

# GOLDEN JUBILEE BEGINNINGS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2021, FALGUN 4, 1427 BS

## Dissecting social networks: The truth about our commenting habits

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

"You will find the most hateful comments in Facebook profiles of women, irrespective of the fact that they are 16 or 60! This shows how society views women" said Habib.

"Society has given us a dress code. Every woman is judged by that code. This is terrible for me as an actress and a writer. (Through the Facebook comment section) I am forced to hear that I do not look as if I can write. Everyone says, beauty and brains do not go hand in hand. Such a derogatory statement! People wish that I behave in a certain way, which I do not follow," Ashna Habib added.

Remarking on how she reacts to the comments made on her profile, Habib said —

"They do not affect me at all. I have chosen this profession, and I am judged for this every day. I do not know the people who follow me on Facebook, but I am a positive and a strongminded person. To not be disheartened is part of the practice."

Although Facebook shows intolerance towards hate speech, misogyny is not considered hate speech and often remains hidden amidst what perpetrators term as 'humour'. Even tragic deaths fail to generate empathy amongst many.

Society at large has witnessed a sudden surge in reported cases of rape. Every newspaper report, every Facebook update in this issue is followed by literally countless comments — some noted for their lack of empathy, some ever

goes on to support the perpetrators.

"I thought death brought some form of sympathy from people, even the cold and the resentful ones. But I was clearly mistaken as most communities seem to be made up more of sociopaths than anything else," said Naaz, commenting on the recent rape and murder of the Mastermind School student in January 2021.

Victim blaming is also a big issue while dealing with Facebook comments. People in general try to victimise the women already suffering by further shifting the blame on her attire, her behaviour and her looks.

Most attribute these attitudes towards the patriarchy that exists in society. Others see the inherent problem lying with how we grow up in society.

"Lack of education. I think an educated person can never use swearwords. But by education, I do not mean just learning theorems and constructions. Mental education is important," Habib said.

Many feel that these comment are made by men only, however, the ugly truth remains that many women themselves take up the role of a bully to belittle other women.

The benefit of Facebook, or any other social networking site, is that it helps us hide behind a façade, a user ID, which can be faked quite easily.

Does that mean all derogatory comments are made by people hidden behind this virtual veil, perhaps not! However, even with their

true identity flashed for everyone to see, social networking does allow a person to create any image that they desire. It is quite easy to say things online, which one may not have said to someone in person.

**Need for 'schooling'**

"We are living in a modern era and so many things are happening around us. We are learning new things each and every day. But we shouldn't forget that at the end, whatever happens, we are human beings, so we should always respect and cherish the human attributes and be more human"

— Juena Ahmed, 35, Teacher

Many suggest that the time has come to incorporate social media etiquette in school curriculum. Others like Ahmed feel strongly that it is high time that sex education be incorporated in the curriculum.

"People are rude, and honestly very insensitive. They need a lot of education regarding how to conduct themselves in social media, and also on the topics they comment on," said Adiba Mahub.

Truthfully, this does make sense. If we can learn social norms and good manners at school, why does it come as such a surprise to learn online etiquette?

Netiquette should also be taught at home. We now witness a time when even toddlers are free to roam YouTube channels of their choice. Perhaps, the time has come to question such freedoms.

The grasp of the Internet in our lives will only increase. Today's generation will probably be the first in line to experience online-communication as the primary mode of exchanging ideas. And to guide this huge number, the need for 'schooling' cannot be undermined.

Etiquette for the most part is plain common sense, but it is wrong to assume that for a new platform that is social media, where it is easy to hide behind a façade, one will exert his/her common sense and act accordingly, without being guided to do so.

**The last words**

Every person is entitled to have his or her opinion. Even if it goes against the common perception, to a certain extent, it should be respected. But the question remains, is every opinion worth stating? And is Facebook the right platform to express all our opinions?

True, it must be said that over the decades, social networks have emerged from being just trivial activity to one that can bring about social change, add to social values, and contribute towards building of a new generation deeply engaged. There have been campaigns brought about by successful positive channelling of thought on social media. But Vis a Vis, how many temples must burn, how many mosques should shatter...how many young lives drown in despair and depression before we learn to mince our words?

Cartoon: Biplob Chakroborty

## The joys of travel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

Zain has feasted on vegetable momos from hole-in-the-wall eateries at bus stations; shared charred grilled liver with other travellers in a shack in Soweto. He's lunched on buttery escargots in Paris and grown fond of empanadas in Buenos Aires. He's sought out acai ice cream from the little carts plying the streets of Rio and pined for jilapi from the tea stalls of Dhaka. He's learnt early on that there is fun and adventure to be had from trying a variety of foods.

**Travel allows you to experience the kindness of strangers**

Throughout our journeys, we've learnt that people in general are friendly and kind. We have so many stories of having complete strangers drive us to

the airport so we wouldn't miss our flight or share their meals or offer up their homes. Zain too witnessed people's generosity early on. Like our kind South African host who had dug out her old teddy so Zain wouldn't feel lonely in a strange, new place. Or the boisterous shopkeeper in Swaziland, busy feeding her own child, who didn't think twice about offering the snack to a hungry and crabby Zain.

Travel can help instil faith in humanity.

**Travel Builds Your Resilience and Flexibility**

Nothing makes you grow and learn as much as being out of your comfort zone. I watched in awe as Zain braved his fear of dogs on Easter Island, where strays, often prone to

aggression, are common. After the first few instances of having large dogs attacking his food, he learnt to raise his hand and firmly say 'NO' when they approached.

When we were bumped off a transit flight in Heathrow, en route to meeting up with the grandparents, he adapted, though not without tears. But it allowed him the opportunity to learn that plans change and we need to patiently work out how to fix the situation so we can get back on track.

Travel creates unique opportunities for resilience and self-development. It forces us to think on our feet and fend for ourselves.

**Travel affords you the opportunity to pause and reflect**

Travel allows you to escape your everyday life. It gives you the time

and space to reflect. Zain and I found ourselves in Borough Market in London. We'd just grabbed lunch and were sitting at a table that overlooked the stalls. As Zain ate, I gave into my favourite travel pastime — people watching.

My musings were interrupted by Zain's careful observations of the hustle and bustle of the market. He wondered if the children at the table across from us went to school or were tourists like us. He thought about what we would've been having for lunch instead if we were back home.

He spoke of his grandparents and asked if they'd seen the Big Ben. What a revelation it was when I realised that contemplation and philosophising isn't solely the domain of wiser,

busier adults. Travel gives us a chance to observe and think about the new environment. It allows us to discover and engage in new interests.

As we slowly carve a path out of the pandemic, I hope that one day we can return to our days of travelling the globe and exploring new cultures, gaining new experiences, so that one day, other children, like my youngest, can also learn about the weird and wonderful world out there.

Photo Courtesy: Samai Haider  
Samai Haider is an economist by profession and a writer by passion. She is the author of Tilmund's Travel Tales, a picture book that aims to instil wanderlust amongst young children. Read about the fables of her foibles at: <http://samaihaider.com>



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