

Factors affecting trust in news media among young people in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Public trust in news media has been declining worldwide in past few decades. This phenomenon is no exception to the case of news media in Bangladesh. Although the notions of trust occupy much space in the public debates, academic discussions and scholarships of the news media and its role in society, the relationship with its audience, and sustainability, there is little work on the topic in the context of the country. Against this backdrop, this study examined the factors that influence trust in news media among young people in the country. A total of 430 individuals from rural and urban areas took part in this study through a web-based questionnaire survey. The findings of the study reveal that the level of trust in news media among the young is very low; males tend to have less trust compared to females, and people living in urban areas have less trust in news media compared to rural areas. Overall, the factors such as political biases in news content, biases toward media owners' business interests, lack of accuracy in news content, poor writing, editing and storytelling; lack of use of reliable sources, providing unimportant/irrelevant news, and the tendency of sensationalizing news and information affect trust in news media. We conclude that the low trust in news media and journalists is alarming for democracy and the sustainability of the news media industry of the country.

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Trust, credibility, news media, media trust, Bangladesh.

Introduction

Trust is the foundation of human relationships and building blocks of a society (Bourdieu, 1986; Govier, 1997). A healthy information ecosystem is crucial for creating, upholding and communicating trust in the society (Heinecke, 2019; Ruhde, 2022). The availability of diverse, credible, reliable, accurate and trustworthy information contributes to the creation of such an information ecosystem (Jaroucheh et al., 2020; Macy, & Cook, 2002; Mitchell-Wong et al., 2007). News media is one of the most powerful social institutions that can influence public trust in other institutions of society (Etemad, 2020; Jo, 2005; Kass, 1996; Ognyanova, 2019), by creating such a favorable information ecosystem. A trusted media system can play an instrumental role in combating the spread of misinformation, disinformation and fake news during an uncertain situation and emergency like the recent COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and wars. Researchers have found strong associations between public trust in media and vaccine acceptance (Piltch-Loeb et al., 2021; Stecula et al., 2020); panic buying (Arafat et al., 2021), and adherence to public health recommendations by the government (Sundiam et al., 2023). For example, Li & Sun (2021) found that high trust in traditional news media contribute to reduce public's hesitation to take vaccine against COVID-19 virus. Meanwhile, Arafat et al. (2021) argued that a trusted media ecosystem plays a significant role in preventing panic buying behavior among people during an uncertain situation and natural disaster. On the other hand, Wu & Shen (2022) found that there is a strong correlation between compliance of COVID-19 health protocols and trust in media. People with high trust in media tend to more comply with the protocols compared to people having low trust.

On the other hand, trust is considered an important element of the media industry. In the past few decades, the media ecology across the globe has experienced massive transformation: reduced authority as the sole source of information lessened gatekeeping role and reduced public trust. The availability of social media platforms and several other communication technologies have contributed to the high prevalence of misinformation, disinformation and fake news which has created an age of suspicion (Bakir, & Barlow, 2007). But it is no denying that a trustworthy media system can play a vital role in reducing confusion, and thus the proper functioning of society and democracy (Buchanan, & Benson, 2019; Fisher, 2018; Jaroucheh et al., 2020; Majerczak, &

Strzelecki, 2022). Moreover, trust is an important asset for media organizations also as there is a strong association between public confidence in the press and their relationship with the news and media consumption (Strzelecki et al., 2020; Tsfati, 2010). Public trust in news media has a financial value for the media organizations also (Watzek, 2019). Because, a decline in the trust would lead to a fall in public attention to the news media content (Williams, 2012); then advertisers will not reach their consumers through news media where there is less audience; and thus the news media organizations will lose their revenues (Amazeen, & Muddiman, 2018; Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Figenschou, & Ihleb, 2019; Knudsen et al., 2021; Newman, & Fletcher, 2017; Tsfati, & Ariely, 2014) in many ways. In sense, news media do the business of trust and sell the trust in the form of news stories and other content to their audiences and advertisers. So, communication of truth, gaining public trust and maintaining credibility in their content are becoming indispensable assets for the sustainability of future journalism (Mrazek, 2019).

Most of the current debates and discussions about news media center around some important questions such as how the media shape our society; what would be the demarcation line between journalism and social media and what are the dynamics of their communication of truth and trust in society; and what would be the business models and strategy of their survival – should they focus on only generating money or concentrate on gain public trust (Heinecke, 2019). Previous studies indicate that public trust in news media has been declining around the world in the past two decades, and the level of trust is low worldwide among the youth (Blobaum, 2014; Swart, & Broersma, 2022). Most of the previous studies explored public trust in media in the context of different countries. Little is known about the topic from the context of a developing country like Bangladesh, a developing nation in South Asia with a vibrant media industry that consists of more than 1200 daily newspapers, 35 on air television channels, 60 radio stations, and around 3000 online news portals. Because of its geographical location and consistent economic growth, rising human capital, high prevalence of natural calamities, political instability, and dysfunctional democracy and issues of human rights, the country often gets wider attention and importance to the global community. The mass media system often functions as a mirror of the socio-political and cultural issues of a country. An understanding of the public trust in the news media could be a lens to understand the media system, and thus the country as a whole. A study on a such topic could contribute to the knowledge body for the global audience and broader international academic discourse from the perspective of a developing country like Bangladesh.

According to news reports that quoted members of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB) as saying that the news media organizations in the country are experiencing a financial crisis as revenue has been decreasing along with the number of readers at a rate of 5 to 10% in the past few years (Islam, 2020). There is a paucity of reliable data on news readership and viewership, news consumption behavior, circulations and reach of news media in the country. Despite the fact that drawing conclusion on causal relationship between decline of readers and circulation of newspapers and trust in news media is difficult in the context of the country. It can be argued that a clear and contextual understanding of trust is very important for media outlets to strategize content and target audiences appropriately to ensure their revenues and sustainability. Against this backdrop, this study examined the factors that influence trust in news media among young people in Bangladesh.

Literature review

Although the notions of trust occupy much space in the debates, discussions and scholarship of the news media and its role in society, relationship with its audience, and sustainability, there is no universally accepted definition of trust in news media (Fisher, 2018; Fisher et al., 2020; Park et al., 2020). It is not a new phenomenon, rather it has recently come to the forefront of public discourse and academic debates amid the high prevalence of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda campaigns and questions regarding the socially responsible functions of media outlets (Brosius et al., 2021; Hameleers et al., 2022; Ognyanova, 2019). Over the past centuries, the notions and meaning of trust evolved, and scholars from various disciplines tried to understand it in a myriad of ways as it is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. However, media scholars defined it as credibility (Fisher, 2016; Kohring, & Matthes, 2007), reliability (Haskins et al., 1984; Horne et al., 2019; Matthes, & Kohring, 2008; Swart, & Broersma, 2022), trustworthiness, and confidence in the news media system as a whole (Fawzi et al., 2021; Gei et al., 2013; Kohring, & Matthes, 2007); news media as a public institution; media ownership (Williams, 2012); media types (Fawzi et al., 2021; Gei et al., 2013; N. Jakob, 2012; N. G. E. Jakob, 2010; K uts et al., 2013); specific media outlets, brands, programs, or newsrooms (Daniller et al., 2017); media coverage (Kass, 1996; Str mb ck et al., 2020), media content (Grosser et al., 2016; Newman, & Fletcher, 2017; Williams, 2012); and journalists (Blobaum, 2014).

Fawzi (2021) argued that trust in media has social, political and media system-related dimensions. Williams (2012) explained this phenomenon in

three categories: interpersonal trust, institutional trust, and informational trust. The notion of interpersonal trust refers to people's trust in professional journalists of a certain news media organization, while institutional trust is associated with a news media organization, and informational trust indicates trust in news content. Meanwhile, Fawzi et al (2021) argued that trust in news media is associated with people's expectations of media organizations as social institutions. In that case, people tend to trust a news media organization that function by following certain norms and values of society. Knudsen et al (2021) defined the idea of trust as a process of interactions between a media organization and its audiences. In that case, the audience makes sense of the reality of their world by taking a risk of not double-checking or acquiring facts themselves, rather they keep confidence in the media. Credibility refers to perceptions of public trust in a certain news medium, such as newspapers, television, radio, social media, and so on (Fisher, 2018).

The media ecology across the globe is very dynamic as it experiences constant changes in the very organizational structures, functions, the use of technologies, audiences and socio-political realities. So, measuring trust requires multidimensional methodological approaches, conceptual frameworks and diverse parameters. Kohring and Matthes (2007) argued that trust in news media can be measured through three methodological approaches: the assessment of credible news sources, credibility in the medium, and factor analysis. They also argued that the assessment process consists of four dimensions: trust in the selectivity of topics; trust in the selectivity of facts; trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in journalistic assessment. Mehrabi, Hassan and Ali (2009) identified eight indicators that help to measure credibility in news media, which indicators include clarity in a news story, not being biased in presenting a news story, telling the whole story, maintaining accuracy, trustworthiness, fairness, and timeliness. Str mb ck et al. (2020) proposed a framework for conceptualizing news media trust at different levels of analysis based on news media in general, media type, individual media brands, journalists and media content. Appelman and Sundar (2016) developed a scale to measure the credibility of a media message. In measuring credibility, it focuses on the accuracy, authenticity and believably of the content.

Verma, Koltai and Fleischmann (2018) found that trust in news media is associated with an individual's demographic features such as gender, age, educational attainment, political leaning, and frequency of social media use. Several other studies found that there is a link between an individual's news consumption behavior and trust in news media (Fernandez-Planells, 2015;

Kalogeropoulos, 2019; Pacheco, & Melhuish, 2018; Ridder, 2020; Young, 2016). In a study in 35 countries, Kalogeropoulos et al. (2019) found that those who mainly consume news through social media platforms, tend to have lower trust in news. Tsifti and Ariely (2014) argued that people's trust in news media is influenced by their social environments: political interest, interpersonal trust, education levels and the perception of journalistic institutions. Gender and education demographics have also some impacts on the perceived reliability of media content. A study by Andaleeb, Jamil and Rajeb (2022) found that gender and level of educational attainment have a strong influence on trust in news media. They found that females tend to have more trust in television news compared to males, while individuals with lower educational levels perceive TV news as more credible than those with a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, Jo (2005) argued that trust in news media is strongly influenced by the sources used in the news stories. Karlsen and Aalberg (2021) argued that people are less trustful of the news they consume through social media. However, the results also suggest that social media news sharing can contribute to a long-term decrease in trust in news. The platforms through which news reaches the audience also affect trust.

The impact of trust in news media is multi-faceted. For example, Marcinkowski & Starke (2018) found that people's political attitudes and trust in government are often influenced by exposure to political news and trust in those media. Fletcher and Park (2017) argued that individuals who have a low level of trust in news media tend to consume more news and information from non-mainstream sources such as social media platforms and blogs compared to mainstream news media organizations. Williams (2012) argued that there is a strong relationship between people's trust in media and their preference for specific content or media organization. A lack of trust in the media is congruent with global tendencies toward deinstitutionalization, privatization, and individualization, which give more weight to facts gained from personal experiences than recognized authorities and experts (Van Zoonen, 2012). There is a definite link between a decline in trust in other significant societal institutions, such as the government (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Hanitzsch, Van Dalen and Steindl (2018) argued that when people don't trust their local media, they stop believing in their local government. As a result, both democracy and political consciousness are weakened. The trust gap between informed folks and the much more skeptical mass population is also widening (Barometer, 2019). Concerns regarding the impact of this change on democracy have arisen. Deliberative and participatory models of democracy contend that without people viewing media as venues

for reliable news, citizens will stop consuming its content. By providing shared knowledge and facilitating shared frames of reference to public life, they are therefore unable to effectively serve as watchdogs or create cohesiveness (Coleman, 2012).

Several studies argued that the news media environment of Bangladesh is not conducive to fostering trust among the audiences (Bhatti et al., 2021; Haque, 2019; Khatun et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Haque et al (2020) attributed the decline in media trust to the propagation of false information via online media, particularly Facebook² in Bangladesh. Ahmed (2018) argued that the high prevalence of fake news is a big threat to traditional media or news sources as it undermines the public's trust in the country. In another study, Hasan and Mohua (2020) found there is a strong association between online non-mainstream news consumption and trust in the mainstream media. They argue that people with low levels of trust tend to consume from alternative sources such as social media platforms, YouTube channels and blogs, etc.

Theoretical framework

There are two broad schools of thought about social trust, i.e. trust as an individual property and trust as a property of social systems (Delhey, & Newton, 2003). However, scholars of both schools of thought argue that the prevalence of trust is a foundation of society (Lehman, & Sztompka, 2001). They argue that it is an element of all enduring social relationships. Without trust, societies really could not exist as it makes possible the formation of relationships, interactions and cooperation. In investigating trust in news media, we must understand the phenomenon from two perspectives: the notion of trust in the society (Misztal, 1992), media as a social institution and public trust in the institutions. From the institutional perspective, trust is a dynamic relationship between a media organization and its audiences. It is based on a certain type of expectation of the citizen, media audiences and society as a whole. The relationship often changes based on a media organization's role, function, position and coverage of certain issues or events in a certain way, and public expectations about the organization's role. In the past few decades, societies around the world have transformed dramatically. People expect that a media organization would ensure fairness, honesty and accuracy in all of its content delivery and activities; and would work for the better good of society. From this point of view, a trustworthy media organization would monitor and guide the power authority and institutions; work as a mechanism for social surveillance and accountability of the power

² Belongs to Meta company, banned at the territory of the Russian Federation.

structure (Hardin, 2002). Mass media can be a tool to build trust and can play the role of the guardian of trust crucial in any uncertain situation, in the time of crisis, natural disasters and outbreaks (Mehta, 2007).

Trust is typically viewed as a precondition to public connection in ideas concerning journalism's democratic mandate (Swart, & Broersma, 2022). But for the common citizen of society, determining the trustworthiness of news and staying updated on current events is becoming an increasingly challenging task. Choosing which sources to trust for current events is made more challenging as people have to consider all possibly perceived biases (Eberl, 2019; Saechang et al., 2021; Soontjens, & Van Erkel, 2022), the possibility of getting controlled by automated algorithms (Dogruel et al., 2022) and financial interests (De Bruycker, & Beyers, 2015). Only when individuals believe the news, they will interact with it and act upon it to fulfil their duty as a citizen. But increasingly lower media trust has generated concerns about consumers rejecting journalism, deliberately avoiding the news, and becoming less and less informed (Prochazka, & Schweiger, 2019). According to Swart and Broersma (2022), these worries are supported by two presumptions. It starts by assuming that users have specific reasons for believing a particular source or report. Second, it assumes that people would only read news sources they trust and that they will ignore news sources they perceive to be unreliable. As a result, media trust has frequently been viewed as a largely rational choice based on consumers' assessments of the perceived dependability of the news source or company (Strmbck et al., 2020). This phenomenon can be understood through the lenses of usage and gratification theory.

The uses and gratification theory by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) explains how people behave when consuming particular media sources, including the fulfilment of their demands and satisfactory feelings. Theorists argued that a media consumer searches for a media outlet that meets their specific demand, and they assumed that the consumer always has other options available to meet those needs. The theory is later expanded by McLeod and Becker (1974) where the audience is placed in a stronger position by the uses and gratification approach because they are engaged, goal-oriented, self-aware enough to articulate why they are using a particular news outlet, and most importantly, their gratification is derived from the media content, exposure, and the socio-political context in which the exposure occurs. Later researchers worked to improve the framework of the idea to expectancy-value theory (Palmgreen, & Rayburn, 1979) and dependency theory (Wenner, 1982). Both theories rely on the concept of uses and gratification as a foundation.

Although this approach has typically been used to study traditional mass media, scholars have argued that it should also be used to study new communication technologies like online and social news media. According to Coleman (2012) and others, in modern times, trust extends beyond factual accuracy and includes the belief that news media will uphold public expectations regarding news, including more affective assessments of how one feels when reading news stories, those news organizations are run with genuine intentions, and that journalism reflects social reality and audiences' everyday experiences (Coleman, 2012; Metzger, & Flanagin, 2013; Schmidt et al., 2019). To comprehend how individuals, deal with trust in news media, we adopted a user-centric approach. We investigated when and how explicit and tacit knowledge becomes significant to young audiences for assessing the trustworthiness of news using a cross-sectional survey of young individuals in Bangladesh. Possible factors that affect the credibility of news sources and content, as well as how such evaluations affect their usage habits were investigated.

Methods

This was a cross-sectional study among young people in Bangladesh. Data were collected through a web-based survey among young people across the country between May 2022 and October 2022. A survey link was distributed through email, WhatsApp messaging tool, and Facebook³ messenger among potential participants using a convenient sampling method. The inclusion criteria to participate in the study were being at least 18 years of age irrespective of their gender, profession, income level, residence, and geographical location in the country. Bangladesh is home to a relatively young population as the median age of the population is 28.3 years. Of the total population, 12.8 per cent are aged between 18-24 years; and 17.1 per cent are between 25-34 years (Digital 22: Global Overview Report, 2022). The country officially considers youth as an individual aged between 18-35 years (National Youth Policy, 2017). So, the target population of this study were aged between 18-35 years. Another inclusion criterion was reading, watching or listening to the news in printed newspapers, television, online portals, or radio at least once a week. In term of administrative structure, Bangladesh is divided into eight divisions and 64 districts. Using multi-stage simple random sampling method, we aimed to collect 1200 responses, that is 150 responses from each division of the country. We randomly distributed 1200 survey links in the selected divisional cities to reach the target groups. During the study period, a total of 887 individuals filled up

³ Belongs to Meta company, banned at the territory of the Russian Federation.

the questionnaire (response rate 73.91%). Due to inconsistency and inaccuracy, we removed a big portion of the responses and used 430 responses for the final analysis.

We used a semi-structured questionnaire for data collection, which contained questions about demographic information, time spent on media consumption and media consumption behavior, and trust in news media. In understanding trust in news media in the country, we adopted the framework developed by Strmbck et al (2020). The framework measures trust in news media using five dimensions, which include the extent to which young people trust information from news media in general, specific media types, individual media brands, journalists, and media content. The dimensions of trust are measured in terms of being fair, and unbiased, telling the whole story, maintaining accuracy, and separating facts from opinion while covering an issue or event. The participants were asked to rate some statements on a 5-point Likert scale. For example, the participants were asked to rate statements such as “the news media are fair when covering the news”, and “journalists are unbiased when covering the news”. On the scale, 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree.

At the beginning of the survey, consent was obtained from the participants by explaining the aims, objectives, procedures, and right to withdraw at any stage of the survey. The participants could enter questions only after giving consent to participate in the study. We performed descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation,) using SPSS (version 26.0).

Results

Socio-demography

The demographic characteristics offer us some insightful information about the participants. A total of 430 individuals from rural and urban areas took part in this study. Among them, 55.3% were male and 44.7% were female. The majority of the participants belonged to the age group between 18 and 23 years. The vast majority of the participants were urban dwellers (38.1%). About two-thirds of the participants (70.2%) were students, and more than half of the total participants had an undergraduate degree (55.1%). A sizable portion of participants come from semi-urban areas, proving that semi-urban youngsters also have good access to news media, particularly online media. However, the low participation rate from rural areas demonstrates the country’s substantial digital divide.

Media consumption pattern

We tried to understand the pattern of consuming media content in terms of the participants' spending time using a particular media platform in a day. Our results indicate that young people spend a large portion of their waking time using social media platforms followed by watching dramas or movies on YouTube and watching various programs on television in a day. The participants spend on average around three hours (160.16 minutes) of their awake time using social media platforms such as Facebook⁴, while they watch drama or movies on YouTube for about two hours (109.65 minutes) every day. Interestingly, on average, they spend less than a half hour (25 minutes) reading printed newspapers a day, while they read news on online platforms for 32 minutes. The interesting part is that they can hardly tell how much time they devote to viewing television news, despite spending approximately 44.30 minutes watching TV. The majority of them watch television news while others are watching.

The main source of news and mode of news consumption

The participants of the study mainly get news through daily newspapers, online news portals, television channels and the newsfeed of the social media platform Facebook⁵. Our results indicate that printed newspapers are the least popular source of news for young people (8.8%) in the country. On the other hand, online news portals are the top source of news for the participants in the study as about half of them (48.1%) informed that they get news mainly from various online news portals, followed by Facebook⁶ newsfeed (30.0%). Both males and females prefer to get news through online platforms instead of printed newspapers.

Mobile phone apps are the top mode for consuming news among the young people. Of the total participants, around two-thirds (66.0%) informed that they mainly consume news using different mobile phone apps. Of those who mainly consume news using apps, 34.7% are male, 42.8% are aged between 18-23 years, 49.8% are students, 36.0% had at least an undergraduate degree, and 24.4% lived in urban areas. So, it is evident that urban young men mainly consume news using mobile phone apps.

Trust in news media

Overall, the level of trust in news media is low among young people in Bangladesh, irrespective of gender, age, occupation, education level, and

⁴ Belongs to Meta company, banned at the territory of the Russian Federation.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

residence of the participants. Moreover, males tend to have less trust in news media compared to females. Among the males, 35.8% have low trust and 11.2% have an extremely low level of trust in the country's news media. While 28.6% of all females have low trust and 9.1% have extremely low trust. Locations of the residence play an influential role in trust in news media. People living in urban and metropolitan areas tend to have less trust in news media compared to people in rural and semi-urban areas. Details are shown in *Table 1*:

Table 1

**Overall trust in news media by gender,
age groups, occupation, education, and residence**

		Extremely low	Low	Some	Total
Gender	Female	39 (9.1%)	123 (28.6%)	30 (7.0%)	192 (44.7%)
	Male	48 (11.2%)	154 (35.8%)	36 (8.4%)	238 (55.3%)
Age	18-23	59 (13.7%)	165 (38.4%)	42 (9.8%)	266 (61.9%)
	24-29	22 (5.1%)	95 (22.1%)	23 (5.3%)	140 (32.6%)
	30-35	6 (1.4%)	17 (4.0%)	1 (0.2%)	24 (5.6%)
Occupation	Student	68 (15.8%)	183 (42.6%)	51 (11.9%)	302 (70.2%)
	Private job	11 (2.6%)	62 (14.4%)	10 (2.3%)	83 (19.3%)
	Business	2 (0.5%)	8 (1.9%)	1 (0.2%)	11 (2.6%)
	Unemployed	6 (1.4%)	24 (5.6%)	4 (0.9%)	34 (7.9%)
Education level	<= Up to class 12	30 (7.0%)	99 (23.0%)	17 (4.0%)	146 (34.0%)
	Undergraduate	46 (10.7%)	148 (34.4%)	43 (10.0%)	237 (55.1%)
	Graduate	11 (2.6%)	30 (7.0%)	6 (1.4%)	47 (10.9%)
Residence	Rural	8 (1.9%)	26 (6.0%)	8 (1.9%)	42 (9.8%)
	Semi-urban	22 (5.1%)	68 (15.8%)	14 (3.3%)	104 (24.2%)
	Urban	33 (7.7%)	103 (24.0%)	28 (6.5%)	164 (38.1%)
	Metropolitan	24 (5.6%)	80 (18.6%)	16 (3.7%)	120 (27.9%)

Level of trust by media type

Data in *Table 2* indicate that the level of trust in different forms of media such as newspapers, television, radio and online portals is very low in the country. Online news portals were found to be the least trusted source of information as more than half (57.4%) of the participants reported that they have extremely low trust in news portals followed by television channels (37.4%). However, newspapers were found to be the more trusted source of information compared to other media platforms, as 37.9% of total participants informed that they have some trust in the information provided by printed newspapers in the country followed by television channels 21.9%, radio 17.4%, and online news portals 15.3%. Details are shown in *Table 2*:

Table 2

Level of trust by media type

Media type	Trust levels	N (%)
Trust in information from the newspaper	Extremely low	36 (8.4%)
	Low	231 (53.7%)
	Neutral	0 (0.0%)
	Some	163 (37.9%)
	High	0 (0.0%)
Trust in information from the television channels	Extremely low	161 (37.4%)
	Low	175 (40.7%)
	Neutral	0 (0.0%)
	Some	94 (21.9%)
	High	0 (0.0%)
Trust in information from the radio	Extremely low	0 (0.0%)
	Low	0 (0.0%)
	Neutral	355 (82.6%)
	Some	75 (17.4%)
	High	0 (0.0%)
Trust in information from the online portals	Extremely low	247 (57.4%)
	Low	117 (27.2%)
	Neutral	0 (0.0%)
	Some	66 (15.3%)
	High	0 (0.0%)

Perception of trust factors in news media and journalists

Fairness, unbiasedness, telling the whole story, accuracy, and separating facts from opinion are some of the key issues when trusting a news media organization or journalists. The mean scores in *Table 3* indicate most of the participants disagree with statements that news media organizations and journalists are fair, unbiased, tell the whole story, accurate, and separate facts from opinion when covering an issue or event in the country. Lack of accuracy is the most important factor that the participants are most concerned about. Details are shown in *Table 3*:

Table 3

Perception of news media and journalists

		Min	Max	Mean	SD
Trust in news media	The news media are fair when covering the news	1.00	4.00	2.1140	.91531
	The news media are unbiased when covering the news	1.00	4.00	2.1837	.94176
	The news media tell the whole story when covering the news	1.00	3.00	2.0698	.65117
	The news media are accurate when covering the news	1.00	2.00	1.7326	.44314
	The news media separate facts from opinions when covering the news	1.00	3.00	1.9953	.62203
Trust in journalists	Journalists are fair when covering the news	1.00	4.00	2.1558	.96869
	Journalists are unbiased when covering the news	1.00	4.00	1.8953	.75461
	Journalists tell the whole story when covering the news	2.00	3.00	2.2558	.43683
	Journalists are accurate when covering the news	1.00	2.00	1.7256	.44674
	Journalists separate facts from opinion when covering the news	2.00	3.00	2.5977	.49094

Data in *Table 4* show that none of the participants strongly agree with statements that news media organizations and journalists are fair, unbiased, tell the whole story, accurate, and separate facts from opinion when covering an issue or event, which indicates a low trust in news media organizations and journalists in the country. Almost two third of the participants think that news

media and journalists are not fair when presenting a news story. On the other hand, more than the two-third of the participants perceive that the news media and journalists are biased when covering an issue or event. A vast majority of the participants reported that the news media organizations and the journalists do not tell the whole story of an issue or event. Moreover, the news media and journalists do not present accurate information as stated by a vast majority of participants of the study. Details are shown in *Table 4*:

Table 4

Trust in news media and journalists

		News media	Journalists
Fair when covering the news	Strongly disagree	109 (25.3)	121 (28.1)
	Disagree	212 (49.3)	173 (40.2)
	Neutral	60 (14.0)	84 (19.5)
	Agree	49 (11.4)	52 (12.1)
	Strongly agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Unbiased when covering the news	Strongly disagree	79 (18.4)	113 (26.3)
	Disagree	272 (63.3)	283 (65.8)
	Neutral	0 (0.0)	34 (7.9)
	Agree	79 (18.4)	0 (0.0)
	Strongly agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Tell the whole story when covering the news	Strongly disagree	77 (17.9)	0 (0.0)
	Disagree	246 (57.2)	320 (74.4)
	Neutral	107 (24.9)	110 (25.6)
	Agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	Strongly agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Are accurate when covering the news	Strongly disagree	115 (26.7)	118 (27.4)
	Disagree	315 (73.3)	312 (72.6)
	Neutral	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	Agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	Strongly agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Separate facts from opinions when covering the news	Strongly disagree	84 (19.5)	0 (0.0)
	Disagree	264 (61.4)	173 (40.2)
	Neutral	82 (19.1)	257 (59.8)
	Agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	Strongly agree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Factors affecting trust

Data in the *Table 5* show that multiple factors contribute to the trust in news media among young people in Bangladesh. The factors include bias towards a certain political party; bias toward the business interest of media owners; lack of accurate information; poor editing, poor writing and storytelling; lack of reputable sources; providing unimportant/irrelevant news; publishing government press releases; using clickbait headlines; sensationalizing news and information; lack of admitting mistakes/apologizes; giving priority to advertisements over the news story; lack of follow-up stories and providing the stories that do not help to make sense of the issues / event. Details are shown in *Table 5*:

Table 5

Factors affecting trust in news

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Political biases in news content	1	3	2.59	.666
Biases toward media owners' interest	1	3	2.54	.705
Lack of accurate information	1	3	2.50	.728
Poor editing	1	3	2.25	.781
Poor writing and storytelling	1	3	2.23	.799
Lack of reputable sources	1	3	2.33	.765
Providing unimportant / irrelevant news	1	3	2.41	.767
Publishing government press releases	1	3	2.07	.812
Using clickbait headlines	1	3	2.38	.709
Sensationalizing news and information	1	3	2.45	.717
Lack of admitting mistakes / apologizes	1	3	2.44	.710
Giving priority to advertisements over a news story	1	3	2.40	.750
Lack of follow-up stories	1	3	2.34	.729
Stories do not help to make sense of the issues / event	1	3	2.13	.763

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that the level of trust in news media among the young people is very low; males tend to have less trust compared to females, and people living in urban areas have less trust in news media compared to rural areas. There are some media factors such as quality of content, biasness, accuracy, and tendency of sensationalizing of an issue or event often negatively affect the trust of people.

The low trust in mainstream news media may lead people to consume news and information from alternative sources, which are often not verified, can be inaccurate, and full of misinformation. Increased consumption of misinformation may foster distrust about mainstream media outlets, which is very alarming for democracy and the sustainability of the news media industry of the country. Young people, who are equipped with diverse information and communication technologies and have access to multiple sources of information, may avoid news and information from mainstream sources (Karlsen et al., 2020; Str mb ck et al., 2020; Villi et al., 2022). This avoidance would affect the media organizations in two ways, namely the loss in direct revenues from the audiences, and the loss in revenues from the advertisers. Generally, advertisers want to reach a large and diverse body of consumers through media organizations by paying for publishing advertisements, and they would pay only those media organizations which have large and diverse body audiences and provide trustworthy content. On the other hand, less trustworthy media organizations cannot help the public to be informed about public affairs and hold leaders accountable for their actions.

Our findings indicate that there is an association between sociodemographic factors and trust in news media, which is similar to the findings of some previous studies (Andaleeb et al., 2022; Verma et al., 2018). The findings show that males tend to have less trust in news media compared to females in the country, which is similar to the findings of Andaleeb, Jamil and Rajeb (2022). Haselhuhn et al. (2015) argued that there is a gender differences in trust dynamics. Women tend to trust more than men after a trust violation. Although the overall trust in news and journalist is low among both gender groups, the gender dynamics may have contributed to the fact the level of trust in males is lower than females. We also found that the locations of the residence play an influencing role in terms of trust in news. People living in urban and metropolitan areas tend to have less trust in news media compared to people in rural and semi-urban areas. Urban people's availability of and high exposure to different and alternative sources of information might be a reason behind the low trust in news. So, news media

outlets must keep in mind the socio-demographic factors such as gender and geographical locations of their audiences when making a strategy on content and target audiences.

Another key finding is that the level of trust in news media organizations and journalists is very low in the country. Our findings also show that none of the participants strongly agree with statements that news media organizations and journalists are fair, unbiased, tell the whole story, accurate, and separate facts from opinion when covering an issue or event, which indicates a low trust in news media organizations and journalists in the country. The findings indicate that the media organizations in Bangladesh must critically reflect on their professional roles and responsibilities. Karlsen et al (2020) showed that a lack of trust in news media and journalists may lead to news avoidance among the consumers. So, it is evident that there is a high possibility of not consuming news and information from traditional media outlets by the young audience due to the prevalence of low trust in the news outlets and journalist, which would lead to a loss of audiences and thus loss of revenues. The loss of revenue may negatively affect financial viability (Moore et al., 2019) of the media organizations; and the financial weakness would lead them failing to attract qualified journalists and producing quality content. A weak media system is also a threat to democracy of the country.

We found that young people spend less time in consuming news compared to using social media platforms and consuming videos on YouTube. So, it is evident that young people tend to spend most of their time using social media platforms which may be linked to low trust in news media in the country as Karlsen and Aalberg (2021) argued that the individuals who consume through social media are less trustful of news. Similar to the findings of Karlsen and Aalberg (2021), we found that young people in Bangladesh prefer to get news through online platforms instead of printed newspapers. The main sources of news are online news portals and Facebook⁷ newsfeeds. Individuals who have a low level of trust in news media tend to consume more news and information from non-mainstream sources such as social media platforms and blogs compared to mainstream news media organizations (Fletcher, & Park, 2017). Kalogeropoulos, Suiter and Eisenegger (2019) found that people who consume news mainly through social media platforms tend to have lower levels of trust in news from traditional media outlets. Young people mainly consume news using a mobile phone. Among those who consume news using mobile phones, the majority are males aged between 18-23 years. It is a paradox that although online news portals are a dominant source of news and information for young

⁷ Belongs to Meta company, banned at the territory of the Russian Federation.

people, the level of trust in the information provided by portals is very low. Once more, it is found that people have greater trust in printed newspapers, although printed newspapers are a less used news source for young people.

These two findings are in stark contrast to one another. In earlier literature, this propensity of mass skepticism has also been addressed (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019). As previously noted by Prochazka and Schweiger (2019), this uncertainty causes them to indiscriminately have less faith in the media, to actively avoid the news and to become less and less informed. The factors such as political biases in news content, biases toward media owners' business interests, lack of accuracy in news content, poor writing, editing and storytelling; lack of use of reliable sources and providing unimportant/irrelevant news, and the tendency of sensationalizing news and information affect trust in news media. Islam and Rahman (2016) argued that trust in news media affects the news consumption behaviour of audiences. The link between a decline in trust in other significant societal institutions, such as the government has also been addressed by Hanitzsch, Van Dalen and Steindl (2018).

The overall results of this study are very well explained by the usage and gratification theory. Similar to this theory, current study addresses the social and psychological causes of needs, as well as expectations that are generated and met by news sources and news media. Studies found these expectations result in different patterns of media exposure, which in turn cause need gratifications and other effects. We discovered that the audience is in a stronger position in this circumstance as they are involved, goal-oriented, and self-aware enough to explain why they are using a particular news source. Most importantly, though, we discovered that their satisfaction comes from media content, their exposure, and the socio-political context in which the exposure takes place are also taken into consideration. This framework allows us to predict that diminishing trust will lead to lower news consumption where people consciously receive only the information that is meaningful to them and will completely/ partially reject all other ideas. This is significant concerning the deliberative and participatory notion of democracy where consumers reject journalism due to a perceived lack of legitimacy. This results in cynicism as they are unable to act on the public information it provides, which makes it more difficult for them to exercise their civic duties as well-informed citizens.

Conclusion

The level of trust of young people in news media organizations and journalists is very low in Bangladesh. Trust is influenced by mainly two factors:

the audience's socio-demographic characteristics, and media factors. In trusting a news media organization and journalists, people expect that they would get fair, unbiased, accurate, and comprehensive information that is not an opinion of the news media organization or a journalist. People become distrustful when they perceive that there are biases toward media owners' business interests and political parties; lack of accurate information; poor writing, editing and storytelling; lack of using reputable sources; providing unimportant or irrelevant news; publishing government press releases; using clickbait headlines, sensationalizing news and information and giving priority to advertisements over a news story.

In the case of trust in news media, people's socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, location of residence and education level play an important role. Both males and females are potential consumers for advertisers. An increase of trust in news media among the gender groups would attract advertisers, which would ensure revenues for the media organizations. So, if media organizations pay attention to gaining the trust of both gender groups, it would enhance their financial sustainability. They also focus on gaining the trust of their audiences living in urban areas as results of the study indicate that they have low trust. The audiences in the urban areas often have high education levels and purchase capacity.

Media organizations must reinvent their roles, responsibilities, and business models to gain the trust of young people who are less trustful of news than ever. The gaining of trust would lead to increased consumption of news by young people which would contribute to the increase in revenues. The media organizations in Bangladesh can regain trust by avoiding political biases in their news content; circumventing biases toward media owners' business interests; ensuring accuracy and high-quality storytelling through the use of reliable sources. In gaining trust of their audiences, the media organizations must invest more in producing diverse and quality content that could satisfy the digitally savvy and hyperconnected audiences. In producing quality content, they should focus on careful fact-checking, intensive verification, and crafting news stories well. Moreover, they also so should invest in attracting skillful, talented and passionate young storytellers to journalism profession. Retaining experienced, passionate, highly committed, skillful and honest journalists in the journalism profession is another area of concern for media organizations in Bangladesh.

Summing up, we believe that the findings of the study would help media organizations, media managers and media owners to strategize their content and business models by gaining the trust of their audience in Bangladesh. It

will also help understand the notion of trust in news media from the context of a developing country. Global scholars who focus on south Asian studies and media studies may find insight into Bangladesh's society and media system.

However, the study has some limitations. The study was conducted among a small sample of the population and people from limited age groups. So, the findings may not be generalizable for people from all age groups and across the country. Moreover, it did not explore any causal relationship between sociodemographic dimensions and the trust in news media, and media consumption behavior. Future research should focus on the association between media consumption behavior and the trust in news media in the context of the country. Future works should also focus on understanding the paradox of why people consume news they do not trust, and do not trust the news they use.

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