The Daily Star

CELEBRATING

29 YEARS OF JOURNALISM WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

SEGMENT 5

ANNIVERSARY SUPPLEMENTS 2020

THE YOUTH IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION

DHAKA THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2020, *FALGUN 7, 1426 BS*

18

Entertainment and the future of digital media

"Now that there are multiple platforms, the subjects can be targeted to individual age groups. We can tell stories from different angles and we don't have to be conscious about filtering, which is an advantage."

Nuhash also noted the drawbacks of digital platforms. "Making these platforms open to everyone can leave a question mark on the quality of the content, but it's a

> "Most streaming platforms are not categorised in terms of quality and content. As a result, more often than not, the things under a particular genre all end up feeling and looking alike."
>
> – Tanvir Ahsan

learning experience, and there is room for everyone," he says. Tanvir, however, asserted that the filtering issues remain the same, in the case of showing intimate scenes, for instance. "Most streaming platforms are not categorised in terms of quality and content. As a result, more often than not, the things under a particular genre all end up feeling and looking alike," he further adds. Nuhash and Tanvir are two of the 11 directors of *Iti Tomari Dhaka*, the first anthology film in Bangladesh, which was released on Netflix recently.

Countering Nuhash's point, Adnan, one of the finest TVC directors in Bangladesh, explained that as a result of having room for every kind of creator on different digital platforms, the depth of storytelling and the essence of visualisation are deteriorating, and these platforms have segregated the audience.

Nuhash argued that digital platforms immortalise films and shows. "Since there are fewer limitations on content, everything can coexist on the same platform, at the same time, for as long as the platform operates. For instance, as a creator, it is

a privilege to have my work release on the same platform where works of a prolific filmmaker like Martin Scorsese are available," he says.

On the other hand, Subrina Irine, a trusted director in the advertising industry amongst many renowned brands, noted that the content on digital platforms needs previewing and monitoring. "These platforms have made it so easy for most people to come into the limelight that people often don't care to carry out proper research before putting out any information," she says.

Ashfaque Nipun had a different view from the others, as he claimed that creators in Bangladesh are still in the experimentation stage when it comes to digital media. "Digital platforms are very new to us, so right now, many 'not good enough' and even 'poor' projects will be

delivered, which I think is okay, because we are still learning," he says.

"I also feel that with the increasing number of screens, the attention span of the public is shrinking. We have so many options today that we cannot stick to just one streaming channel or one show." The director, whose tele-fiction *Amader Ei Shohore* was widely appreciated last year, also spoke about the importance of creating memorable characters and stories.

"I think that with the growing number of screens, there is no variation in terms of storytelling. In recent years, I don't think we have come across characters as iconic as Baker Bhai, Himu, or Misir Ali. We may have made improvements in terms of tools and amenities, but we

the youth are willing to use these platforms legally," he says.

Rony also spoke about the strategic policies of the telecom-based streaming services. "Telecom companies mainly target data business with their streaming services. At the same time, the restriction of having to use a particular sim card to watch particular shows discourages consumers. Thus, the companies lose a massive number of viewers in that regard," says the director.

"International platforms use a strategy that follows content business. In the long run, I think our local platforms will be bound to switch their strategy, because they cannot sustain for a long time in this way."

The discussion eventually

phenomenon, people have moved their interest towards the web. However, the risks for full length feature films are getting higher day by day. We can easily pitch a story for a fiction or even a web series, but in the case of movies, finance is a major issue. The risk factors are higher."

On a more positive note, Irine pointed out that in the past few years, out of the box films like *Doob, Aynabaji, Debi, Komola Rocket* and others have made a mark and if this trend continues, the industry will be successful.

Rony spoke about the evolution of watching films. "Ultimately, our film industry has to match up to international levels. The movie-going experience will eventually

have a lot more work to do on the stories we tell," he says.

Following up with Nipun's views, Redoan Rony, known for films like *Chorabali* and *Ice Cream*, explained that to retain the interest of the audience, he needs to keep evolving with time and come up with new strategies of telling stories.

Furthermore, the apps for Bangladeshi streaming platforms are telecom-based and not available overseas. As a result, creators lose out on reaching a large chunk of the potential audience. "People watch our content on YouTube, but the revenue earned from YouTube is negligible. It is not sufficient for the investors. Ideally, streaming services are more profitable because they are not for free," Adnan explains. "But people are often unwilling to pay for these services, but are not comfortable with the payment systems." In relation to Adnan's point, Nipun identified that as shows are made accessible to the audience on platforms like YouTube for free, they are discouraged from paying to watch those on a streaming service. He also added that local streaming platforms need to make their catalogues richer.

Irine pointed out that streaming services neglect people of the rural areas and are mainly focused on the urban audience. "People in rural areas prefer projectors or televisions. They often find it difficult to subscribe to a particular streaming service due to poor network quality. At that point, they automatically drop that option," she says.

"I worked on a project for a local platform last year. Upon its release, I received many calls from fans who were trying to watch it on television. However, the platform's content was not available for television," shares Nuhash. "Our audience is bigger than any platform. So, when I got to know that they are ready to pay to watch my content, but they cannot because of these restrictions, it was heart-breaking for me."

Rony had a different point of view. "I don't think that people are discouraged from paying for streaming services. Statistically, the subscribers for popular international streaming platforms are increasing day by day. Their customers mainly include the youth, who are spending money for their own entertainment, despite having the option to watch pirated versions of their favourite shows, free of cost. It is great that

shifted gears to the impacts of advertising. Television commercials predominantly represent the young generation today, and play a key role to standardise the voice of youngsters. Adnan, one of the youngest creators in the industry, shared how the youth is misunderstood by communication groups.

"The youth makes up a major part of Bangladesh's population today. However, I think there is a huge gap between the communication groups and the generation z. As a result, their attention span has drastically dropped and they are often misunderstood," he says.

Rony supported Adnan's views. "Djuice brought us an experience which was completely out of the box, after that, many other telecom companies followed the trend. But today, all content looks the same. I also wonder whether

> "The problem with our producers is that they depend on word of mouth, which works in both positive and negative ways. Statistically, most of the films in Bangladesh start picking up from the second week because of word of mouth."
>
> – Ashfaque Nipun

these communication brands are creating false images in the name of 'coolness'," he shares. "For example, before the student protest, no one was really aware of the spark of the youth. With that one movement, the students showed that they are not only smart but also politically aware, and they know how to do things following the constitution. So, I feel that these companies should be more conscious about targeting the youth."

Meanwhile, the number and the quality of films in Bangladesh are also on the decline. Only 45 films were released in the country last year. "Films should have been the supreme medium in Bangladesh, but television has taken that place," says Nipun. "I think it will take time to change, as after the television

change. People will turn towards more science fiction genres, there will be 3D, 5D or even 9D technologies for movies, which will pull more people into the theatres," he explains, adding that the number of art and indie films will increase, but people will prefer watching them on streaming platforms. "In Bangladesh, people do not go to multiplexes just to watch a film—they go for the whole recreational package and to spend some quality time with their friends and loved ones. So, for a sustainable future, the industry needs to change."

Adnan brought forth the importance of marketing. "I personally think that films have a positive space at the moment. Proper marketing for a movie is very essential to earn back the revenue. At the same time, more multiplexes are being built, which is great. Nevertheless, there will be a mix and match of the cinema theatre and the web," he says.

"The problem with our producers is that they depend on word of mouth, which works in both positive and negative ways. Statistically, most of the films in Bangladesh start picking up from the second week because of word of mouth," adds Nipun. It has become a tool that sadly decides the success or failure of the film, whereas the fate of a film should depend on the strength of the script and the quality of the project."

The directors all plan to work on different projects focused on the youth. While Nipun wants to explore the political interests of the young generation, Rony wants to work on something based on the student movement. Tanvir wants to showcase the narcissism of the youth and their struggles in adjusting to the society. Adnan wants to focus on generation z.

Despite their different views, the discussants all agreed that the industry is headed towards a positive direction, against all odds. Nuhash and Tanvir have already completed their respective feature films, and are working on their upcoming projects. Nipun is set to make his debut feature film, tentatively titled, *Golla*.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the problems and probable solutions in developing the digital media and the medium of entertainment. Undoubtedly, these young creators will all have significant roles to play in the future of the industry.