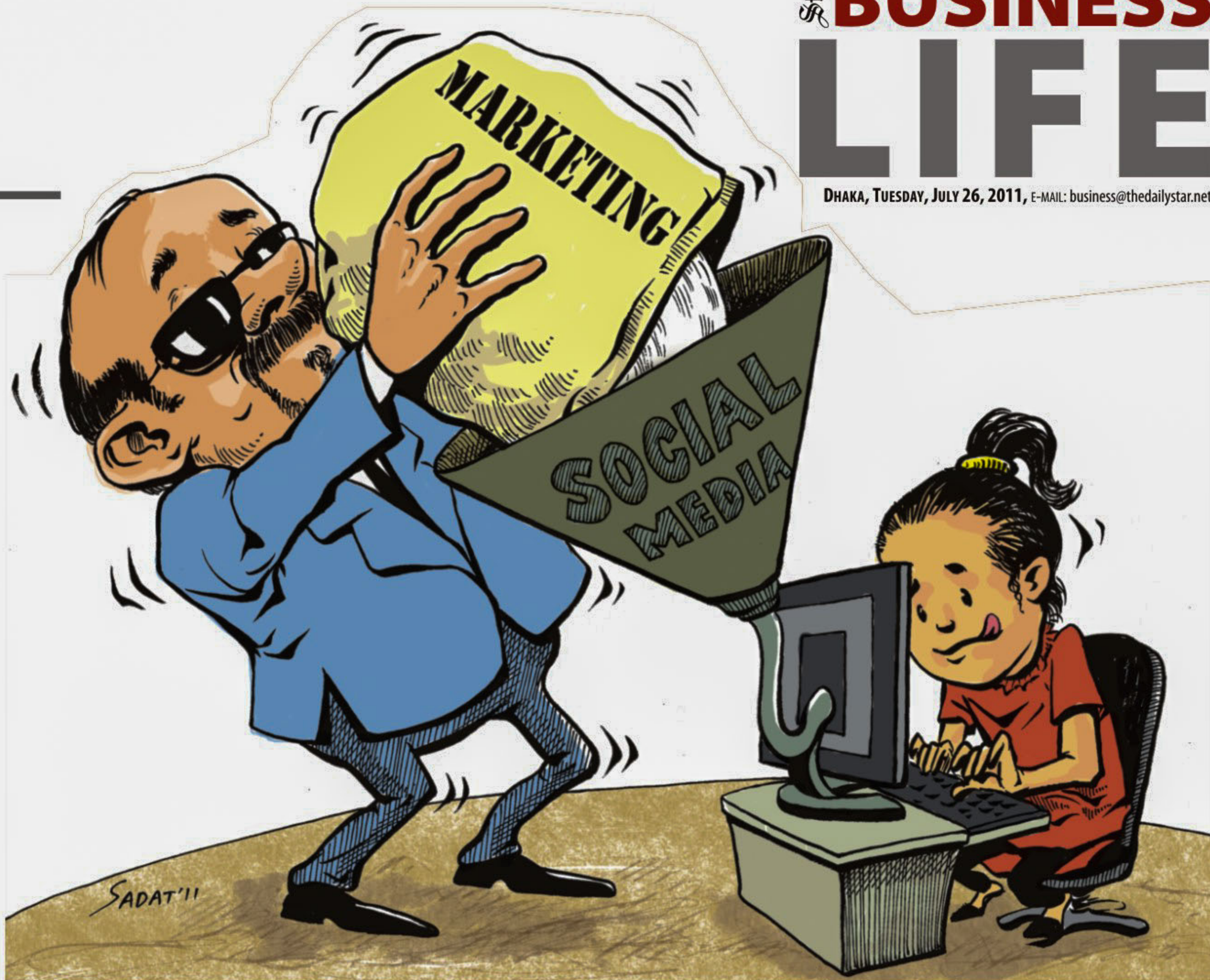


Social media drives branding



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ABDULLAH MAMUN

AN online presence of businesses in social media is talk of the town. Companies can either choose to jump on the bandwagon or be left out of it all. Nowadays, businesses in Bangladesh are engaging efforts in social media to gain proximity to consumers.

"We once aired a television commercial on the company network, which quickly became popular. But some of our Facebook friends criticised that we were too emotional in the visual. Taking the comments seriously, we changed our visuals to make it more colorful and lively," said Tahmeed Azizul Huq, head of corporate communications of Grameenphone.

Why do companies care about feedback from Facebook?

Tahmeed said most media perceptions are one sided. "Consumers may take different projections differently. But social media is interactive and direct personal reactions can be obtained. Companies can get new ideas from the consumers. It is a form of two-way communication, a sort of dialogue between the two parties. So, the company cannot keep away from the opinions," he said.

The internet revolution can keep people from different parts of the country to abroad within the same distance. This is what ultimately

impacts a brand, said experts in the field.

The pace of information flow has made the world small. People can reach out to any corner of the world with the click of a button. A man in Dhaka can get easy access to the head of a big beverage company in the US. More and more Bangladeshi companies are taking part in new media by uploading information on their websites, Facebook or YouTube.

With direct feedback from customers, companies are better equipped to respond to customer queries. It pushes the company to fine-tune their campaigns. It has become a way of learning, said industry people.

In the last decade, social networking has revolutionised the way companies communicate. Each day, over 175 million people log on to Facebook; each minute, twenty hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. Each second, over 600 tweets are sent out to a worldwide audience. Half a billion people are connected to Facebook and numbers are growing exponentially.

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Dell, Intel, FedEx, ComCast, CISCO and a large number of other popular companies are building their social media marketing strategies

and getting good results. Dell had generated \$6.5 million in sales from Twitter alone. ComCast has helped over 150,000 customers through social media. Starbucks gave their consumers a voice, resulting in over 50,000 product ideas.

In the western world, new media may have an impact on direct sales, but in Bangladesh, it is still within branding. Syed Ashiqur Rahman, head of brand of Wimax broadband provider Qubee, said they are optimistic about the use of social media. The company is connected to 40,000 friends on Facebook. As soon as any new product is launched, friends on Facebook get the information first.

Ashiqur said Qubee recently arranged a musical programme at Mirpur in Dhaka called 'History of Rock and Roll' without a single promotional activity on television, radio or the newspaper. Surprisingly, an audience of 5,000 was present at the programme, he said.

He said Qubee always responds to consumer complaints through Facebook, but sometimes it becomes tough to respond to all when the network is disrupted. "But a portion of service related complaints come through Facebook."

Rahat Ahmed, communications manager of Nokia Emerging Asia, Bangladesh office, said above 80 percent of the youth in Bangladesh use social media on their handsets. So the

company has dedicated applications for the group.

He said it is easy to reach out to various segments of people with Facebook to present new products and oversee customer reaction.

Rahat said consumers are already online. "We just need to communicate with them."

"In the developed countries, products are being sold with the help of social media -- but it is not yet possible here."

Mahboob Zaman, president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), said sales through new media in the country are yet to start as Bangladesh Bank has declared the start of online payment.

His company DataSoft once tried to work with two super shops for the home delivery service. "But we couldn't for problems in the payment system."

"This trend is also evident from the fact that worldwide, online versions of books are sold more than original paper versions."

Zaman said Bangladeshi freelancer software developers are getting large sums of money from western companies to work from Bangladesh. Some of them even earning \$1,800 to \$2,000 a month from home. They communicate with the purchasers with the help of the internet.

abdullah.mamun@thedailystar.net

Target the youth

Media and communications teacher discusses the role of youth in branding

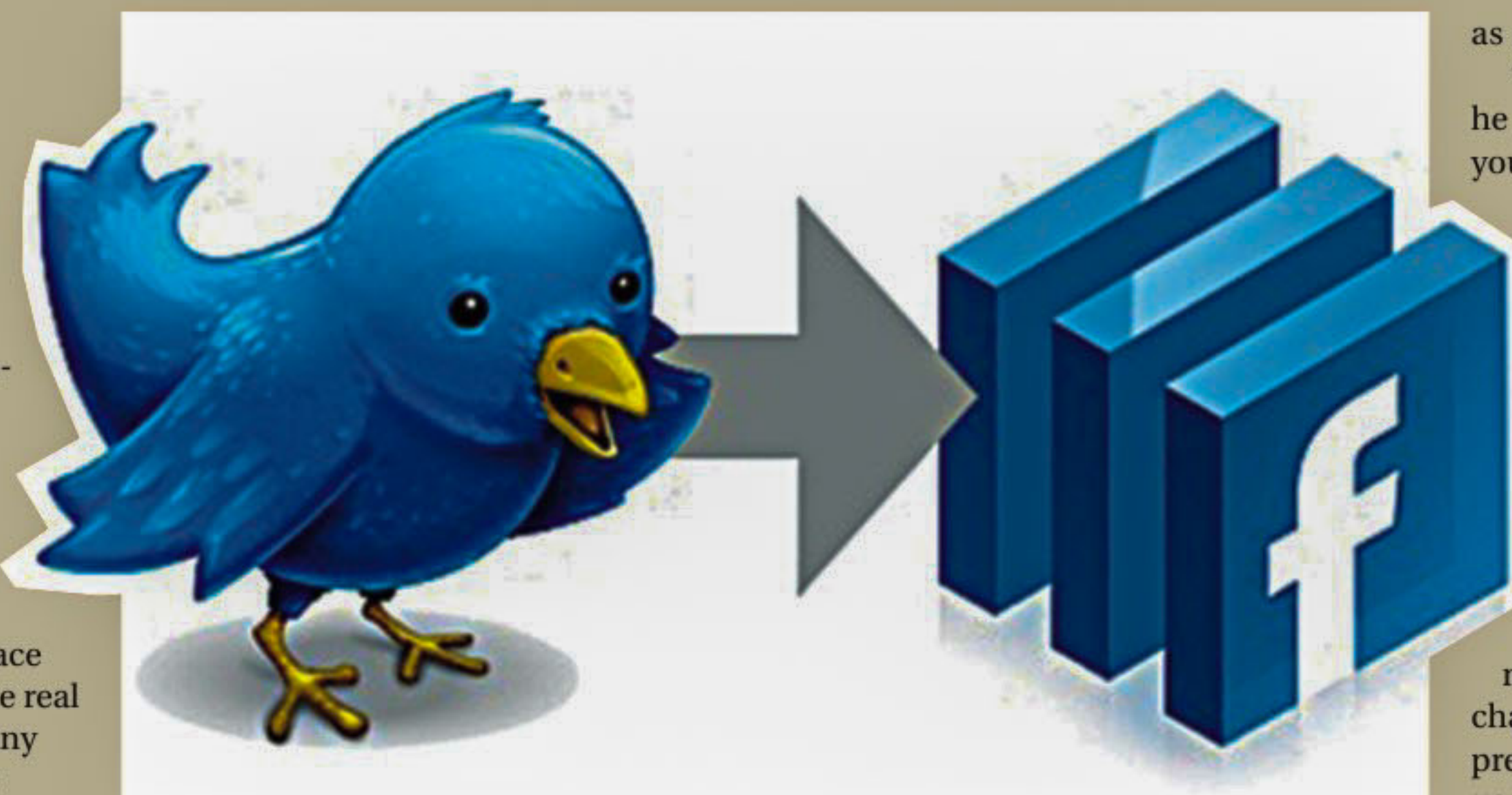
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BUSINESS tends to pick social media, as new platforms -- Facebook and Twitter -- have multifaceted applications. Social media is exploding as a new media channel. It differs from other advertising channels because messages are multi-directional and generated by many parties: marketers, influencers, individuals and consumers.

Social media is not a one-way broadcast of messages to the masses, but a conversation taking place between many individuals. Unlike the real world, the conversation can have many others observing and consuming the content, not just during the conversation, but practically forever into the future. Social media marketing has an easily accessible and long memory.

The practical side of social media is that it can target lifestyles, said Mohammad Masud Chowdhury, a senior lecturer of the media and communications department of Independent University Bangladesh. Chowdhury said social media is integrally linked with our life and offers a range of available products that suit our lifestyles.

He said every person with an internet connection has an account on the social



media site Facebook. This site is like a kaleidoscope.

People want to know the impacts of social media in businesses, but they do not want to research the topic. "So we should do an in-depth analysis or research on the impacts of Facebook on our lives and businesses," he said. "This would help us decide what to do next."

Media is an integral part of business now a day, said Chowdhury.

"For example, one can get an idea of global finance by analysing Bloomberg

reports. Similarly, we should study the impacts of new media so that we can make predictions on the business of the country."

He asks what is needed for the business entity. "Businesses need to reach out to the youth of the country because they are the real consumers. They dictate their parents about brands that would be purchased."

"A lawyer friend of mine was supposed to purchase an ordinary car. But his adolescent daughter persuaded him to get the Toyota Premio brand," he said

as an example.

"This brand is much costlier than one he chose at first. But the choice of the young members in the family become important in buying goods," he explained.

He said businesses should address this segment of society for marketing with the help of new media.

It is very easy to reach out to this young crowd with the help of music too, he added. "This segment is also very adventurous."

He said businesses should be more aware of what is happening or changing in society. "There will be new pressure groups in the market; they will use high-tech methods. To sustain in the digital market, business people should concentrate on new media."

The concept of brands differs between the parents and children, he added.

"Kids basically share their brand concept with their peer groups. What they say really matters. So every campaign should target that group. Using new media in branding or campaigning is still absent in Bangladesh. But the landscape is changing very fast."

"Now a day, we see sugar or oil vanishing from the market. But the day is not so far when oligopolies or monopolies will

disappear from the market. These are very old business concepts."

"The architecture of information is shifting very fast. The paradigm is changing," said Chowdhury.

The senior lecturer said one could get digital solutions if required.

"People are even using smart cards in the chicken markets."

The internet has become a part of everyday life, he said. "This means that spending behaviours are changing. People don't want to carry cash for security reasons. New media has a lot to do here."

New media has the power to change brand loyalty, said Chowdhury. "The perception of a brand can be changed. You may have a tea garden in the Tetulia upazila of Panchagarh district, in the extreme north of Bangladesh. You also have the facility to market the garden as an organic one by using Youtube. You can raise consumer eagerness on organic food. You can even take orders on the net."

On the other hand, Chowdhury talks about digital governance. "The products should be authentic, as expressed on websites. Social media has strong catalytic role to run a business."

abdullah.mamun@thedailystar.net