

# Influence of Social Media on Fashion Market: A Explorative Study in Bangladesh Context

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## Introduction

Fashion is the process of choice, decision-making and decision implementation. It indicates how fashion houses conduct consumer affairs and manage consumer interest. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries that struggles with poverty and fragile market. A weak market environment and the absence of strong policy to support consumers, as well as a highly unemployed youth further reinforce the adverse effects on fashion business. In this situation, small entrepreneur, fashion designers and fashion houses are actively using social media to increase market linkage and responsiveness among the local consumers as well as global customers.

Social media is an internet-based participatory medium, hub, or platform that generates opportunities for users to participate, collaborate, create, and exchange content comprising information, opinions, and interests while establishing identity, connectivity, and relationships in a many-to-many manner (Gohar F. Khan, 2017).

Social media is a web-based technology which creates interactive dialogue among a wider community across the globe. The increased availability and rapid spread of internet access in different countries, have been accompanied by the development of social media platforms, especially Facebook. As a social interactive tool, social media has a high potential to bring about changes in the commercial arena. It also creates a scope to increase opportunities for mass people to participate actively in product discussion and opens new horizons for the potential customers to actively participate in market. The number of people using social media is increasing daily, and nowadays millions of people interact with each other through social media to discuss business issues, social issues, education, entertainment, and personal issues.

In this research study, the term "social media" is used to denote Facebook because statistics show that 96 percent of social media users in Bangladesh are active users of Facebook (2020). This article focuses on exploring the role of social media in shaping fashion market, the perceptions of users and its effects on different fashion products also try to analyzed.

## Background of the Study

In Bangladesh, the most visited social media site is Facebook, which has the highest number of users of any social media platform in the country followed by blogs, Twitter, and Instagram. Different statistics reveal the scenario concerning the use of the internet and various social networking sites. Every study indicates an increasing trend of internet and social media use. According to the Bangladesh government telecommunication authority (2019), about 93 million people, or 57.2 percent of the Bangladeshi population, are active internet users, and about 34 million or 20 percent of the population are active social media users. Among those social media users, 96.1 percent are users of Facebook, 1.6 percent use Twitter, and the rest use other social media platforms.

Social media comprises web-based tools and services that allow users to create, share, rate, and search for content and information without having to log in to any specific portal site or portal destination.

These tools become “social” in the sense that they enable users to share and communicate with one another (Bohler-Muller & Van der Marwe, 2011). This includes social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, video blogs, discussion forums, and others.

Historically, media have most frequently been shaped and used by those in power or elite groups to maintain their positions of power. A fundamental question is whether the role of social media is actually different from that of mainstream media or whether social media influences business and whether it influences the existing business process when different types of expensive mainstream media are actively working for business houses particularly fashion industry.

In this context, small fashion houses are more likely to search for alternative business promotion sources via which to express their market opinions and connected with consumers. Small Fashion houses and individual fashion designer become dependent on social media and it perhaps plays a vital role in flagging different choice and opportunities for both local and global consumers. Social media encourage small fashion houses and individual fashion designer to raise their business strategies for their consumers. Social media empowers small fashion houses, individual fashion designer and consumers to express their views and reactions, which may improve their business situations. Social media allows customers to influence on consumers’ debate and opinion, and provides wider scope for fashion houses to correct business strategies.

### **Information socialization**

Both simple and complex information socialization has the potential to occur through the incorporation of social media channels into government websites or the creation of official government social media pages. Such channels provide information on services, events, and rules and regulations in the governance structure and process. They also provide a channel through which consumers can seek support and services from the government.

### **Social Media and Peoples Participation in Market**

The internet, mobile phones, and other forms of “liberation technology” generate an enabling environment for people of different strata to express opinions, give feedback, and mobilize customers that increase people’s participation with local and global fashion market. Moreover, social media have that power to increase transformative change in the fashion market structure. Social media plays an important role to involve consumers very rapidly with global contemporary fashions. It is used to share fashion information and news, connect different fashion houses and individual fashion designers and mobilize fashion industries and consumers to initiate campaigns across the globe to boost up fashion economy and make fashion industries accountable to ensure quality products.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to understand the role of social media, especially Facebook, in strengthening the fashion market in Bangladesh with a particular focus on the following:

- To understand user perceptions on social media (Facebook) concerning its impact on fashion market in Bangladesh
- To explore the challenges and opportunities of uses of social media in fashion industries
- Understanding to what extent customers are able use social media to create pressure on fashion business houses

### **Methodology of the Study**

As an exploratory study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in this research to gain better insights into the current scenario and an in-depth understanding of public perceptions and impacts. Samples were drawn by using stratified random sampling methods and a questionnaire survey

was performed. A total of 100 university graduates studying master's and above social media users (students and professional groups) were interviewed. Respondents were selected from urban areas, especially Dhaka. Individual users were the unit of analysis for several findings.

Existing literature, newspapers, and Facebook posts were reviewed to gain a greater understanding of social media and fashion markets. A questionnaire survey was adopted to understand the perceptions of social media users. The study also conducted in-depth individual interviews with different occupational groups and key informant interviews in order to understand the issues and explore underlying causes and effects of social media on fashion market. These interviews allowed the research team to analyze the data concerning challenges as well as opportunities encountered by social media users and their impact on fashion market. The research team held informal discussions and conducted group discussions with academics, businessman and fashion designers to explore their thoughts and perceptions of social media and fashion market. Finally, several impact cases (both negative and positive) relevant Facebook content of the users had an impact on fashion market were reviewed to understand the holistic scenario in relation to the study objectives.

### Limitations of the Study

The research findings were generated from a small sample size. However, qualitative discussions with different groups clearly reveals the linkage between social media and fashion market. This study had a few limitations. Firstly, the primary data was collected from only 60 social media users in an urban setting and the survey was unable to cover all occupational strata across the country due to resource constraints. Social media users in urban settings are less likely to feel comfortable discussing challenges they have faced. Time constraints and the COVID situation were another limitation which prevented us from increasing the number of social media users surveyed. Sample selection was not scientific enough to make any recommendations or draw broad conclusions.

### Social Media and its Wider Uses in Bangladesh

According to the Internet Service Provider's Association of Bangladesh (2018), 88 Gbps of the country's total available 436 Gbps bandwidth is used for Facebook. Social Media Stats (2020) claims that in Bangladesh nearly 92 percent of social media users are active users of Facebook. This makes it appear as though there is a Facebook craze throughout Bangladesh, but least 65 percent of users are from the capital city of Dhaka. Most Facebook users across the country are youths aged between 18 and 34. Nowadays, Facebook is a more effective way to reach people than mainstream media, as people are always active on Facebook.

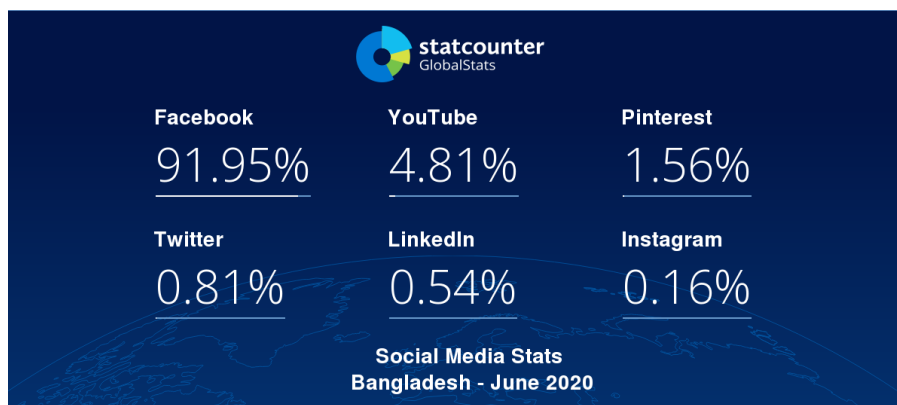


Figure 1. Percentage of Social Media Users by Platform

The Financial Express (2018) cited the Digital Report 2018 jointly created by We Are Social and Hootsuite, which showed that 18 percent of the country’s population were active users of social media, and 94 percent of them accessed social media, especially Facebook, on their mobile phone devices. The report also unveiled that there were 30 million monthly active Facebook users in Bangladesh. The number of users is growing so fast that in 2019, active social media users comprised 20 percent of total population, or 34 million people total.

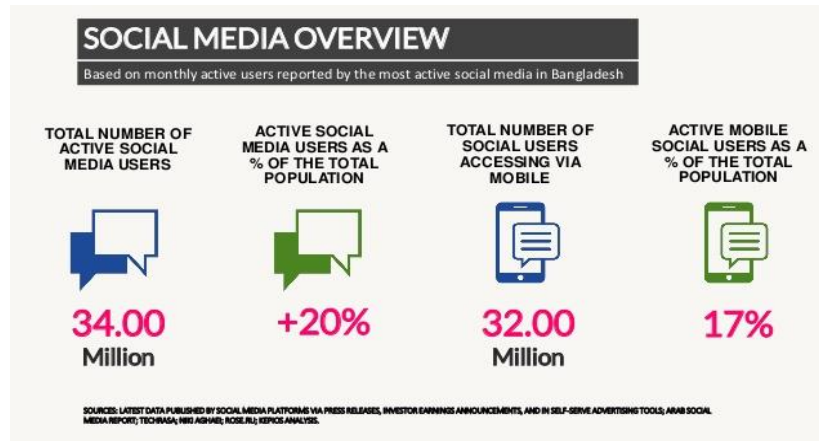


Figure 2. Social Media User Overview

NapoleonCat (2019), which performs social media analytics among other services, also found that 33.7 million use Facebook. The majority of users are male (73.8 percent). Nearly 78 percent of the users are in the age group from 18 to 34 years.

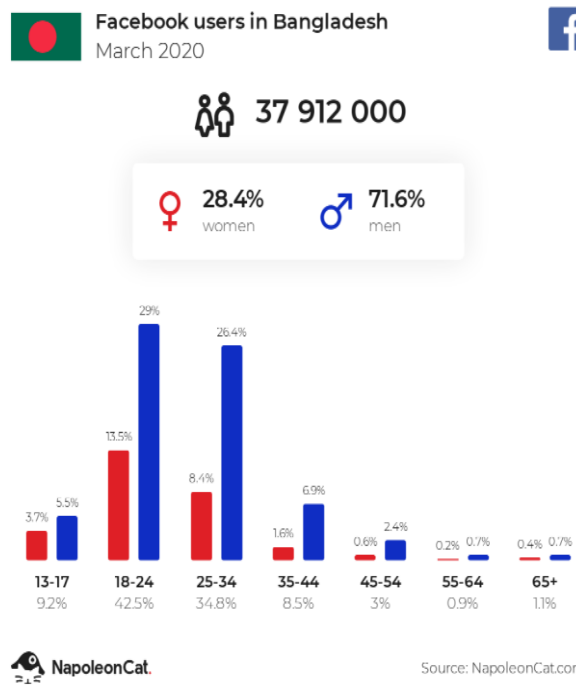


Figure 3. Facebook Users by Age Group

Our study found that 90 percent of internet users in Dhaka city (students and professionals) are frequent users of social media. Students spend more time on social media, with a daily average of two to three

hours. Discussion with the students revealed that they don't have many options for how to spend their leisure time. As a result, youths are more likely to spend time on social media, particularly on Facebook. Mou, a private university student, said, *"We do not have anything to do when we have free time. For that we spend time on Facebook. We can discuss various issues ranging from personal affairs, fashion matters, political, social issues etc. on Facebook. We do also follow product marketing pages to enjoy our free time."*

### Social Media as a Consumers Platform: Consumers Perceptions

Ordinary people, businessman and consumers groups remain active on Facebook, and a significant number of Facebook-based groups which actively participate in fashion promotion and trade. A review of the discussion and content of the Facebook posts of ordinary people suggests that people usually use social media to discuss personal and social issues and their posts or shared items reflect their thoughts and intentions. But many people also occasionally actively participate in online shopping platforms on social media, especially when a business promotional news breaks. This mostly happens prior to different festivals.

Our study findings revealed that social media users in Dhaka mainly use Facebook to raise awareness about social issues. Specifically, 72 percent of users claimed that they use social media to talk about personal issues, 56 percent participate on social issues and 30 percent follow Facebook based marketplace and online business platforms. Just 15 percent said that they used social media for religious discussions (based on multiple answers).

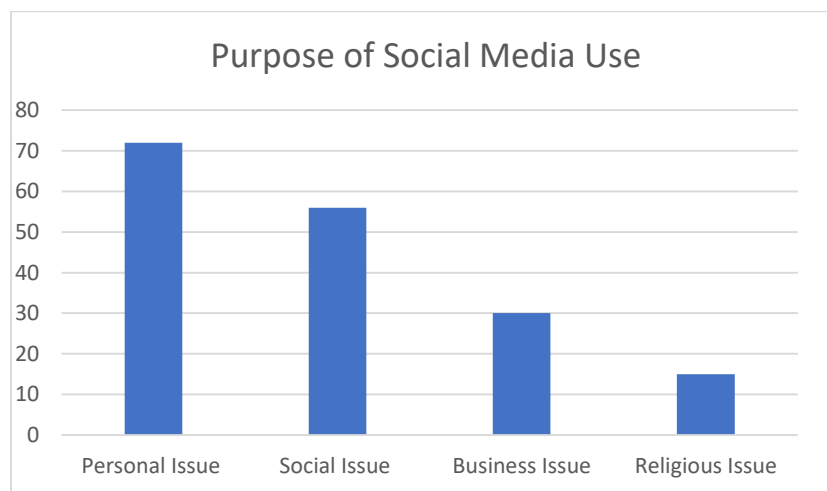


Figure 4. Purposes of Social Media Use

In our discussions with elderly owners of fashion houses (age 60+ years), it was apparent that most of them (18%) are less likely to feel comfortable discussing or sharing information about their business promotional issues on Facebook. On the contrary, most of the young (89%) fashion house owners (age less than 40 years) more likely to prefer their business promotion at Facebook. Only 39 percent middle age fashion house owners (40 to 60 years) prefer Facebook for market promotion.

The discussants of group discussion admitted that Facebook has created the opportunity to run debates or discussions on different commodities particularly fashion products, though the extent of such discussions and debates is limited at online marketplace. Our discussion participants said that nowadays Facebook marketplace is an important path to discuss business issues are evident. The enactment of the

ICT Act has become a serious concern for social media users, especially those who actively take part in business debates or discussions.

Twenty percent (20%) of users believe that they use social media to create a minimum level of pressure on fashion houses to improve their product. Our group discussions revealed that there are currently no organized groups are active to create pressure on the fashion houses, which has made by social media platforms and particularly Facebook the main alternative platform for ordinary consumers. Group discussants also claimed that sometimes this platform has a huge impact on fashion and develop products based on market demands and consumers online discussion at Facebook based marketplace platform.

### **Social Media Influence on Fashion in the Bangladesh Context**

Social media influences fashion in various ways, and this may enhance opportunities for both fashion business houses and fashion designers to connect with consumers very rapidly. There have been many occasions where it was evident that the pressure of consumers from social media accelerated the impetus to take the right steps against negative business strategies. The key strength of social media is its ability to develop interactive connectivity between a marketplace and its consumers. This study has attempted to understand this impact from group discussions and an analysis of social media content. The major influences that we identified are as follows.

### **Influences on the Fashion and Market Situation**

Our study findings suggest that female in Bangladesh are very active on Facebook in fashion pages and marketplaces. In many cases Facebook users are able to place a huge amount of purchase pressure on small fashion houses run by Facebook page. About 40 percent female users interviewed claimed that they regularly follow few fashion related pages and had shared or posted about at least one fashion content on Facebook within the last three months. On the contrary, only 5 percent male Facebook users follow fashion related pages to keep update themselves on current fashion trend.

Sixty-nine (69%) percent of users thought that fashion is changing rapidly because of Facebook. The same users believe that consumers pay attention and inspire by viral fashion posts on Facebook and those fashion houses are more likely to get huge number of new customers. When a post goes viral it draws the attention of the mainstream media and they also give coverage of that fashion. Finally, both becomes source of consumer pressure on the fashion market.

Discussion with social media users revealed that just interesting post on Facebook have created huge influence on female consumers. In many cases, one viral post have established fashion business houses and or individual fashion designers in urban areas of Bangladesh. For, instance, Glamgrl an online fashion page is become very popular in last few years. Currently they have 87, 000 active member who are their customer as well. Similarly, Dress Up, SA Corporation and few others also expanded their online business using social media.

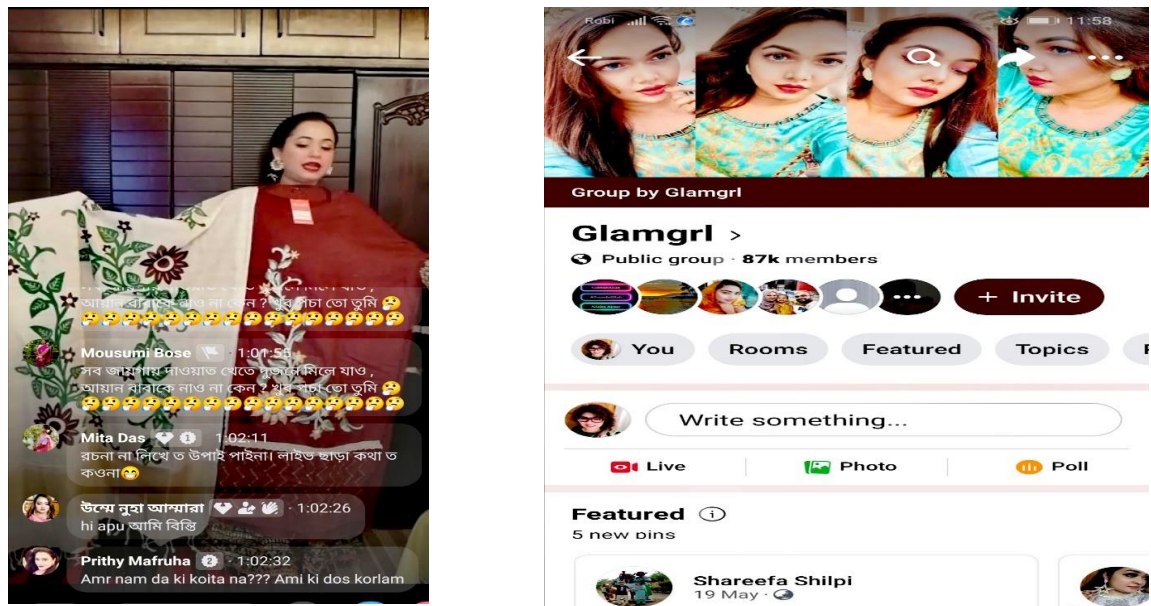


Figure 5: Few online fashion business page

One successful example becomes an inspiration for other small business houses. However, online business professionals claim that examining popular blogs, pages, and individual accounts clearly reveals that rural Facebook users presence is very limited or they don't bother to take part in such online business activities through comments, likes, or other reacts.

### Creating a People-oriented and Demand-driven Fashion Market

Through in-depth discussions with professional fashion designers and fashion houses, this study has explored how social media is able to make significant changes concerning the liability and openness of fashion market. To a certain extent, a culture of accountability has developed among online and offline fashion houses. Different fashion houses demonstrate a positive attitude towards the consumers they encourage consumers to direct dialogue during online marketing and allow consumers to participate or give feedback openly at Facebook marketplace which ultimately influencing on decisions of fashion. Social media has made significant changes in people's thought processes and their bargaining power with fashion houses and as a whole with fashion market. It has contributed to an increase consumers understanding about their consumers rights, how to claim those rights, and their bargaining capabilities. On the other hand, social media is also able to influence owners or management of fashion houses to recognize the importance of building a better relationship with the consumers so that consumers can be benefitted from their business houses as well. Overall, these changes have ultimately enhanced the image and acceptability of fashion business houses and gradually started to erase "negative" images of online market.

Our discussions with different fashion professional groups also revealed that changes are now evident in the fashion houses owners' attitudes and behavior due to mass awareness through social media. Now they are responsible for providing better products and services to the consumer and are more accountable.

### Challenges of Social Media

Social media is an open, popular, and widely accepted tool via which people of all ages and economic or political status can vent their two thoughts, beliefs, and ideology.

Citizens usually discuss problems related to the ethical issues which emerge from malfunctioning institutions, society, and local or geopolitics. Different types of challenges arise for both platforms and their users. Several challenges identified by this research are as follows.

- Distorted information and intentional bad remarks cause confusion among platform users. This happens more frequently in newly urbanized societies like Bangladesh.
- Freedom of expression is another feature people enjoy through social media, but often a good number of consumers are abusive and misuse social media for their personal interest.
- A section of the public use social media platforms to promote their own self-interest and increase or spread hatred. They use social media and intentionally expose negative information about their opponent business groups, sometimes with the intention to defame some person which results in wider consumer mistrust.

### Conclusion

This study tried to understand the role of social media, especially Facebook, in Bangladesh fashion market. The study clearly shows the growth of the internet and social media users creating changes in the fashion trend and market. Social media marketplace has allowed the consumer to increasingly address and deal with local and country-wide fashion houses. Social media keeps revealing structural problems associated with consumers interest and creating mass awareness among the wider community while sensitizing business houses.

Social media is playing a significant role in making the fashion house owners more responsive and accountable to the consumer of Bangladesh. In neo-normal life, the role of social media will be more crucial as compared to the recent past. It will obviously be a driving factor in re-shaping fashion market in the coming days.

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