

Role of Social Media in Promoting SDGs

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Currently as per the demand of the day and age social media has become an essential part of our lives which has made a vast impact upon the whole world. Social Media is rapidly getting adopted in the public and private sector to disseminate information, provide services, and keep in touch among individuals. It is commonly used for establishing and maintaining relationships with friends and family, communicating, and interacting between service providers and seekers. Now, it is used for government to have better and quick service delivery, inform and interact with the citizens. It empowers citizens to participate in development activities, innovation or idea sharing, and problem solutions and raising awareness. Many studies show that social media is identified as an important tool for government service and public-service engagement. Thereby it can help to strengthen democracy.

Bangladesh is on a journey with the agenda to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in response to a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Seventeen goals and 169 targets of SDGs declared by the United Nations constitute a universal, integrated, and transformative vision for a sustainable world. SDGs are a follow-up of the MDGs that was completed in 2015. Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development has stressed the need for ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, by national legislation and international agreements. SDGs target 16.10 ensures public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms. Bangladesh has formulated the 'Right to Information-2009' act for ensuring people access and right to information; Bangladesh Constitution protects people's fundamental freedoms and rights. Besides, Prime Minister's Office has initiated the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) program, which gives huge opportunities for ensuring citizen's access to information and building a digital nation through delivering services at the citizens' doorsteps.

However, media is one of the critical actors for widening these opportunities and protecting fundamental freedoms. Media can act as a communication, transparency, and accountability channel for all stakeholders. All its forms can play a significant role in the implementation of a development agenda with a well-informed citizen. In the context of the SDGs, media is an integral part of raising awareness among people about the goals, targets, and their relevance at the national and local levels. And it can catalyze citizens' empowerment through informing, educating, and sensitizing them. Besides, media can help citizens to hold government and authorities into account through providing a platform for public debate and discussion. Social media is critical along with mainstream media to have fulfillment the 'leave no one behind' commitment of the SDGs through creating a voice for those who are often not heard.

Bangladesh has moved seven notches up in the SDGs index 2020 as it ranked 109th among 166 countries compared to last year. Recently, the Government

published ‘Bangladesh SDGs Progress Report 2020’ highlighting how much more effort will be needed to reach the SDGs and meet the commitment to leave no one behind. Social media which is now has turned as new media, has significant potential to use for promoting government service delivery including the SDGs. It can reduce time, cost, and visits for government service recipients. As such it is quite useful for the service delivery agencies to distribute service more efficiently and quickly.

It is estimated, there are about 36 million social media users are there in Bangladesh. Currently the number of social media users has increased by 3 million between April 2019 to January 2020. Another study shows that 94.46 percentage of social media users use Facebook, and 3.31 percent use Youtube. The growth of social media use in the developing countries is changing the way people communicate and interact with each other and with private and public sector organizations including local government. Citizens are becoming more empowered. This figure shows that citizens can be engaged in the decision-making process in development activities in the public sector. Online debate and dialogue on social media between government and people on Acts, Rules, and Policies including public services help to build healthy citizens.

Media is a channel of information flow. A huge amount of information will be generated to measure the progress of SDGs in the country. Media and other information providers, including social media, will sample and adapt this chunk of information in the form of news, articles, features, talk shows, debates, videos, animation, and so on. Social media can inform and influence public opinion about government policy. It can be done by providing access to information (SDG target 16.10) to the citizens.

In line with social media guidance, government departments use social media sites to deliver their objectives. In March 2016, Cabinet Division issued the 11-point guidelines for social media use for the civil servants with provisions against the propagation of political ideology and provocative statements. Civil servants have been instructed to follow the ‘social media usage guidelines in government offices-2019 (Revision Edition), provided by the Cabinet Division, to help raise awareness regarding social media platforms and ensuring its proper usage. The guidelines have been drafted in order to ensure effective use of social media in the government offices. Government officials and institutions slowly but increasingly adopt social media in order to serve better their mission. Citizens of the country also adopt social media to receive services from the government. Social media can gradually redesign and restructure the traditional model of the public sector as they offer numerous opportunities to increase government transparency and trust, create new forms of citizens’ participation and engagement in public issues and enhance inter and intra organizational collaboration.

We have 6,686 digital centers covering all unions of the country to provide more than 270 services to the citizens of remote areas. All offices in districts and

Upazillas now have launched Facebook pages, these pages are being used to redress citizens' grievances contributing immensely to the provision of better, quicker, and more affordable public services. The success of this model has already encouraged more than 5000 offices of many ministries, divisions, directorates, sub-district level government offices and even frontline service providing agencies also open up their Facebook pages.

New media tools empower citizen journalism. Users have the power to disseminate information through social media as the journalists do. The emergence of citizen journalism in social networks has helped to found new tools of communication, information, and journalism for the twenty-first century. Social media has been adopted as a significant source by professional journalists, and conversely, general people are able to use social media to share any event happened in the local areas. Social media content is generated everyday and provides a platform for voices of mass people which cannot be created through traditional media alone. General people can send news and views; can shoot photos or videos of the problem of their own areas. Citizen Journalism helps to broadcast and focus the issues of any neglected areas, remotest regions in the country. Thus, social media plays various roles in promoting the SDGs of the country.

Social media can promote accountability in government actions through monitoring the performance of public institutions, exposing any misconduct, providing instant feedback, and advocating for change. Social media can spread information on the status of progress and challenges related to the SDGs, highlight the human story behind the data and numbers, and put pressure on the governments to take necessary action to effectively implement the SDGs. The mainstream media often cannot address the problems of the remote areas, but new media can serve remote communities and issue-based problems remote areas like climate change, disasters, etc. It works as a tool that may facilitate mass people realizing the SDGs and engage them in the activities related to SDGs. It helps to channel through SDGs-related information and thus leads the flow of dissemination more quickly. Therefore, social media has a key role to ensure together the SDGs generated information found from a variety of sources and thus channel through the contents them in a reader-friendly way continuously.

The number of social media, particularly Facebook, Instagram, Whatapps, Twitter, Blog, and Youtube users have been increasing rapidly. The government has initiated to promote public service-related social media pages, so that citizens can get the desired information and services directly and promptly. Several rules and regulations have been formulated by the government to promote and practice the SDGs. Private organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders should take initiative and arrange seminars, conferences, and workshops on the guidelines, methods, and tools for using social media appropriately to promote SDGs implement them at the macro and micro level much effectively and successfully.