

Putting the “news” in our news feeds

Hint: it’s not celebrity gossip

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The decline of print media does not indicate a decline in readers’ demand for news. The medium has simply shifted online, where majority of readers are young and politically opinionated. They want to stay informed on the issues they care about, but what exactly do they care about?

Roshni Islam, 23, is a student of environmental science at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). On a typical day in her life, she wakes up around 8am and goes through a rotation of social media apps on her phone. She finds a few nihilistic memes at the top of her news feed on Facebook, alongside some articles from *The Guardian* on climate change, which instill a deep existential crisis in her.

She reads about the ice caps melting, she reads about Greta Thunberg, she reads about Bangladesh’s vulnerable position in the climate crisis. But the media coverage on the effects of climate change in our country is still not satisfactory, she claims. “When over 60 percent of our parliamentarians are businesspersons, it is highly likely that capitalist interests will be prioritised over the common good. If nothing else, the media can at least call out policies and projects that degrade our environment, and educate people on the issues they should be considering when electing a representative,” said Roshni.

In a survey done by *The Daily Star* last week, more than half of 250 respondents said they were highly interested in reading

about the climate crisis. “Bangladesh stands to lose the most because of climate change, yet the population is blissfully unaware of how they are contributing to it and how they can mitigate it. Newspapers have an important role to play here,” opined Prithvi Shams, 26, who is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree at Concordia University, Canada.

Mansura Amdad, a 23-year-old graduate student at Dhaka University’s international relations department, echoed the same with a few additions, “I want to see more coverage on human rights issues and the environment, because I think these two factors contribute the most to our generational existential crisis.”

Constantly connected with the rest of the world through social media, today’s youth are no longer detached from the news. Social media is not just for selfies and cat pictures; people use it for keeping up with current affairs. Even the memes are political, sometimes the cats as well. Young people follow football and fashion as ardently as they engage in debate and discourse about national and international issues. The advent of the internet has helped this generation be more “woke” than ever, but it has also caused massive information overload, contributing to their deteriorating mental health.

20-year-old Labib Daiyan recently completed his A Levels, and he thinks information overload can affect people negatively. “However, there are countless other reasons behind mental health issues. There should be more coverage on the causes, symptoms, effects, and treatment of mental illnesses. It is heavily stigmatised, yet experienced by a majority of young people,” he said.

“Newspapers can play an integral role in educating people about mental health as they reach a large number of readers in all corners of the world,” Labib stressed.

“Do you know who still reads print newspapers? People of my parents’ age. The older generation has a disconnect with their offspring, because they do not understand our problems,” said Taslima Tarique, 20, who wants the media to highlight gender issues and LGBTQ rights. “If newspapers give the youth a voice, it will not only encourage young readers to pick up a copy of your publication, but also convince older generations to empathise with us.”

Taslima mentioned that while stories of women’s victimhood are widely circulated, there are few follow-ups on women who survived through

their struggles. “There should be more coverage on seemingly small instances of systemic gender discrimination that occur across the country,” she said, highlighting women’s unpaid household labour as an example of continued social discrimination.

Multiple female readers complained about a gendered lens missing from the media. “It’s quite a taboo to speak about gender and sexuality in Bangladesh. But if we never talk about it, the marginalised groups will continue being discriminated against,” Taslima said.

Bangladesh has long been plagued by faults in governance. Despite corruption being a widely-covered issue, readers think what they see on the media is merely the tip of the iceberg. “I’d like to see a series that investigates various socio-political and economic allegations against the government. Such documentation would certainly be an interesting read, while hopefully leading the path towards greater transparency in the system,” said Saadman Chowdhury, a final-year student of business administration at Dhaka University.

As news on corruption, gender-based violence, and accidents dominate mass media, many readers have started experiencing information fatigue. Khaleda Akhter Laboni, 34, a development professional, believes there should be more wholesome stories. “Amidst all this bad news circulating in social media, it’s impossible to find even a small positive story. I personally want to see more human stories—there are people in remote corners of our country who are doing small acts of kindness, or bringing positive change in their communities. I believe they deserve more limelight,” she said.

With over 30 percent of the population aged between 15-24, and the government, pushing for their Digital Bangladesh agenda, the tech industry is of utmost interest to the youth. Business, science and technology, and startups are popular interests. Abrar Rahman, a 29-year-old business graduate who is currently between jobs, said, “I like reading career tips and articles that provide industry insights. These are helpful during interviews.”

Entertainment news was snubbed by most interviewees, with Tabassum Noshin, 21, a computer science student from Rajshahi, saying “Nasty gossip about celebrities is boring and unnecessary.”



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