Experiencing "New Normal"

Exploring digital media usage of Dhaka dwellers in the lockdown period

Dr. A S M Asaduzzaman
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
University of Dhaka

Syed Kamrul Hasan
South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID)

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Dr. A.S.M Asaduzzaman
PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
University of Dhaka

Syed Kamrul Hasan
Deputy Director
South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID)

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promoting information and media literacy in media in Bangladesh

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Dr. A.S.M Asaduzzaman
Syed Kamrul Hasan

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study conducted as a primary attempt to see how a selected number of dwellers of Dhaka city used digital media during the lockdown period with regards to coping with it. Ten digital media users of different background, age and occupation were selected as respondents whom the researchers exclusively interviewed. As the questions were almost open-ended the participants were free to share their experiences, sometimes sitting in multiple sessions with the researchers. Despite all the limitations including finding relevant participants and not being able to interview them physically, interesting findings came out of all the discussions. Everyone agreed with a common realization that the experiences they underwent were quite significant and unprecedented. They clearly realized that a significant part of their professional, social and economic activities can be done from anywhere, perhaps with as much efficiency and flexibility as when they are done in workplaces. This shows a new way to them that can reshape their whole work culture, economic activities and even the overall human relationship in the post-pandemic world. The current "new normal" experience will evolve as a new reality in the lifestyle and livelihood of the citizens. However, to get the full benefits, the researchers have identified some shortfalls which need to be addressed. One of them is to acquire digital literacy by quickly adopting the skill to access to and use new devices and software by the users. Another is inadequate and poor ICT infrastructure (e.g., interrupted power supply, poor connectivity, weak network).The policy-makers need to take necessary measures to mitigate these problems. The researchers were aware of the limitations of this study, and, finally,put forward several recommendations. One recommendation is that academics and institutions should come up with a comprehensive research in this area(taking possibly a mixed-method approach), which should be country-wide and multi-sectoral in nature, and which can capture the overall scenario. In this respect, this primary attempt can be used as a pioneering reference.

Experiencing "New Normal": Exploring digital media usage of Dhaka dwellers in the lockdown period

1. Introduction

Like most other countries of the world, Bangladesh has experienced the crisis of COVID-19 Corona virus pandemic. This is a novel experience for the world, and certainly for a developing country like Bangladesh. Following all other countries which were affected by this pandemic, Bangladesh also went for a lockdown to stop spread of the virus among the citizens. However, the government in their notification termed it as "general leave" instead of officially using the word "lockdown". Beginning on 26 March 2020, the lockdown period continued for about 10 weeks during which international borders, airports, transports, offices, markets and academic institutions were kept closed. Citizens were prohibited from going out in the public sphere and were made to stay at home; but they remained neither idle nor isolated. They made efforts to adapt themselves to this unprecedented situation to continue with their normal life. Many people worked from their own homes instead of going to workplace. Many of them ran businesses and maintained intensive social contacts. Schools and universities also continued their operation (e.g., classes) online albeit in a limited scale. This lockdown has encouraged many people to buy necessary products online who perhaps did not have the practice of online shopping earlier. People purchased their daily essentials from various online retailers more than ever before. For entertainment, along with many other things, they played digital games and watched movies online. For all these activities, they used a number of internet based digital media/platforms such as smart phones, Zoom, Google classroom, social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Messenger, Skype, Viber), smart television, etc. The scarcity of facility-based health services during this pandemic has increased citizen's dependency on telemedicine and virtual medical services. Managers and leaders from big to small industries and organizations, some of whom were probably reluctant to use digital platforms, learnt and adopted digital tools and technologies to manage and oversee remote work and maximize productivity. This has been clearly an opportunity for the people to realize that a significant part of professional, social and economic activities can be done from anywhere, perhaps with as much efficiency and flexibility as when they are done in work places. True, this was a bit early, little unprepared, and probably forced too, but such an acceptance of and adaptation to the digital way of doing remote work may have a long term impact on the office work culture and economic activities in the post-pandemic world. Everyone is talking about the 'new normal' (Deguchi, 2020) or 'next normal' (Sneader & Singhal, 2020) these days. By these concepts, authors have tried to depict a picture of the world, which includes changed scenarios of how businesses should operate in future, how people's lifestyle will be changed, and even how human relationships will change. Influential German futurist Matthias Horx wrote on his blog in early March "The world as we know it is dissolving. But behind it comes a new world, the

formation of which we can at least imagine" (Horx, 2020). Sneader and Singhal (2020) emphasize the importance of effective remote working in the post-coronavirus future. Columnist of the *New York Times* Max Fisher wrote, "Changes in how we think, behave and relate to one another — some deliberate but many made unconsciously, some temporary but others potentially permanent — are already coming to define our new normal" (Fisher, 2020). It can be assumed that one important aspect of this 'new normal' world will be increased use of digital media by citizens in a networked environment. It can also be predicted that people will require a certain degree of skill (i.e., digital literacy) to operate different types of digital media to adapt to the 'next normal'.

It can be expected that the introduction of the fourth industrial revolution may become a reality in Bangladesh after this COVID-19 pandemic. Considering this context, SACMID has conducted a critical assessment of the digital literacy of selected participants coming from different segments of the population of Dhaka city. With this purpose, it examined and evaluated their use of digital media during the lockdown period due to coronavirus outbreak.

2. Objectives of the research

» To assess the accessibility of the participants to digital services during an emergency situation like the pandemic caused by Covid-19 virus;

» To assess the adaptability (level of competency) of the users;

» To explore their purposes and pattern of digital media use and

» To identify challenges and opportunities for further upgrading of the networked environment of the country.

3. Research Questions

» To what extent are the digital services and infrastructure available/ready to cater to the needs of the users in the current emergency period?

» How far are the people prepared to adapt to and be responsive to this situation?

» To what extent have they coped up with the situation by using digital media?

» What is the extent of the gap between existing infrastructure/structure and users' digital literacy, and an optimum networked environment?

4. Methodology & Scope of the Research

The study was conducted following a qualitative research design. The location of the research is Dhaka, the capital city. For data collection, in-depth interview method was adopted. Due to the lockdown situation, one-to-one interviews were conducted over Zoom platform. For interviews, 10 participants from different geographical areas of Dhaka city were selected employing both purposive and convenience sampling methods. The participants were selected based on the criteria that they more or less had used digital media for different purposes during the one month period since 25 March till 25 April 2020.During this period, lockdown was most stringent in the country. To explore diverse experiences as well as to bring diversity in the findings, participants were selected from different categories of the population, such as students, teachers, professionals, and journalists. The main objective was to examine the experiences of these users in terms of their digital media use during an emergency situation when normal mobility in the public sphere was restricted. Gender representation was ensured while selecting respondents. Table 1 shows their features:

Table 1: Participants' number and profession

Student (male 2, female1)	Teacher (3 female)	Professional (1male,1female)	Journalist (2 female)	Total
3 (2 university and 1 high school)	3 (1 primary school, 1 high school, 1 university)	2 (1 CEO, 1 manager)	2 (1 newspaper, 1 TV)	10

The participants came mostly from middle class families. Only two of them, the CEO of a transnational telecommunication company (Grameenphone) and a 10th grade student of International School Dhaka (ISD), came off the upper class of Dhaka city. They have diversity in terms of age. The high school student is the youngest of all, with the CEO being the oldest. Their residences are located in different areas of the metropolitan city. Except Nadia Sharmeen, crime reporter of *71 TV,* all participants stayed home during the entire study period.

The cases were analyzed to see users' digital technology use and their digital competency mainly in the following priority sectors of everyday life:

- Occupational work
- Education
- Health
- Commerce
- Social networking
- Information/news and
- Entertainment

However, during the interviews, which were conducted in Bangla language, many other important aspects of their lives were revealed, as it always happens in qualitative research. For example, they talked about what changes the lockdown brought in their lives, how they were coping with it physically and mentally, etc. Apart from interview data, researchers' personal observation and desk review of journal and newspaper articles were also used as sources of data for the research.The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Interview data were analysed by coding manually. A thematic analysis was conducted to generate broad themes consistent with the research questions.

5. Theoretical framework

Two theories have been used to formulate the conceptual framework of the study. The framework helps us understand the social process of media consumption. It also helps us interpret the findings of the study. The theories are: Uses and Gratification Theory and Technological Affordance Theory.

5.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

Since 1920 till 1940, communication research was characterized by the notion that mass media have powerful effects on their audience. Notable among the popular communication theories of the time was the 'Magic Bullet Theory' where the media was thought to have a strong, one-way and uniform effect on the masses. But a number of studies conducted in the 1940s and beyond proved this notion weak. The relationship between mass media and audience was rediscovered, which helped the coming into being of "Uses and Gratification Theory". First Elihu Katz discussed about it in 1959. This perspective explains what people do

with mass media instead of what mass media do to people (Severin & Tankard, 1997). According to communication theorists Katz and Blumler(1974), Uses and Gratification theory gives us a framework which can explain the process by which the audience choose media content based on their needs and interests to achieve gratification. The main tenets of the theory are:

i)   The audience is considered as active agent;

ii)   The audience uses media for its own benefit. It is the users who decide which media content they will be interested in, what to take from the chosen content and how much of the media content to internalize;

iii)   Media users have different types of needs. To satisfy their needs they choose such media content as to give them the higest level of gratification and

iv)   We may know about people's needs and purposes of use from the information provided by themselves. They are quite aware of their objectives and taste, and, if needed, are capable of explaining them orally.

This theory can explain how, to what extent and for what reasons the selected inhabitants of Dhaka used digital media during the study period. It can also help us explain the gratification aspect of their usage.

5.2 Technological Affordance Theory

Drawing on James Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances, Ian Hutchby (2001) put forward the theory of technological affordances. In the sociological study of technology, there exist two major contrasting views: constructivism and realism. Constructivists see a technology as a "text", an artefact whose meaning and interpretation is contingent upon how its users define it. This view corresponds to the idea of social shaping of technology. According to this concept, technologies do not have any inherent properties in them. Rather, technological artefacts are what their users make of them. On the other hand, realists or essentialist hold the view that every technology possesses some essential technical features imbued in it by its designers and manufacturers. They believe that "there are features of artefacts that are not constructed through, or retrievable only by means of, accounts" (Hutchby, 2001, p.13).

Hutchby offers a reconciliation between these two opposing poles by saying that technologies have to be seen neither in terms of their 'interpretive textual' properties nor of their 'essential technical' properties, but in terms of their affordances (Gibson 1979, cited as Hutchby, 2001, p.5). Technologies can be understood as artefacts which may be both shaped

by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them. According to him, "different technologies possess different affordances, and these affordances constrain the ways that they can possibly be 'written' or 'read'" [emphasis original] (Hutchby, 2001, p.9). Certain objects, environments, or artefacts have affordances which enable the particular activity while others do not. "Affordances are functional in the sense that they are enabling, as well as constraining, factors in a given organism's attempt to engage in some activity: for instance, walking, or hiding, photocopying a document, and so on" (ibid, p.11). Digital media such as computer (desktop and laptop), mobile phones (traditional and smart), the Internet, the Web, social media, television (traditional and smart) etc. definitely have their essential features which enable (if not dictate) their users to do certain things by them. For example, traditional television was designed to watch audio-visual content. Again, users quite often use these media in ways that were probably not originally intended by the designers (e.g., use of social media for activism). The latter is aligned with the idea of social shaping of technology. However, drawing on Hutchby's theory, I argue that these technologies have certain affordances. That is, neither their uses are limited to designers' desired ones only, nor are their interpretations limitless. People can use them according to the affordances that they have. Along with media Uses and Gratification theory, Technological Affordance theory will also help us explain and explore the different use of digital devices by the participants. It may enable us to explore in how many ways they interpreted (used) certain communication technologies during the lockdown period, and to explain why they did so.

6. Findings and discussion

6.1 Access to ICTs

All 10 participants have access to a variety of digital media or ICT. The devices that they mentioned are: smart phones, desktop computer, laptop computer, smart TV, PS4 gaming console, tablet and ipad. Through these digital technologies, they accessed a variety of internet based digital platforms/media such as the Web, social media, OTT (Over the Top) media services, Zoom, and many other apps. Three common findings are: they all used smart phone, they used more than one device and all of their devices were connected to the Internet.

For connectivity, except Nadia Sharmeen(the TV journalist), they all used broadband internet connection to have a Wi-Fi environment at home. Instead of WI-FI internet, she used mobile data for her internet use at home. She, of course, used Wi-Fi at her office which is a television station (news channel). Some other participants informed that, although they mostly used Wi-Fi for their internet activities, they had purchased mobile data-package as a back up so that they could use the Internet on their devices uninterrupted just in case there was power failure which is commonly known as 'load shedding'.

Depending on their professional background,age, purpose and needs, participants used some media more than the others. For example, two corporate professionals used smart phones, laptop and tablet/iPad intensively for their official work. Two students informed that they used gaming console PlayStation more often than other devices for their entertainment need.The reporter of the *Financial Express,* a Dhaka-based national daily, told:

> *I use different devices for different purposes. When I write long reports, I use my desktop computer as it is convenient for me. When I write short reports or do something quickly, I use my mobile phone. Again, when I join meetings over Zoom, I use my iPad. And when I watch movies lying in my bed with other family members, I use either my laptop or android TV.*

However, smart phones and computer, either desktop or laptop, were most popular among the respondents.

6.2 Uses of digital media: Needs and purposes

During the lockdown period, the participants used digital media for a variety of reasons. The broad categories are as follows:

- Professional work,
- Education,
- News/Information gathering,
- Communication,
- Social networking,
- Entertainment

The categories are elaborated below:

6.2.1 Professional work

As mentioned earlier, all of them worked from home. For doing so, they all depended on ICTs. Of course, their degree, pattern and nature of use varied depending on their occupation, along with other factors such as different needs, (probably) age, taste, personality traits, etc. It was found that two corporate professionals heavily used digital media. Yasir Azman, the CEO of Grameenphone, informed that he needed to convert one of his rooms into a mini-office in which for connectivity solution he installed a Wi-Fi system separate from the one used by his family members and also a dedicated GTX system for enhanced and concentrated 4G mobile internet. According to him,

> *The pattern of my digital media use is like this – the laptop must be turned on in front of me for video connectivity, iPad is in my hand for note taking or writing during my meetings with local and international colleagues. If needed, I send emails instantly, even during meetings. Lastly, the mobile phone is also there, perhaps not to be used for meeting purposes as much. But, you know, it's very much a part of life now.*

The other corporate professional, Joya Sirkar, informed that she needed to use the Internet from morning till one a.m. This long time-span of use included her personal and official work.

The two journalists used ICTs for their journalistic work. The reporter from the daily newspaper used mobile phone and social media to communicate with people. She took interviews using Zoom. She visited different websites for information needed to write her stories. She also watched reports of foreign television channels on YouTube. She reported that before the lockdown quite often she used to write her news reports on mobile phone and send them to her office while being stuck in traffic jam. Broadcast journalist Nadia Sharmeen informed that

she also would use her smart phone for writing and sending reports when she was far from Dhaka. Sometimes she could not record her voice using camera. On such occasions, she used her phone for voice recording and sent it to office using mobile data.

6.2.2 Education

Teaching and learning on digital platforms have been two major activities for the participant students and teachers. Elizabeth Pinaru Rothi, teacher of YWCA Secondary Girls High School, in normal times always used her laptop for preparing educational document, program schedule, and report card. She also used it for program recording, information collection and information dissemination.However, during the lockdown her usage has largely increased. She has to operate all classes online now. In preparing her class lectures, she needs to download books from NCTB website. Before delivery of the class lecture, she has to record the lecture and then deliver it to the students in time.

Nusrat Binte Islam of European Standard School (Mirpur Branch) has had similar experience. Usually, she used her laptop for collecting information and making question papers. In one week since the lockdown started, her school started teaching students online using Zoom. Simultaneously, she used WhatsApp for collecting home assignments from her students who also sent text messages to her via this app and email. Nadia Nahrin Rahman who is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Bangladesh University of Professional (BUP) used ICTs for both official and academic purposes. She, too, taught her students online using Zoom and Facebook live. She participated in official meetings with her colleagues and the Vice Chancellor over Zoom. According to her, "I need to collect a lot of information online to prepare my lectures and writing articles as I don't go to the University library now. I study using online resources."She downloaded a good number of books in both Bangla and English language for reading.

Like the teachers, the students also depended on ICTs for their academic activities.It should be mentioned that, when the research was conducted a few private universities and English medium schools initiated online classes. BUP is one of the rare public universities which commenced online classes during the lockdown. Tahsin Sabah of BUP is a BBA student. She attended online classes and uploaded assignments using the Internet. She used her laptop for doing research in order to prepare her assignments. Her assessment was done online too. Firoz Mahmud, a student of the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Daffodil International University(DIU), did not have any experience of attending online classes before. He has experienced this during this lockdown period. He had to learn how to use Zoom and

Google Classroom for his classes. He participated in online classes through Google Meet. Apart from his university classes, he attended different short-term courses online.The high school student, Zadeed Azman, is used to using his laptop for school work from before. He is required to carry it to his school. During the lockdown, he was using it for online classes. Google Classroom is the platform in which they attended online classes from 10a.m. to 4p.m. having one recess for lunch. After school, he needed to do home assignments which made him use the laptop for another 4 hours. He also has a private tutor who teaches him online over Skype.

Those who are not directly related to academic activities also informed that they used the Internet for earning knowledge about certain issues such as Covid-19, pandemics, etc. The CEO and BUP student reported that they watched documentaries and historical movies on digital TV to learn about many things. According to Yasir Azman,

Education is one of my personal agenda. I believe in learning online. It probably has increased during the lockdown. More than reading newspapers or literature, I read topics on technology, leadership, change management, Covid's impact on society, economy, how people will behave in future...I am being intrigued by the writings in this context. These are available only online in the digital world.

6.2.3 News/information gathering

All 10 participants reported that they received information and news updates, particularly corona-related, either from online sources (e.g., WHO website, social media) or from TV. It is an important finding that most of them stopped subscribing to hand delivered newspaper as they feared that newspapers might carry corona virus home. It is observed worldwide that people become dependent on media more during natural or human created disaster, pandemic, etc. than in normal times. The participants also sought information and news from media. The journalists, particularly the reporter of the daily, used online sources, both local and global, for information to write reports as she worked mostly staying at home.

6.2.4 Communication

The lockdown made the participants communicate with people using ICTs to a great extent. It is found that, as their mobility was confined within their respective residences and as social distancing rule was imposed across the country, they could not interact with their colleagues, relatives and friends physically. The only alternative was to communicate with them over phones and social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber).

6.2.5 Social networking

Although social networking is a form of communication it has been separated from other discussion as it has some unique features. Social networking, as it is understood now, is done exclusively by means of social media which are by default internet based platforms. Our participants used social media for social networking on their digital devices. The reporter of the daily informed that she has 15 social networking groups on WhatsApp and Messenger including professional, family and friends' groups. Social networking has been discussed elaborately as a separate theme in a later section.

6.2.6 Entertainment

Participants used ICTs for meeting their entertainment needs. They used laptop, television and phones for watching movies and tele-dramas. Netflix has been found to be a popular movie site among several of the respondents. Using Facebook and watching videos (e.g., music, film) on YouTube have been mentioned by quite a few respondents as their sources of entertainment. Nadia Nahrin watched films over weekends and listened to music on weekdays. Tahsin Sabah watched movies on movie-sites by streaming in addition to Netflix and YouTube. She played Xbox and Nintendo games on her console. She also played Ludo online with her school friends regularly. Zadeed watched Spanish League football matches on TV. He also watched movie commentary on YouTube such as televlogs. He also played PS4 games on console. Two participants opined that it would have been difficult for them to cope with the Covid situation, had they not accessed to digital devices for diversion.

6.3 Pattern of usage

6.3.1 Time-length increased

All 10 participants reported that their degree of using ICTs and the Internet has increased largely during the lock down period. Elizabeth Pinaru Rothi reported that she used to spend 2 to 3 hours per day online in normal times, but during the lockdown she spent on an average 16 to17 hours a day for educational and entertainment purposes. Zadeed's response on this was:

> *Currently, I am using my mobile four and a half hours every day, which is twice as much as the time on normal days before the lockdown. It's hard to pass time staying at home all day. You can't study all the time. So my screening time has definitely increased. I guess, including phone, laptop and TV, the total time of my use will be 10/12 hours.*

Reporter of the daily *Financial Express* informed that she needs to check on the Internet for information as long as she is awake. She said:

> *I could move to many places before. I could visit the spots of event. Now I can't. I feel helpless. My only help is the Internet now. I visit different websites to see updates. Since I can't go to the spots, I feel a kind of insecurity of missing important information. That's why I see the Net frequently all day.*

Nadia Sharmeen of *71 TV* used 30 GB mobile data during the lockdown month which is almost double of the average amount that she would use in normal months. The reason for her excessive use of the Internet was that she needed to reduce her work-related as well as mental stress (due to corona situation) by listening to music, watching movie and video-chatting with friends on social media.

Participants talked about the negative impacts of excessive use of digital media. Some of them reported physical sickness such as eye strain, back pain, fatigue, headache and even over-stimulation caused by looking at screens of different sizes for too long. Two of them thought that using digital technologies has become addicting for them. Zadeed thought that his mobility has decreased which is responsible for his recent obesity. Nadia Rahman reported that using digital technologies till late night disturbs her sleep and kills her appetite quite often. Elizabeth told us that the excessive use puts pressure on her physical and mental organs. Since she has to record the classes and listen to those, she feels extra pressure on her ears. Her head sometimes aches; sometimes she feels pressure on her eyes.

6.3.2 Different use at different times of the day

Some participants reported that they had differences in device/internet use between day and night times. Zadeed thinks that there is a big difference between his daytime and night time use. He does school related work on his devices from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. He starts watching movies or plays games from 11 p.m. and continues doing these activities until 2 to 3 a.m. BUP student Tahsin Sabah also has distinct usage pattern. Other than her two-hour daily online class, she spends most of her day hours in using social media. She does her home assignments from 7 p.m. till 11/12 p.m. After that, she starts watching movies or playing games. She sometimes stays up all night. Even the broadcast reporter informed that she quite often works till 4 to 5 a.m. She looks for information on the Internet. That is how she uses ICTs more in night time than in daytime. Nadia Rahman uses ICTs from 10 a.m. to 4/5 p.m. for teaching online classes and attending meetings. Evening hours are for her personal work or activities. She

reads books, chats with friends or enjoys music in the evening.

6.3.3 New Software learnt

One important and common finding is that all of them had to learn using one or two new application or software. For most of them, it was Zoom. Some had to learn Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams. WhatsApp was new for quite a few respondents. Except the broadcast reporter who took her producer's help once and Elizabeth who took assistance from others sometimes, everyone learnt these new apps all by themselves. However, four participants informed that they watched tutorial video to learn how to operate the apps. Therefore, it can be said that they more or less taught themselves and developed their skill.

6.4 Importance of social media in life

The study reveals that social media occupy an important part of the lives of the participants. Everyone uses a variety of social media including Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc. for a variety of reasons. Tahsin Sabah uses Pinterest and Reddit in addition to Facebook, YouTube, Messenger and Instagram. Zadeed uses Snapchat in addition to Messenger and Instagram. Instagram seems to be popular among young people. Among them, Facebook and Messenger are the most popular and Twitter the least popular. The reasons of use mentioned by the participants are as follows:

i)   To get updates on news (e.g., Corona related news) (Facebook, YouTube),

ii)   To communicate with students (Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger),

iii)   To interact with news sources (WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber),

iv)   To update personal career profile and build professional network (LinkedIn),

v)   To build and expand friends' network, follow friends' activities and wellbeing, express and share personal opinion, feeling, idea etc. (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube),

vi)   To practice creativity, draw attention and make people aware of something (Facebook, YouTube),

vii)   To learn something new (e.g., cooking) (Zoom, Google Meet),

viii)   To be in touch with colleagues, family, relatives and friends (Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp)

ix)   To watch videos (e.g., music, movies, games, Corona related clips) (YouTube, Messenger, Facebook)

An important finding is, social media is no more used only for building social networks, making friends and/or being in touch with the near and dear ones. We have found that some participants used it for professional purposes, some   created closed groups within the colleagues. In fact, LinkedIn is known to be designed for making professional networks. However, other social media were used for performing official functions as well. For example, the reporters kept contact with their news sources through Messenger, Viber and WhatsApp. The teachers used WhatsApp and Facebook (live) for academic activities such as receiving assignments from students, teaching online, giving notices to students and so on. Majority of the participants informed that they do not practice creativity on social media. However, the newspaper reporter who claims herself a heavy user (12 hours per day) used Facebook for creative work. According to her,

To me, Facebook is a breathing space. I can't meet my friends for loitering any more. I can't visit my relatives' places. So I am trying to write on Facebook. I write whatever I feel like...I write short stories...I write my personal experiences...I then share it with my friends.

Nine participants informed that their use of social media increased largely during the lockdown period. Only Yasir Azman said that his use has decreased as he became too busy with official work. Table 2 shows their social media usage time:

Table 2: Duration of participants' social media use

Name (or profession for those who opted for anonymity)	Average time per day (hour)
Elizabeth Pinaru Rothi (teacher, YWCA school)	12 to13 hours
Senior Reporter (*The Financial Express*)	12 hours
Nadia Nahrin Rahman (Lecturer, BUP)	7 to 8 hours
Joya Sirkar (Manager, Banglalink digital communication)	7 hours
Tahsin Sabah (student, BUP)	5 to 6 hours
Firoz Mahmud (student, DIU)	4 to 5 hours
Nadia Sharmeen (crime reporter, *71 TV*)	3 to 4 hours
Zadeed Azman (student, ISD school)	3 hours
Nusrat Binte Islam (teacher, ESS school)	1.5 hours
Yasir Azman (*Grameenphone*)	1 hour

Those who used longer actually used social media for both personal and official purposes. The respondents evaluated social media by discussing their merits and demerits. The merits mentioned are as follows:

1. Being connected with the near and dear ones reduces stress and tension caused by the Corona-crisis and concomitant lockdown;

2. Corona-related experiences and necessary information are being shared, which is proving useful for others;

3. Communication with people can be established in a short time;

4. People can use them for many purposes such as education, shopping, entertainment, getting news and information, etc.

5. Awareness campaign and activism can be done effectively.

However, they put emphasis on the disadvantages of social media too. They particularly mentioned the following disadvantages of social media:

1. Security is threatened in social networking sites. Most people do not have digital literacy to maintain the security of their personal information and protect them. As a result, they fall victim to hacking and sometimes get embarrassed in public;

2. Social media is a place where cyber bullying takes place;

3. The most alarming aspect is, social media spread fake news, rumor and misinformation;

4. Social media can be addicting;

5. It distracts people from doing productive work;

6. It sometimes makes people oblivious about the physical world. That is how they get disconnected from people by being too much into the cyberworld.

6.5 Digital Media use in Health and Commerce

During the lockdown, an alternative healthcare system is telemedicine, which means that people in need of medical care can get medical consultation or health/disease related advice from a doctor over phone or online instead of meeting the doctor physically. The participants were asked if they knew about this system. Most of them were found to be familiar with it. However, only two of them actually took help of this system and they found the system to be easy and convenient. When asked how the participants knew about the system, all of them replied that they got familiar about this system existing in Bangladesh via ICTs, particularly social media. Most of the respondents opined that it can be an effective alternative healthcare system during the lockdown only for people with minor diseases, not for complicated or serious patients who require emergency medical treatment and major tests.

They were also asked if and how they found information about Covid-19 virus. All of them replied that they got information on this fatal disease by means of mainstream mass media and ICTs. For instance, Elizabeth follows the news bulletin (press briefing) of Health Directorate everyday on TV channels. She also follows BBC and other international news channels to get updated information on Corona pandemic. Besides, she gets many useful health tips from her regular visits on social networking sites. Firoz visits the social media sites and print media regularly for having news and information related to healthcare and treatment facilities. The participants were divided on the issue of whether the information disseminated about Covid-19 was enough or not. Five of them thought the information was enough but the other five thought it was not adequate. Also, a few participants have trust only on mainstream media such as national newspapers and TV channels as the other media of information do not mention sources.

Like telemedicine, online shopping is considered to be a useful and relatively safe option to buy daily essentials. The participants were asked if they had the practice/experience of shopping online before or during the lockdown. Five of them informed that they have the experience of shopping online and they actually started this practice even before the lockdown. Among them, interestingly, three stopped shopping online after the lockdown started. Two of them said they do not get what they want as most businesses are closed. The other participant thought it was not safe to shop online during the lockdown as there is a risk of being infected through delivered products or packets. Tahsin Sabah and Joya Sirkar continued shopping. All five of them opined that shopping online is not a difficult process. Elizabeth is among those who did not buy goods online. The reason is, she can purchase all the commodities just outside her door. Nevertheless, she shared some of the feedback that she had gotten from her colleagues. There are doubts whether the prices and the quality of the products mentioned on the pages are reliable at all! There is no option for bargaining in online shopping. However, she along with seven other respondents thought that online shopping can be an effective alternative, especially during the lockdown as going to market places is more risky than buying daily essentials online.

6.6 Work from home: Lockdown experience

The participants were asked about their experience of working from home in relation to their digital media use. They discussed the issue from the perspective of their respective occupations. Two journalists opined that reporting of events is a task that can never be and should not be done staying at home, no matter what digital devices are used to make the stories. This is more so about broadcast reporting. There is no alternative of going to the spot, examining the area of the event, talking to news sources and revealing the facts. Similar responses came from teachers. They thought that online classes can be an effective makeshift arrangement during the lockdown but it cannot replace physical classes. According to Ms. Elizabeth,

> *Online system cannot be the full alternative of the regular physical system, because students are becoming restless gradually during their lockdown situation, they cannot come out in the open air, they cannot go for physical interaction with their fellow students and teachers, they cannot share or play any game which affects them mentally.*

She, of course, finds many bright aspects of online education. Firstly, students can attend the classes at flexible times convenient both for the students and the teachers instead of a rigid schedule. Secondly, by means of a variety of digital media the teachers can transfer the knowledge to the students and the students can receive it at the other end at their convenience.The students were not satisfied with the online classes. Tahsin Sabah reported that the classes were rather one-way and some teachers did not allow the students to ask questions. She found it really difficult to follow Maths class and there was no option to have tutorial classes what they usually have in their University.

Yasir Azman, on the other hand, thought that the concept of work from home should be made popular in all sectors and be integrated in the work culture of Bangladesh, particularly in the post-Corona "new normal" world. He has found increased productivity among his colleagues during the lockdown. Joya Sirkar, on the contrary, thinks that there is no added benefit in work from home. Rather, the gap between teammates was increasing due to this mode of work.

However, none of the participants, regardless of their profession found it difficult to learn the skill to operate novel digital media to continue their respective work. In spite of having some problems at the initial stage, they seemed to have coped with the lockdown situation.

6.7 Internet infrastructure: Far from being optimum

Virtually everyone expressed their dissatisfaction about the existing internet infrastructure of the country. For instance, both the teachers and students informed that many of their students were staying /attending classes from outside the city and they were facing many problems. First of all, many of them did not have required devices. Secondly, power failure in the villages was a regular feature. Thirdly, there were frequent network problems.

7. Conclusion

This qualitative study, although not extensive, rigorously tried to examine the experience of a selected number of participants in a new situation (quarantine/lockdown at home) that suddenly came and pushed the citizens to a different reality.This new reality has given them the opportunity to explore advantages of digitalization in their life-style and livelihoods. This study, based on 10 exclusive interviews of 10 digital media users staying in Dhaka city, explored their accessibility to digital media or ICTs, their pattern of use, importance of social media use, digital media use in health services and commerce, their work from home as an alternative to working in physical office and, finally, the available internet infrastructure. Through the findings

of the study, researchers could identify the changes in their using of media devices and in making them more useful and effective. A lot of changes were found particularly in time-length of their digital media use, access to new software and their applications, diverse use of social media, telemedicine and on-line services.Some respondents/interviewees could foresee "work from home" as a viable alternative to carry on their occupational work even in the post-Corona future. Also the learning and use of new digital technologies helped the citizens cope with the new situation.Digital media literacy, which the citizens have been able to achieve during the lockdown period, could be a valuable component for reaching the goal of having a "Digital Bangladesh" by 2021. However, from the experiences of the participants the researchers also identified the challenges and problems in digitalization. Still, much work and improvement needs to be done in building an optimum ICT infrastructure which will establish smooth connectivity throughout the country and ensure affordable/equitable access to digital media by all citizens, particularly living in the remotest corners of the country.The researchers are confident that large scale further studies may generate some specific recommendations for solving existing problems.

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