



ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

Public Universities in Changing Times

I When universities shut-down because of the pandemic most people thought they'd re-open within a month. It soon became evident that the virus was here to stay. Almost all public universities in Bangladesh have halls of residence. Some of them have *Gono Rooms* where too many students are housed in a single room. Re-opening would make social distancing a challenge to enforce. Thus re-opening prematurely disappeared from the equation.

Keeping public universities shut for a long time opened up twin challenges. First, session jams, for which public universities in Bangladesh are known, would become prolonged. The challenge that was unforeseen was the mental health of students. Staying at home with zero or minimum social contact was becoming detrimental to the mental health of students in what was coined as the "new normal".

Doing something may not solve a problem. Doing nothing will make a bad situation worse. Public universities had to re-open. Today's *Echoes* tries to explore where constraints lie for public universities. It's based on the experience of economics students of Jahangirnagar, Barisal, Mawlana Bhashani and BUP.

II *Constraints outside the control of universities:* The first problem students across Bangladesh are facing is: connectivity. Most students don't have access to Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi isn't available everywhere. Although most students have a basic smartphone, weak



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

network, frequent disconnection, and network fluctuation are posing a challenge to attendance.

Many students are getting out of the house and walking a distance to locate themselves to the nearest tower. If classes are being held for even four hours a day, many students are exposed to outside weather. They need an additional power bank for back-up power.

If experiencing online lectures in real time is a challenge, then streaming or downloading recorded lectures where made available is another challenge.

Data costs: This varies. It depends on data consumption per class and over a week or a month. Students from the above universities are spending Tk 150 on average per week for data connectivity. This constraint is partially in the control of universities. Mobile operators have started offering packages for online classes. Special packages at affordable rates for students can be arranged over time.

Mental health: Prolonged online classes and gazing at screens is posing a challenge not only to the eyes, but also to the mental health of students. This is a challenge that

needs to be considered by universities, the students and their families.

III Online education is here to stay for some time. It's the "new normal". What will work and what will not work will become clear only over time. Each university will have constraints that are unique to themselves. Respective university authorities can address them based on their experiences. There will also be some common constraints which can be addressed by the University Grants Commission, the parent body of universities in Bangladesh.

Cooperation between universities and their students; and students with their families may be the best way out of the challenges public universities and students are experiencing now. Our students are our future. They are very dear to us. Whatever we do, we'll have to put their welfare first, but also remind ourselves, we have to proceed ahead.

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Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Why do bad movies have cult followings?

JISHAD BIN SHIRAJ AL HAMID

Have you ever sat down with your friends to watch a movie only to find it horrendously bad just 10 minutes in? And even though it was bad, you and your friends still wanted to watch it for some reason? Most popular movies known for being notoriously bad are *The Room*, *Troll 2*, *Birdemic: Shock and Terror*, the *Sharknado* series—the list goes on. Here's why people like them so much and go back for repeated viewings.

To answer why bad movies gain cult followings I'd have to delve into the psychological aspects of it. I'll try not to make it boring. When *The Room* first came out back in 2003 it was met with raucous laughter from critics and audiences due to the sheer stupidity of the plot and the characters and pretty much everything. But as time went on it eventually formed a fanbase with it getting sold out midnight screenings each

month around the US.

When people gather together to watch films such as *The Room* there is a communal aspect to it, everyone's there to laugh at the movie and just have a good time. The sense of communion within like-minded people is what gets viewers from all over to catch midnight screenings and throw plastic spoons at the screen in unison when a particular scene shows up. Followed with meet and greets with the man himself, Tommy Wiseau, seals the deal for fans of the movie.

Enjoying bad movies, or what is also known as "paracinema", are movies which are out of the mainstream realm. And viewing them with an ironic stance gives people a sense of being an expert critic, whereas they're just an average viewer and their favourite movie is *The Nun*. Anywho, not all movies are made equal though, some are deliberately bad just for



the sake of being bad, such as *Sharknado*, but others just missed their mark like *The Room* and *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (quite the title). These movies are the ones with a

cult following because the creators behind the movies put their heart and soul into it, which is respectable in comparison to those making a bad film just to earn money at the box office.

Passion projects such as *The Room* even inspired a book titled "The Disaster Artist", which was later adapted into an Oscar-nominated feature film starring James Franco. This just goes to show the impact of a bad movie on the industry. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise?

Next time you and your friends are deciding on which movie to watch, maybe you ought to look outside the box, you may not witness a patrician flick, but you and your friends will have a fun time, and at the end of the day, that's all that matters.

Jishad says he loves movies, but he hasn't seen all of them, so he's a liar. Send him some recommendations at jishadshiraj66@gmail.com