali	One (P9)	Social Media Moderator
Kaler Kantho	Bengali	One (P1)	Online In-charge
Jugantor	Bengali	One (P4)	Online In-charge
Daily Samakal	Bengali	Two (P11 and 13)	Sub Editor, Sub Editor
Daily Ittefaq	Bengali	One (P6)	Online In-charge
Daily Naya Diganta	Bengali	One (P3)	Online Editor
Desh Rupantor	Bengali	One (P5)	Deputy Editor (Online, Social Media and Feature)

Table 1: Participants, designation and their news organizations

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **FINDINGS:**

After interviewing 13 journalists from 11 national newspapers in Bangladesh who were responsible for keeping the social media activities running, the author found recurring themes in the data. At first, the background and general information or characteristics such as gender, title of job posts, work experiences as social media journalists, previous experiences of joining the social media teams, their organizations' identity, etc. were described. Following that, the author sought answers to the major situations encountered by the journalists. These included investigating their roles in the newsrooms and the ways they managed the social media accounts.

Among the 13 participants, one was female and the rest were all male journalists working for 11 national newspapers. Eight of them worked for Bengali newspapers and five worked for English newspapers. They also shared how long they had been doing journalism and how long they had been involved in their social media roles. The majority of them claimed that they were experienced journalists in terms of their involvement with journalism as a career.

Table 2 shows below which social media platforms were used by the 11 newspapers studied and which social media platform was the most popular among them:

Name of Newspapers	Social Media Usage	Most Popular Social Media
The Daily Star	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest	Facebook
New Age	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn	Facebook
Dhaka Tribune	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube	Facebook
The Business Standard	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Pinterest, Youtube	Facebook
Kaler Kantho	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube	Facebook
Jugantor	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest	Facebook
Prothom Alo	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube	Facebook
Daily Ittefaq	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube	Facebook and Twitter
Daily Samakal	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest	Facebook
Daily Naya Diganta	Facebook	Facebook
Desh Rupantor	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube	Facebook

Only one of the participants shared that he had experience in journalism for less than a year while four participants said they had been involved in journalism for more or less 10 years. Seven participants had careers of more than 15 years and one had less than 15 years of experience.

The most experienced participant, P3, shared that he started working in journalism in 1992 and it had happened to him incidentally and that he had not planned to work in the field. The youngest experienced participant, P10, said that he had just begun working in journalism at his current and only workstation as of March 2019.

All 13 participants who took part in the study shared that they had previous experience of working as journalists and had been involved in other tasks related to newspapers. For instance, one participant — P12 — shared that he had worked as a graphics designer and had started his career with this job at a defunct weekly supplement of his current news organizations.

The others mentioned that they had worked as a Reporter, Sub-Editor or Copy Editor, Feature Reporter and Editor, Editor of Literature Page, Sports Reporter and Technology Reporter and even as Television Newsroom Editor.

They also shared that none of them had been involved directly in social media journalism before joining their current jobs. Two of them shared that they had worked at a newspaper's now defunct Blogging sections or Blogs. Seven participants, however, said that they had either experiences in online journalism or had worked on the website teams for their current and/or other newspapers.

P9: *"I did not work on any social media team but rather worked at Samakal as a member of their Literature-based feature team. Then I joined the Prothom Alo Blog where I was a moderator or gateman...I would decide which one to publish and which one not to. Then I joined my current team."*

P2 from The Daily Star shared —

*"I was an intern journalist, then did reporting and sub-editing at the Daily Star. Later, I also worked as the Deputy Editor of the Daily Star Art, Editor of the youth-based supplement and served as the Editor of the City section which covers the capital Dhaka right before I joined my current team"*

One participant said that he had just joined his post in the first month of this year, five joined in 2019 and the seven others joined their current posts at least five years back.

Four participants, all of whom were from three English dailies, shared that they had never worked for any other news organizations before their current workplace. They also shared their experiences with other teams and departments at their current work stations.

When the researcher asked the participants what his or her job title was, they named a total of 10 types of job titles. Among all the 13 participants, seven claimed that they were chiefs of their teams, one claimed himself to be a trainee and the other five were team members. The participants had a diverse set of designations as three of them were Online In-charges, two were Sub Editors and the other participants bore each of the following designations — Head of Digital, Online Editor, Deputy Editor-Online, Deputy Web Editor, Senior Sub Editor, Social Media Moderator, Trainee Online Journalist and Graphics Designer. Some of the participants said that their organizations had such posts since they joined the social media teams in the newsrooms as early as 2010 and at the latest in 2019. Two participants shared that the posts they were now working in had been created upon their joining in 2019 as both the newspapers were launched last year.

*P5: “The post I am working in right now began with me as I am the first person to be given this post. My newspaper is also a new newspaper which started its journey in 2019”.*

The participants in the study were working at different national newspapers with different types of job titles. While some of them shared their experiences in different roles under different job posts with other organizations, only a few said that they had never worked for any other newsrooms apart from their current workplace. They also shared about their diverse job experience timelines as well while a few of them shared about their journeys with social media teams which were created last year or even this year. The most promising information revealed through the study is that none of the participants had any prior experience of working on any social media team or performing such activities before joining their current posts.

### **HOW JOURNALISTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA:**

The author investigated the ways social media journalists follow to manage social media accounts belonging to their newspapers. In the course of the study, the author managed to find how social media journalists in Bangladesh's print newsrooms used the newspapers' social media accounts. Some important matters such as decision making about posts and strategies which reflected the policies regarding sharing of social media contents, moderation of comments or replying to comments, content types, topics and daily post numbers, and training facilities for journalists are discussed here. The participants shared that they did not share any contents based on editorial decisions or strategies but rather shared articles which were more likely to be attractive to audiences and had no negative impact on national politics, the ruling class, the government, advertisers and their own newspapers. They said that they could not undertake comment moderation or reply to audience comments on social media accounts belonging to the newspapers as they did not have the manpower and no related policies in place for doing so. Besides politics, sports and entertainment were the most popular topics for sharing while text was the most used format compared to pictures, graphics, videos, etc. The last key finding of this study is that most participants had no training for performing their daily functions.

#### **DECISION MAKING ABOUT POSTS AND STRATEGY:**

While asked how they take editorial decisions which content to post or share on social media accounts, majority of the participants said their priority on posting depends on what the audiences' want. Besides, they cannot share anything on their own if the news or content were possibly against or have negative relations with national politics, ruling class, government, advertisers and even their own newspapers. The majority participants said often they do not often need to take decisions on posting rather share almost all the contents of website and print on social media with little or no changes.

*P13: Usually for highly serious issues like national politics, government, ruling class or something against our advertisers or newspapers image, we need to take prior permission from the bosses to avoid following consequences. Otherwise, we do not need to take any permission, we just post.*

*P5: There is no policy about selection and posting. We post whatever might attract the audiences. Entertainment and Sports get more priority over other categories. Social media audiences do not stay anywhere for long, they keep scrolling down and therefore we need to give them what they like. The majority of our audiences are aged between 18-35 years which means they are the youth. This group of readers are a little bit impatient and we try to treat them accordingly. We provide them with contents they would like or look for.*

*P1: Our idea of posting contents on social media is simple. We upload all the print contents onto the website and all of our website contents go to social media platforms. We post all of the website contents on our social media accounts, however, many readers read the posts later on.*

All of the journalists interviewed either said or hinted that the newspapers did not have any written or formal strategies or policies for managing their social media accounts but followed unofficial guidelines and editorial policies set by the newspapers. They also shared that they followed some different unofficial and temporary strategies.

*P3: We do not have any particular policy or strategy regarding social media but we are careful about two things — one is what our readers demand. We post news which our readers want. And secondly, content has to be posted based on our editorial policy. We do not post any vulgar items, pictures of dead bodies. We do not post on social media by extracting things from the print or website but rather try to be selective. We change the headlines for social media.*

*Since our readers are mostly young, we also keep that issue in mind. In that case, we try to post such contents with little edits which could be attractive to them and thus engagement will increase.*

*P9: We follow the editorial policy of the newspaper. We do not post anything until it gets confirmation. We do not post without talking to the accused and we are careful about some gender related issues and laws on women repression. For instance, we do not expose the victim's identity.*

On the other hand, some of them shared that they followed certain strategies about the content types, elements, topics, etc. and timelines about posting. The majority of the participants said that they did not share any “vulgar” or “violent” contents while some shared that their organizations observed caution about posting news articles related to gender, religion, sensitive and sensational issues. Some said that “trendy” contents attracted their readers most. The contents were shared in time throughout the day.

*P1: Earlier, we did not have any strategy and posted contents carelessly. Now we are trying to develop a strategy and are taking social media more seriously. Facebook also shared their observation about our account as we were posting vulgar contents earlier. Now we strictly do not post any porno, violence or vulgar contents as well as fake news.*

### **MODERATING COMMENTS:**

The majority of participants said that they did not have the policy and manpower to go through all the comments and moderate them regularly. But, in some cases when they found any comment that went against their editorial agendas or policies, they hid or deleted them. Some of them said that they had to be very cautious any comment from a reader might go against the ruling

political party or influential groups. Few of the participants said that they did not or rarely replied to the comments posted by audiences but they replied to messages on chat boxes, such as P13 shared —

*“No, not likely. Sometimes we reply but that is rare. But I am not allowed to reply. But I have experiences of replying to the messages we get on our social media accounts, chat box. Actually, we do not have enough capacity, such as manpower, to deal with it. I have heard we have plans to undertake comment moderation.”*

*P8: We moderate comments. We erase two types of comments from our social media accounts – one is when someone posts abusive words about any political figure or party and secondly when a comment is potentially threatening for our newspaper’s entity. We usually get a lot of pressure from the government for being non-partisan and recently Bangladesh has passed a law called the Digital Security Act to dismantle the freedom of expression and stop the tiniest of criticisms against the government. For these two reasons, we have to be very careful as any abusive word against the current government on our page might damage our social page and newspaper’s entity...*

The majority of the interviewed journalists, however, said that they got news tips on comments by the audiences and they then tried to reply to the comments. The social media journalists then pass the comments containing news tips mostly to their colleagues on the reporting team or print section. They also said that they appreciated audiences who posted such comments.

*P6: On our Facebook group, we get such news tips often. It is a very good source. Readers mostly give corruption related news tips. Once we get such a tip, we then cross check them on our own and also convey the message to our designated reporters. Recently, a school*

*teacher provided us with a video of the birth of a one-eyed calf. We later engaged our local reporter and cross checked the matter and later published it and got huge response. That school teacher became a regular contributor as he often contributes contents for us.*

### **CONTENTS TYPES, TOPICS AND POSTS DAILY:**

The participants shared about the variations in their content topics such as politics, international, national and entertainment. They shared these topics most as their readers wanted or demanded them, while text was the most shared content type. Some of them said that they also posted videos, pictures, graphics and live videos on the social media accounts.

*P1: Politics, entertainment, sports, local and regional news get published a lot. Besides, we have readers for crime, international and national important news. We also post the contents in accordance with our readers' demand.*

*P6: Contents are text based mostly, but we do post videos, photos and graphics as well. We have started making video contents since January and are trying to post regularly. But due to lack of people, we are unable to stick to our plans.*

The number of posts also varied in newspapers and even on social media platforms. But in most cases, they shared posts more on Facebook than any other social media platforms due to its popularity among the Bangladesh populace while a few of them, however, said that they shared contents regularly on Youtube, Twitter and Instagram.

*P11: A total of 120-130 posts shared on all the social media platforms. Among them, 85-90 are posted on Facebook, and the rest on Twitter. We put contents on YouTube and share that on social media based on availability of videos.*

### **MOST HAD NO PREVIOUS TRAINING:**

Only four participants from Dhaka Tribune, Desh Rupantor, Prothom Alo and Ittefaq said that they received training at their organizations. Participant P5 shared his dissatisfaction over the trainings he and his teammates received. Eight other participants stated that they did not receive any formal training at their organizations but that they learned and equipped themselves with skills through self-learning and with help from other teammates. One participant from an English daily did not answer when he was asked if he had received any training at his organization. Sharing his thoughts, P5 of Desh Rupantor said that he received training along with his other teammates but it was not satisfactory and termed it as “so-called training” while P13 said that she did not get any formal training at all since joining Daily Samakal newspaper but that she got help from her news editor who taught her about the usage of social media.

The participants shared the above-mentioned tactics they used every day to manage their newspapers’ social media accounts. The discussions and participants’ own words also tell us that the social media journalists were barely following any strategies to use the newspapers’ social media accounts while the majority of them did not even receive any training. The participants also shared that they mostly did not moderate or reply to audience comments.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA ROLES:**

Social media journalists working in the newspapers based in Bangladesh shared the variety of roles they played in the newsrooms among which the most common phenomenon were posting contents over social media, creating and posting contents for the newspapers’ websites, attending meetings and maintaining liaison with other teams, audience engagement and marketing or selling

of the news. The study is also aimed at investigating their roles in the newsrooms and how they perform them.

*P1: We have three separate Facebook pages for sports, news and feature. I run two sports and news pages. We have 7.5 million followers on our Facebook page. Managing team, following all of these social media platforms, providing business ideas, designing and monitoring contents for digital platforms, managing analytics such as Alexa ranking monitoring, SEO, overall management of both desktop and mobile versions of the website are my duties.*

*P2: I monitor the digital services of other media organizations (both national and international) alongside monitoring the activities of the website and social accounts of my organization. It is also my job to ensure the standard we always follow reflects on our digital platforms. My work also includes managing the website display and news sorting. As the boss of Digital Media, my duty also encompasses communication with the senior reporters of print version.*

As seven out of the 13 participants were the heads of their social media teams, therefore, they all said that leading the whole team was one of their key functions in the newsroom and one termed their jobs as “a lot”. The six ‘only-team member’ social media journalists did not speak about any involvement in team management.

*I actually lead my newspaper’s digital or online team. Precisely, I do news collection, formation of news, distribution over the website and social media, lead the digital team and maintain connection with the other teams in my newspaper. — P6*

*Developing news stories, sharing them, leading my team, helping my teammates, communicating with other departments, dealing with revenue issues, content creation,*

*advertisement, technical issues like web management, proof reading, video making — everything including overseeing all the things under my supervision. It is a lot of work...-- P4*

### **CREATING AND POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA:**

Creating and posting contents on the social media accounts are the major functions as described by the majority of participants. All of the participants shared that they were kind of “key” persons of their newspapers’ social media activities along with that they were also responsible for the website contents. P11 shared that his major duties comprised news collection, editing them, uploading on the website and sharing the news links on the social media platforms. Like him, the majority of participants also worked on other tasks such as news writing, editing, etc. P10 said that he was kind of the key person of some of the social media accounts of his newspaper and his responsibilities included managing those social media handles such as Facebook, Twitter which he had access to. He also shared that a separate team, which they called the “New Media” team, worked for YouTube contents.

*I have been doing the job since our newspaper opened its social media accounts, may be five six years back. My role is to share the stories written by me and the others. I also edit other reports as well. — P13*

Most of the participants said that they posted along with their other team members. In some cases, they worked in groups of two or more, split in accordance with the news or content genres they were assigned to work on. In other cases, all the team members on a social media team performed the same duties across the platforms. P4 shared that his newspaper employed 17 people altogether for both social media and website operations. The team worked in two sub groups to upload both international and national news on both the website and social media accounts.

*Copy editing and posting on the website and social media platforms at the fastest possible time are my duties. We have a team of four persons in total. All of them do the same type of work as I do. We do not have any particular task for a particular person. — P8*

Some of the participants said that all members on their teams could not access all the social media platforms. Different members were responsible for different social media platforms and their contents. Participant Five and Two, who were the heads of the social teams of a Bengali and English newspaper respectively, said that they “do not post” or “edit” contents on social media but rather monitored and guided their teammates who do that. P5 said his job responsibility was not to post on social media or website but only leading the teammates who work under his supervision.

*I have Facebook, Instagram and Twitter under my direct supervision. We also have a YouTube channel but a separate team operates that under my guidance. On Instagram, we mostly post for our younger generation readers as they tend to use it more. — P2*

Most of them said that they regularly multitask between activities in the newsrooms that ranged between news writing to social video production. They were engaged in many works alongside managing the social media platforms they used for their newspapers. Their tasks included writing stories, editing them, editing photos, creating graphics, producing social videos and later uploading them on the website and social media accounts.

*I edit, write, work on Photoshop and even on graphics as all of our team members perform everything needed in a news production cycle. The headlines are mostly written by me.*

*In short, I do everything needed to upload and produce a news article from scratch. — P3*

Another task related to the social media called boosting or sponsoring contents on different social media is basically done by the team leads and heads of the social media teams. All the heads

of social teams acknowledged that they did this task exclusively while a few others also supported their statements. The team leads also shared that they always began their day by checking and monitoring their social accounts from home after waking up while some of them like P4 of Jugantor said that they would have to monitor the social media accounts and operate them even when they were on vacation, away from office and even out of the country.

*I do boost the posts on social media, this is only my task. Contents and item management are also part of my duties. Social media account management is also my duty. Budget maintenance for the social media boosting and team are my primary responsibilities. — P1 who is the head of Kaler Kantho social team*

*I am an early riser in comparison to other journalists in Bangladesh. After waking up early in the morning, my first task is to check our website and social media accounts. I usually check what was posted after my departure from office in the evening before. If we missed something and I find it, then I upload and correct the mistakes from my home. - P3*

### **WEBSITE MANAGEMENT AND CONTENT POSTING:**

Only two of the participants — P5 and P10 — explicitly shared their non-involvement with the website management or managing and uploading contents on their respective websites. While P5 said that he looked after the whole team and even website, but did not post on the website himself but rather monitored his colleagues' activities and guide them whenever necessary, P10 however said that his job responsibility does not include managing or posting contents on website.

*I oversee three teams — Online, Social Media and Features. My primary duties are to lead these three teams. That is all... Before going to office in the afternoon, I monitor our*

*website and social media platforms. If I find any faults, then I communicate with my teammates and ask them to resolve the issues as soon as possible. P5*

All the others, whether they were team leads or just members, claimed that they also wrote news articles, made other contents and uploaded them onto the website and oversaw its layout.

*My duties include news collection, writing, editing them, uploading on the website and sharing the news link on social media platforms. If the news is a breaking news, we collect it via phone. If the news has some importance, reporters file those via messenger groups created for internal communication between the online team and reporters. If there is minimum importance, reporters send them via email. — P11*

The majority of the participants seemed to work on the website management and social media management side by side. Whenever, they uploaded anything on to the website, the first thing they did was to share it on social media. Unlike, social media, the majority team leads shared that they monitored the websites regularly and even for some, it was the first task they embarked on every day after waking up, and later contacted the other teammates if they found any mistakes or any report had remained uncovered. The team leads also guided the team members to fix the issues as early as possible.

*P5 said: “Before going to office in the afternoon, I monitor our website and social media platforms. If I find any faults, then I communicate with my teammates and ask them to resolve the issues as soon as possible. Besides the big news stories, which we might have missed the day before, I also get my focus on other newspapers’ activities and then I ask my subordinates to make contents on the issues.”*

### **ATTEND MEETINGS:**

According to the majority of the participants, they had to attend meetings almost every day or at the very least every week. The meetings were not only held between their own team members but rather they also had to attend meetings with members from other teams such as the print team, reporting, advertising, senior colleagues, editorial boards. One participant shared that his work at office started with a meeting with his own team members following which he joined other meetings with colleagues from other teams.

While P4 said that the first thing he did at office was to hold a meeting with his team to discuss about content and planning, following which he joined meetings with his colleagues from other departments, P1 said that he had to attend at least two meetings everyday — one with his own team and the other with the top bosses of the print team.

*I also sit in editorial meetings with other department heads every day in the afternoon. I stay busy with website news and social media news the whole day. I edit, write stories and give instructions to my fellow colleagues. — P3*

In some cases, participants shared about monthly meetings and meetings held over social media messaging platforms. Sometimes they held meetings before producing and posting any contents. Besides, the participants said that they talked about the daily plans for social accounts' contents in the morning meetings and then decided which one they preferred for the day.

*We do have a monthly team meeting, sometimes it gets online, as most of our teammates also go to the spot and report from the ground. They cannot be free always. But I do contact with them almost every hour via messaging options. — P6*

*I start my job unofficially at 8:30am in the morning. I start work from home as I have to assign stories in the morning. Upon my arrival in office at 10:00am, I try to find out what the other local and international media are doing. I check whether we have the news or not. I check the placement of news and follow other televisions and media outlets. News monitoring continues throughout the day. We hold a meeting in the morning where we submit plans for what to put on web throughout the day and a meeting later in the evening to check what we have missed and what we could have done. — P7*

**AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT:**

All the participants agreed on the issue that one of their core objectives was to maintain audience engagement on their newspapers' social media platforms. The majority thought proper audience engagement on social media helped the web version of their newspapers.

*Audiences aged between 18 and 35 usually want light topics and contents on news media website or social media accounts. We know it is not good for journalism but we have to do that to increase website traffic engagement. Sometimes, I think if there were no rankings or Alexa, that would be great for us. This trend is hampering journalism as a whole. We do follow it and give light contents on website and social media accounts to bring in advertisements and generate revenue. — P1*

*Social media redirects traffic to our website. We do not consider social media platforms as different entities which many of the organizations in Bangladesh do. Majority of the outlets are not serious and active on Twitter and Instagram, but we are serious about both along with Facebook. — P2*

On the other hand, some participants believed that the overall audience engagement of the newspapers, both digital and print, were now highly dependent on their social media activities. In this regard, P10 shared that the majority of readers of his newspaper came through the digital version such as the website and Facebook accounts where they got all the published print news and thus got engaged more with the newspaper.

They also shared that the audience engagement was nowadays highly dependent on social media activities of the news media outlets, therefore, maintenance and ensuring audience engagement were highly important roles they performed in the newsrooms. P2, who was also the The Daily Star newspaper boss of the overall digital team that included social media, said that the news outlets now needed social media to thrive as it pulled in traffic to websites and therefore social media should be considered as a necessity.

*We basically share our web story links to get more traffic on our website. Sometimes we do some special contents such as Facebook Live and graphics about polls on sports events or any such trending issue to get ourselves more engaged with our audiences. — P4*

Participants said that they were now sharing not only texts and photos but also putting emphasis on other types of contents such as creating events and “tagging” celebrities on them to create enhance audience engagement. A few of the participants said that although the importance of social media for audience engagement was still there, the social media platforms were not performing as well as before to pull up traffic to their websites.

*Only text and photo cannot bring traffic to our website. In fact, overall Facebook is now not able to push traffic to the website. Google Plus was a great platform which is now unavailable. It used to bring a good amount of traffic to the website. Therefore, we boost and give money to*

*Facebook but it does not work the way we had expected. It doesn't matter if your news is shared by 50 or 500 people, the traffic remains the same. That is why we boost to get a lot more shares. People now do not click on the website but rather go away after seeing the headlines. Boost does not help these days, it used to do so in the past. Facebook is not helping newspapers. — P5*

While asked “how does social media influence your organization’s work?” — P9 said “*I would say social media still has huge impact on overall news media as well as my organization. Without social media my newspaper cannot consider it as full filled now days. We get half of our web traffic from social media but it was higher earlier...now it has decreased.*”

A participant who is also a team lead of social and online teams at a Bengali daily newspaper said that now their overall digital version got more advertisements due to their high impact audience engagement activities.

*Our social platforms are driving traffic to our website. And now, seeing the huge traffic on the websites, the print advertising team has requested us to keep slots aside on our website as many advertisers are interested to see ads on the website than our print version. — P6*

According to the participants, they regularly or often applied some default social media methods along with external measurement methods to measure audience engagement on social media accounts and websites. They used Social Blade, Facebook insights, Twitter analytics, Youtube creator studio, and other methods to measure audience engagement.

### **MARKETING OR SELLING NEWS:**

The majority of 11 out of 13 interviewed participants compared their jobs as “marketing”, “selling” or “promotional activities” of the news their organizations produced every day. Among them, a few considered the tasks to be journalism while some indirectly hinted they were non-

journalistic tasks. While P4 considered their overall social media activities as promoting news, P9 from Prothom Alo, on the other hand, thought his job was to sell news that were published on the website.

*At our newspaper, a person working on the online team is responsible for both uploading the news and sharing it on social media. But social media is not journalism. Social media helps the marketing of a story. Social media helps us to reach out to readers, but it is not journalism. It is only used to market and spice up the news. — P11*

While some of them referred to it as journalism or partially journalism or as a job that lies between “marketing and journalism”, they, however, shared that this job had a drawback as it was changing the traditional gatekeeping process in the newsrooms.

*60-70% of our total readers read news on websites and social media. We try to put contents online which they might like. Daily Naya Diganta is in second position in terms of popularity on Facebook among the newspapers in Bangladesh. I do believe it is journalism. Without it none of the organizations will sustain now. But, the drawback of it is that gatekeeping roles cannot be performed on social media as it can be on print. - P3*

*I would say it is barely journalism and has only 30% journalism elements. I do not need to analyze news or stories, as I get ready news stories. I am saying 30% as sometimes we need to go for cross-checking. — P10*

*I do not consider myself as a social media journalist. I am a journalist appointed by my organization for its digital platforms. All the necessary tasks a reporter or a sub editor performs, I do the same tasks and add value for my organization’s marketing activities. I know in some organizations in Bangladesh, some people dedicatedly work for social media pages. They are*

*basically doing marketing or promotional works. My work kind of lies between that and journalism. — P6*

A few of them were way ahead of others and compared the role of social media jobs with the activities of digital news hawkers and termed social media as a means to the end of journalism.

In response to the question “How does your job incorporate journalism?”, one boss of a newspapers shared his thoughts as follows —

*Newspapers are representing themselves on Facebook and other social media platforms for their own sake. Since they are losing prominence over the audiences, they are now going to social media. Besides, Facebook and the other social platforms are like peddlers of the digital age who only deliver news to audiences...I also have a fear that in this way journalism will cease to exist in the near future. — P5*

P2 from The Daily Star newspaper considered social media as a means to an end for journalism as Facebook was gradually beating the other news websites in reaching audiences.

The discussions with the journalists explored their overall roles in Bangladesh’s print media newsrooms which included creating and posting on social media, website management and content posting on website, attending meetings, audience engagement and marketing of published news. The participants shared their roles in audience engagement and marketing of published news were the two important key factors in their overall roles which made them considered their jobs to stand between journalism and marketing.

### **TREATMENT FROM COLLEAGUES OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS:**

Eight among the 13 interviewed journalists shared or hinted that they were not treated well by their colleagues from the other departments. On some occasions, they were treated as less important persons in the newsrooms and thought of to be leading comfortable lives as they did not usually need to go outside like the reporters for writing reports. The participants, however, shared that their weekly working hours varied between 36 and 80 hours and some of them said that they worked all seven days a week. The interviewees also shared mixed reactions about getting support from their colleagues from the other departments when they asked for any help.

*P4: Overall, I would say that my colleagues from the other departments neglect me and my team members. Those who work in the mainstream such as reporting, editing and the editorial team are not taking us seriously as if we are doing needless jobs.*

*P3: I work seven days a week. Friday is my day-off but I also work from home on that day. I have to work for about 12 to 13 hours daily while it would amount to about 80 hours in a week. Sometimes, I feel exhausted and overburdened but...*

*P12: My colleagues from the other departments do not understand my work, so they cannot help me. In most cases, I seek support from the photographers. They provide photos to us. Sometimes, we need support from the desk team regarding support about the wire services.*

One of the crucial findings generated through this study is that given the fact that their daily functions were similar to the jobs performed by other journalists working in any newspaper and that their work added value to the newspapers' overall news and content dissemination to the audiences, these relatively new generation journalists faced volatile behavior from their

colleagues in other departments. Their colleagues considered them as less important personnel in the newsroom and neglect them whenever they asked for any support.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **DISCUSSION:**

This exploratory study aimed to find out the recurrent issues faced by journalists responsible for the social media efforts of Bangladeshi newspapers. To investigate the journalists' roles in the newsrooms and how they used the social media accounts belonging to their newspapers, the study interviewed a total of 13 journalists from 11 national newspapers based in the country. The newspapers are published in English and Bengali languages and have national-level reader base and coverage. The journalists interviewed also had experiences of working in other arenas of journalism such reporting, copy editing, online reporting, etc.

Interviews with some of the social media journalists revealed information that corroborated ideas presented in earlier studies on social media journalists. The study found that at least 11 newspapers in Bangladesh were using different social media platforms and appointed journalists to manage their social media presence in a bid to augment engagement with audiences for both their digital and print versions. The journalists' statements obtained during the course of the study made it almost evident that the majority of the newspapers had started their social media journeys with or soon after the arrival of social media in Bangladesh. The newspapers, in order to maintain their overall social media presence, used different methods and recruited varying numbers of journalists to run and manage their social media accounts.

The newspaper industry in Bangladesh is relatively younger than its counterparts in other countries across the world and as a result, the functions performed in the newsrooms were new

and continuously evolving. The participants had a wide range of job titles including that of the Digital Head, Online In-Charge, Web Editor, Deputy Editor, Senior Sub Editor, Sub Editor and Trainee Online Journalist. However, no participant who took part in the study had the designation of a social media editor, social media journalist or digital journalist as earlier studies (Aybar. B, 2019; DeVito, 2014 and Curries 2012) found, although their job responsibilities were directly related to managing the newsrooms' social media accounts.

In elaborating on the functions they carried out in the newsroom on a daily basis, the interviewees shared how they managed the social media accounts of their organizations, the roles they were assigned and the tasks they executed. Guided by the in-depth interview method and the Gatekeeping Theory, the author asked the participants a total of 36 questions and found that their overall traditional gatekeeping roles had undergone substantial changes as their jobs required them to put the most emphasis about audiences' demands and reactions as found by an earlier research (DeVito, 2014 Curries, 2012; and Tandoc and Vos, 2015). The journalists, while answering questions during individual interviews, shared the key roles and functions their jobs entailed in the newsrooms. Among their key roles, the journalists also thought they performed the roles of news marketers or news sellers, which supported the findings of Tandoc and Vos (2015) and Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017).

At first, the study set out to investigate how the social media journalists in Bangladesh's newspaper industry used their organizations' social media platforms along with the process of making editorial decisions about posting or sharing contents on the social media accounts. Besides, changing trends were found in their traditional gatekeeping roles as evidenced in previous studies (DeVito, 2014 Curries, 2012; and Tandoc and Vos, 2015). Several other studies — Singer (1998), (2001), (2006), (2008) and Cassidy (2005) and Brill (2001) — noted that the gatekeeping roles

had been experiencing changes from its traditional roles in the internet-based media landscape. According to the theories on news media, traditional gatekeeping always emphasized editorial independence. The theories also pointed to the fact that the journalists were required to shield their work and roles from forces like the government, advertisers and audiences as these elements acted as possible influencers in the traditional gatekeeping process (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). The majority of the journalists shared that they were not treated with respect or said that they were neglected by colleagues from the other departments, which stood in line with the findings of (Curries, 2012). It resulted in another key finding from the study.

The first finding in the study emerged when social media journalists in Bangladesh shared that they were highly influenced by their audiences, advertisers, the ruling class, the government and even their own authorities. They could post or share contents when something matched the choices of these quarters. They mostly shared contents on their social media accounts which served all these groups. The overall editorial decisions about which news articles to post depended on how their overall audiences and other influencer groups wanted to see them. In some cases, the interviewees shared that they had to take permissions from their senior colleagues or editorial bosses before posting contents. Curries (2012) referred to this situation in his study on Canadian newspapers' social media journalists as hostility towards the social media journalists in the newsrooms. Singer (2006) described both the audiences and newsroom superiors as the two masters whom the social media journalists were serving in the newsrooms.

All the interviewees shared that their newspapers did not have any official or written strategy or policy regarding posting of contents on social media, but they were told to follow the newspapers' editorial policy while sharing or posting contents. Some of them, however, stated that they followed certain strategies regarding the content types, elements, topics, etc. and posting

timelines. The majority of the participants said that they did not share any “vulgar” or “violent” contents while some said that they observed caution regarding news articles that were sensitive to gender, religion, other issues and sensational matters. Others said that “trendy” contents attracted their readers the most. The contents were shared at different times throughout the day. On analyzing the operations of six Colorado newspapers, Singer (2001) found that the online journalists were mostly replicating their print version contents over the websites. These findings were also supported in the latest study on Bangladeshi newspapers’ social media journalists. Bangladeshi newspapers’ social media journalists shared that their activities mostly involved sharing the news first on the website and then sharing them again on the social media platforms.

When asked about moderation of the comments section on social media accounts, according to most participants, the majority of the newspapers covered did not have a formal policy and the manpower to go through all the comments and then to moderate them regularly. But, in some cases when any comment went against their editorial agendas or policies, they were hidden or deleted. In another context, the journalists had to show the utmost level of caution regarding comment moderation. They shared that when the audiences shared, posted or wrote anything against the newspaper owners, ruling political parties or any related persons and any religious or social influential groups, such comments were deleted as they might have ill consequences for the newspaper. Being the point person or the one responsible for social media activity, the social media journalists might also have to face consequences the most. A few of the participants said that they did not or rarely replied to the comments posted by audiences but replied to messages on chat boxes. They, however, said that they engaged in communication with the audiences or replied to messages on chat boxes whenever they got any news tips from the audiences in any format — on comments or messages.

According to the interviewees, the newspapers also preferred to share contents related to topics liked most by their audiences. The participants shared about the variations in the contents shared that ranged from politics, international, national and entertainment. They shared posts related to these topics the most as their readers wanted or demanded them while text-based was the type of contents shared most. Some of the participants shared that they also posted videos, pictures, graphics and live videos on the social media accounts. The number of posts also varied in newspapers and even on social media platforms. But in most cases, they said that they posted contents the most on Facebook compared to any other social media platform due to its popularity among the Bangladeshi audiences. A few of them, however, said that they also shared contents regularly on YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

Although the usage of social media by Bangladeshi newspapers were in an early and developing stage, statements made by the participants revealed that only four newspapers had so far provided trainings for the social media journalists in their newsrooms. One of the participants, who was also from one of the newspapers mentioned above, shared his dissatisfaction on the trainings he received from his newspaper and termed them as “so-called trainings”. Other journalists who had no official training shared that they learned the skills needed to manage the social media accounts of their newspapers either themselves or with help from other teammates. One participant from an English daily did not answer when he was asked about getting any training from his organization.

Secondly, while sharing about their roles in the newsrooms, the social media journalists in the print media of Bangladesh found themselves engaged in various activities such as posting contents over the social media, creating and posting contents for the newspapers’ websites, attending meetings and maintaining liaison with other teams, audience engagement and marketing

or selling of the news. As seven out of 13 participants were heads of their social media teams, therefore, they all said that leading the whole team was one of their key functions in the newsrooms.

Creating and posting contents on the social media accounts were described by the majority of participants as the major functions of social media journalists. All of the participants said that they were kind of “key” persons of their newspapers’ social media activities. Social media journalists did not need to access and manage all the social media platforms on their own but often managed them by splitting into teams or their tasks were split up among team members. Another finding revealed that the social media journalists were involved in multitasking such as writing news stories, editing them, editing photos, producing and editing videos, etc. which corresponded with what Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017) found in their study.

Website management and social media management seemed to be done side by side by a majority of the participants. Apart from two social media journalists interviewed, the majority were found to be engaged in both tasks related to the newspapers’ websites along with social media responsibilities. Since the social media teams in the Bangladesh newspapers did not enjoy any autonomy and worked as part of the greater online or digital teams, they had to maintain or upload contents on the websites regularly.

According to most participants, they attended meetings almost every day, or at the very least every week. The meetings were not only held internally amongst the social media team members but also with members from other teams, including the print, reporting and advertising teams, senior colleagues and editorial board members.

Maintenance and enhancement of audience engagement was another key role regularly performed by the social media journalists in Bangladesh as was done by American and Canadian social media journalists, found in separate studies conducted by DeVito (2014) and Curries (2012) respectively. The Bangladeshi social media journalists thought that nowadays both their newspapers' print and digital or online versions could not thrive without social media presence. Traffic to the websites and also subscriptions for print versions of these newspapers were highly dependent on the respective newspaper's social media activities. Besides, according to some journalists interviewed, a greater percentage of the newspapers' revenues was now generated through their social media activities as social media created more engagement with audiences on their websites and prints versions and advertisers were more interested in running advertisements and spending money on the newspapers' social media platforms.

As discussed earlier, one of the crucial findings of the study was the fact that the social media journalists claimed they were "marketing" or "selling" the published news of their newspapers, which supported the findings of earlier studies conducted by Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017), Tandoc and Vos (2015) and Brill (2001). All three studies found that these journalists were either doing marketing jobs or had jobs that crossed paths between journalism and marketing. Most participants in this study said that they were doing jobs similar to marketing as they barely produced or created any news reports from scratch but rather disseminated ready news articles on the social media platforms.

Last but not the least, this study also found that the social media journalists in Bangladesh's print media were not treated well by their colleagues from the other departments. The majority of those interviewed stated that their colleagues "neglected" them because they thought these social media journalists were involved in less important jobs and had relatively comfortable

responsibilities in the newsrooms. However, the daily activities and working hours of the social media journalists hinted otherwise. A previous chapter described the roles these journalists played in the newsrooms and detailed the hours they worked daily and weekly which revealed that they spent up to 80 hours a week as a social media journalist.

The study found almost no editorial decisions were made in newsrooms or the newspapers had no strategy regarding what to post or what not to post. In most cases, the social media journalists posted what their audiences might like and kept their bosses happy, which were also found to be true by Singer (2006) who termed the two influencer groups, the audiences and the bosses, as “two masters”. Another crucial finding of the study is that the overall gatekeeping roles of journalists were changing from the traditional print media roles as was found in earlier studies conducted by Singer (1998), (2001), (2006), (2008) and Cassidy (2005) and Brill (2001). These studies found that once gatekeeping roles include to disseminate news and investigating the information they found from the sources, but with the development of digital media now journalists in newsrooms are acting as interpreters or communicators to their audiences. In the changing trend another role of social media journalists – marketing the news - was again rediscovered and discussed by the study which also found by earlier studies as Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017), Tandoc and Vos (2015) and Brill (2001). In fact, in this study, the journalists themselves explicitly said that they were actually doing something that either stood between marketing and journalism or was only marketing, promotion or selling of the news and improving their newspapers’ brand images. Although these social media journalists were a new type of army in the newspapers’ arsenals who battled for audience engagement largely to help the newspapers to get connected and enjoy better readership both on the print and website fronts, they barely avail the opportunity to get any trainings from their organizations to do their jobs. Besides, their previous journalistic

experiences in different sections of the newspapers and weekly duty hours of up to 80 hours could not ensure respect for them in the newsrooms as they often were treated badly or were slighted upon by their own colleagues who thought these new breed journalists were doing more “comfortable” jobs compared to them.

### **LIMITATIONS:**

Conducting a study with the support of the exploratory research method is always challenging and has limitations as due to the evolving nature of the studied phenomenon. The social media editors’ posts in the newsrooms are not so old but are almost quite new in Bangladesh’s print industry. The study, which aimed to investigate the relatively new posts in the newsrooms of the print industry in Bangladesh, is possibly the first of its kind in the context of Bangladesh as far as the author knows. Since the posts are quite new, it was difficult initially for the author to find out relevant participants who could be included in the study and to initiate contact with them.

There was no formal body that represented these journalists as there are for other groups of journalists in Bangladesh. Therefore, they were contacted individually through connections the author had during his previous career in journalism and later interviewed them following the snowball sampling method. The social media journalists were very generous and cooperating during the interviews. They also shared important information regarding their works and other related issues candidly and with openness. The author wants to thank all of them for their support and cooperation.

The first limitation of the study was that it had a relatively low number of data set as the author could not reach all the participants he had initially planned to. This small data set might not

actually represent the overall situation of social media journalists in Bangladesh but helped to bring to light information relating to how these 11 newspaper social media journalists executed their roles and took editorial decisions at a time their gatekeeping roles were transitioning from the traditional functions performed by journalists in newsrooms.

Besides, the geographical distance between the journalists based in Bangladesh and the author also compelled him to follow the telephone-based or social media-based interview methods. It was impossible for the author to visit and conduct face-to-face interviews of those who participated. The replacement of face-to-face interviews by the interview method adopted in the study did not significantly alter the outcome of the data as Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) noted that the telephone interview could be used productively in qualitative research.

Translation was a must for transcribing the interviews as the interviewed journalists preferred to speak to the author in Bengali. As a Bengali-speaking individual, the author interviewed them in Bengali and later translated all 13 interviews into English. The author has tried his level best to translate the interviews but due to time constraints, he had to make them precise in which case, certain portions of the interviews deemed as irrelevant to the study in hand may have been excluded.

The study was conducted as part of the academic curriculum of the graduate program the author was currently enrolled in at the University of Mississippi. It was also his first ever solo study that investigated a relatively new phenomenon in the print media newsrooms of Bangladesh. The study makes no claims to generalize its findings beyond the 13 interviewed journalists. However, the study was trying to provide a glimpse of how the new types of journalists were performing their roles, the nature of their relationships with their colleagues and audiences and how their gatekeeping roles were witnessing shifts from the traditional ways of gatekeeping in the

newsrooms. The author also aims to investigate the topic further with a bigger data set from the industry studied here. Moreover, the author has a second aim to expand the realm of this study further by investigating the roles of social media journalists in the newsrooms of other print and broadcast industries both in Bangladesh and other countries across the globe.

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**APPENDIXES**

**APPENDIX-A**

**Consent Form**

**Title:** How newspapers' Social Media Editors in Bangladesh use official social media accounts and their roles at newsrooms

**Investigator**

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*By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.*

**Description**

The study aims to explore the roles of social media editors working at Bangladesh newspapers

and how they use social media platforms in their reporting. You will be asked to answer a series of questions as accurately as possible about your roles as a social media editor as well as your use of social media in your newsroom.

### **Cost and Payments**

It will take you approximately one hour to complete the interview.

### **Risks and Benefits**

We believe there are no risks associated with this study.

### **Confidentiality**

No identifiable information will be recorded, therefore we do not anticipate that your identity will be revealed from this study.

### **Right to Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Ahmed Shatil Alam in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

### **IRB Approval**

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board

(IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

**Statement of Consent**

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview I consent to participate in the study.

## **APPENDIX-B**

### Questionnaire

#### Conversation starters

1. How long have you been working as a journalist?
2. What are your roles within your news organization?
3. How long have you been in charge of your news organization's social media pages? Please tell me your duties.
4. Do you have any previous experience with any other organization/s?
5. What did you do before you became a social media journalist?
6. How long has this job existed in your newsroom?
7. Describe a typical working day for you.
8. How does your job incorporate journalism?

#### Ways of using social media platforms

1. How many social media platforms your organization have? Can you please name them?
2. Which one you use the most and why?
3. Do you have any social media strategies? If so, can you please share with me with some examples?
4. Since when your organization have been using them?

5. What types of contents (video, text, image or graphics) you post, share or produce for your audiences?
6. Do you also moderate the comments posted by your audiences? If yes, please share us example/s.
7. Do you also monitor other newspapers social media accounts? Explain why or why not?
8. How many languages you usually use to manage social media handles of your organization?
9. Do you respond to the queries of readers who ask questions on the pages? Please share examples.
10. How many times do you usually post in a day?
11. How do you decide which contents will you post on the pages?
12. What type of news item, such as politics, entertainment etc you post and share most?
13. When you post a report, do you write something accompanying the link? Photos, video, audio elements?
14. Have you ever considered your audiences' reply or comments as your news tip? If so, then what do you do next about the tip?
15. Do you use social media accounts as news source? If yes please give an example.
16. Are there any social media strategies related to breaking news item?
17. What are your most popular social media posts?

18. How does social media influence your organization's work?
19. What method you follow to understand your audience engagement with your pages or accounts?

#### Roles in the newsroom

1. What is your job title?
2. Did you get any training prior to join your current social media team?
3. What are your primary functions in this role?
4. What are your primary responsibilities in this role?
5. How are the editorial decisions made about which content should be posted on social media?
6. How your colleagues treat you in the newsroom?
7. Can you get help or any other supports from your colleagues of other departments?
8. How many of hours you spent weekly or daily for your work?
9. How many people or journalists are working in your team? Do they all have different responsibilities?
10. How do you use your journalistic training in this role?
11. How has social media influenced your work as a journalist?

## VITA

“Ahmed Shatil Alam began his career in journalism as a reporter at New Age, a national English language daily in Bangladesh, in 2010 and worked there for nearly eight years prior to enrolling in the master’s program in journalism at the University of Mississippi’s School of Journalism and New Media in 2018.

He soon developed an interest in academic research and found his way in his first collaborative project titled “Fact-checking Initiatives in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal: A Study of User Engagement and Challenges.” Another collaborative paper he worked on titled “Combating Misinformation in Bangladesh: Roles and Responsibilities as Perceived by Journalists, Fact-checkers, and Users” was presented at the 2020 AEJMC Midwinter Conference at the University of Oklahoma in March this year.

He has covered several beats, including health, information and communication technology, and environment, during his reporting career at New Age in Bangladesh. Alongside his career at the paper, he has also worked as a fixer for journalists of the Washington Post and Al Jazeera. In the Summer of 2018, he helped Washington Post’s Vidhi Doshi cover a story titled “138 people killed in 2 months in Bangladesh police crackdown on drug dealers”.

In September 2017, he worked with the Human Rights Watch as a fixer and interpreter for a report on the plight of workers employed by the readymade garment industry of Bangladesh, a major revenue earning source for the country.

Since the Fall of 2019, he has been working as a writer for NewsLab as part of his assistantship duties. NewsLab, run by the University of Mississippi's School of Journalism, is an online resource and training center for journalism and marketing communications professionals who want to build their skills, broaden their thinking and stay abreast of developments in their ever-changing fields.

He completed his undergraduate degree in journalism with a concentration on Electronic and Print Media from the Journalism and Media Studies Department of Stamford University in Bangladesh. In 2016, he enrolled in a one-year Government and Development Studies master's program at the Jahangirnagar University, a public school in Bangladesh.”